



# **Immigration & Refugee Protection in Northern Ireland: An Analysis of Public Attitudes**

Conducted by  
The Social Change Initiative (SCI)  
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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This study follows on a series of Public Attitude reports that have been commissioned by The Social Change Initiative (SCI) over the past three years. Working with More in Common/Purpose, with the objective of building more inclusive societies which are resilient to the appeal of xenophobia and authoritarian populism, polling and analysis has been carried out to examine how public attitudes and opinions are connected when considering issues of migration and refugee protection. Four reports focus on findings in Germany, France, Italy and Greece. SCI also directly commissioned a parallel study in the Republic of Ireland (2018), carried out by Martha Fanning Research and Bricolage. This most recent study is based on public attitude polling completed by Martha Fanning Research across Northern Ireland in 2019.

The report offers insight into how people in Northern Ireland view their current and future prospects, whether they feel comfortable about on-going developments and what are their concerns and aspirations. Carried out in June 2019, the impact of a pending Brexit influenced people's responses, but over and above that public opinions about aspects of migration and refugee protection were shared. The findings suggest that there is a considerable level of openness to increased societal diversity in a Northern Ireland that has not been known for its tolerance of difference.

There are, of course, concerning findings. Attitudes towards Muslims and Irish Travellers indicate at best lack of understanding and at worst considerable levels of negativity. Interestingly, this is in line with similar attitudes expressed in the Republic of Ireland. There is also a sizeable proportion of the population (the Socially Concerned) whose questioning of immigration and immigrants could veer towards oppositional if their perceptions and questions are not addressed.

The write up of the study also draws on a range of reports researched and published by ARK (Action Research Knowledge, [www.ark.ac.uk](http://www.ark.ac.uk)) which analyse public attitudes garnered through the Northern Ireland Life & Times surveys as well as the Youth Life & Times.

The Social Change Initiative is committed to supporting civil society activism and advocacy on issues of Human Rights, peacebuilding and refugee and migrant rights. It offers the data contained in this study as important information that civil society activists and advocates can use to communicate more effectively on issues of immigration. Where perception is often cited as nine-tenths of reality, it is essential that this public perception is made accessible to both activists and policy-makers. SCI is grateful for the support received from Unbound Philanthropy, the St. Stephen's Green Trust and the Law Centre (NI) in enabling it to commission the research.

## Methodology

The approach adopted by Martha Fanning Research was to employ a population clustering segmentation analysis method that involves identifying groups of people who respond differently to stimuli, in this case how they respond to various communications about refugees and immigrants, to aid future communications strategies. This form of segmentation provides a rich composite picture of how a population is divided in its views, going beyond basic demographic factors to show how networks of attitudes and opinions are connected.

The research was undertaken through an online survey in June 2019, with a representative sample of 500 adults. Quotas were set on gender, age, social class and region to ensure that the results reflect known demographic characteristics for Northern Ireland. Respondents answered demographic questions as well as questions relating to issues of greatest concern to them, their political views and affiliations, familiarity with refugee and immigration issues, their personal experience with refugees and their responses to different policy approaches and propositions.

## Key Findings

1. **People in Northern Ireland are reasonably positive about the economic consequences of globalisation, the European Union and the euro.**

The implications of Brexit influenced responses received with 36% of the population expressing the view that Northern Ireland should distance itself from the EU as compared to 46% who disagreed. Northern Ireland voted to remain in the European Union in the May 2016 referendum and clearly continues to be of that view.

2. **Northern Irish people describe their region as welcoming, optimistic and tolerant on the one hand, although 28% view it as fearful and a smaller percentage (22%) as weak and angry.**

By far the most important issues identified as impacting on Northern Ireland are seen as the implications of Brexit (41%), the lack of a devolved Assembly (34%) and the state of healthcare (33%). In comparison, the issue of immigration was only highlighted by 12% of respondents.

3. **There is strong agreement in Northern Ireland that when Government makes laws the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly (12% disagreed with this proposition).**

While only 4% of the population identified racism and discrimination as key issues, 13% referred to poverty and social inequality as well as to ongoing divisions in society as matters of concern.

4. **The issue of identity is complex and often contentious in Northern Ireland given its relationship to both Britain and Ireland.**

However interpreted, 63% of people feel proud of their identity and are connected strongly with both the region and with their community (57% in both cases). Some concerns were expressed that current identity is in danger of disappearing (37%), but only 5% categorised this as a key issue. Just over one third of people expressed the view that they sometimes 'feel like a stranger in their own country'. A higher proportion (42%) feel that people like them do not have a say in politics and society, whilst 71% agree that traditional political parties 'don't care about people like me'.

5. **People are divided in the views about the impact of immigration, balanced between those who see it as a positive development, those that are unsure and people who feel that immigration is bad as it is a drain on the welfare state and draws away resources that could be spent on local people.**

Notwithstanding this division, many people agree that immigration is good for the Northern Irish economy bringing new skills, opportunities and the will to succeed (49% - with an additional 24% unsure); and similar numbers feel that immigration is good for cultural life making Northern Ireland a more vibrant and exciting place to live.

6. **A majority of people remain warm towards incoming new communities, including refugees and migrants:**

- 54% agree that compassion for those who are suffering is the most important value in a person (16% of respondents disagreed).
- 70% of people said that 'If I were from another country and fleeing terrible circumstances I would want Northern Ireland to offer me protection (7% disagreed), although this was moderated by people being concerned that such a welcome would serve to attract people from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries in crisis.
- Just over half the public (51%) still felt that Northern Ireland should accept refugees as the region has a culture of solidarity and compassion (19% disagreed). Similarly, 56% of people expressed feelings of solidarity given historical experience of poverty and marginalisation.

7. **Concerns are expressed about the possible impact that immigration will have on the prospects for local people.**

A sizeable number of people believe that immigrants and refugees get priority in terms of access to public services, such as housing and welfare benefits, over local people (46% hold this view as compared to 26% who disagreed). It was also suggested that immigration has made it more difficult for Northern Irish people to get jobs (40% agreed) and that employers should prioritize the employment of local people over immigrants or refugees (46% supported this suggestion, with 22% disagreeing). It was, however, acknowledged that immigrants often do jobs that Northern Irish people do not want to do (67% agreed); that immigrants tend to work harder (55% agreement) and that they are known to work for lower pay (70% hold this view).

8. **Northern Irish people are sympathetic towards children and 74% believe that no child should grow up undocumented in Northern Ireland.**

When it comes to acceptance of refugees, 42% of respondents believe that families with children should be prioritised, and another 27% feel that refugee children travelling alone should warrant priority treatment. A majority of people (68%) agree that refugee and asylum-seeking children should have equal access to education and training as local children, whilst 78% think that these children should have additional English language support in schools.

9. **Like people in many other countries in Europe, people in Northern Ireland have limited knowledge and fail to feel any strong sense of connection with Muslims.**

Broadly similar numbers feel that Islam is incompatible with Northern Irish society (29%) as those that disagree with this statement (33%), although many people are unsure. The divergence is greater however when people were asked whether they felt that Muslims hold similar values to them – 24% responded that they did, but 40% disagreed. The response to question as to whether people would be content for a mosque to be built near their home showed 30% replying in the affirmative and 39% being negative.

10. **When asked about their understanding of the differences between a refugee, an asylum-seeker and an economic or other migrant, people were reasonably clear in making a distinction.**

Similar numbers were open to refugees living permanently in Northern Ireland irrespective of whether the situation in their country of origin improves (41%) as compared to 44% who felt that they should be required to leave where it becomes possible. However, in a somewhat contradictory statement 58% agreed that people living in Northern Ireland for a long time should be able to become citizens. A majority were in favour of special protection measures being introduced for people who have been trafficked illegally into Northern Ireland either for the agricultural and fishing industries (61% in favour) or for purposes of sexual exploitation (73% in favour).

## **Northern Ireland Segments**

This study groups people into different population segments according to their beliefs and values around issues of identity and belonging as well as their relationship to the outside world. These groups are placed on a spectrum between 'open' and 'closed' values:

- Those in the 'open' groups include **Confident Modernists** and **Uncertain Pragmatists** who hold welcoming attitudes towards migrants, and are empathetic towards refugees. They are often more international in their outlook (although not all believe that globalisation has been beneficial for their country) and want Northern Ireland to be an open society that welcomes migrants and refugees.

- Those in the **'closed'** group – the **Concerned Traditionalists** – tend to have a narrower view about entitlement to live in Northern Ireland and the impact of immigration and refugee protection. They are generally more hostile to migrants and refugees.
- An **'anxious middle'** segment (**Socially Concerned**) that are marked by mixed attitudes and that are often uncertain as to what their views are about the impact of immigration. They tend to be concerned about perceived pressures on services and the welfare system, as well as expressing anxieties that reflect economic insecurity. The views of this cluster swing between the 'open' and the 'closed' clusters and people in this cluster often do not have strong views on any of the issues relating to immigration.



## Open Segments

### (i) Confident Modernists

Strongly female, under the age of 35 and with a slight skew towards being single and middle class. This cluster demonstrate a higher than average third level education attainment. They are likely to be living in either rented accommodation or else still living in the family home. Politically the Confident Modernists will tend to support more left-wing parties or else have no specific political allegiance. The cluster is a mix of religious backgrounds, but with a slight skew to the Catholic community.

**Key concerns: Women's reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights are of predominant importance; the cluster is pro-immigration and in favour of the EU, with major concerns about the likely impact of Brexit.**

The cluster demonstrates attitudes that are –

- Much more likely to see the positives associated with immigration, particularly with regard to how immigration enhances cultural life in Northern Ireland and brings new skills and opportunities into the local economy.
- Supportive of refugees and that they should be allowed to bring their family members with them as well as showing widespread agreement that long-term residents should be able to become citizens. They are also broadly supportive of special protection for trafficked people.
- Likely to be more concerned than average about issues of racism and discrimination (4% overall as compared to 22% of Confident Modernists).
- A little more hopeful than average about the future in personal and family life but are pessimistic about the future Northern Ireland economy.
- A little conflicted about the impact of globalisation and whether or not it is increasingly difficult for someone like them to do well in Northern Ireland. The cluster is in broad agreement that the Northern Ireland economy is rigged to advance the rich and powerful.

## (ii) Uncertain Pragmatists

Slightly more male in composition, middle class and older – 50 years plus. This cluster shows high levels of third level education and homeownership. It tends to be heavily identified with centrist politics and is composed of a mix of religious backgrounds, but with a slight skew to the Catholic community.

**Key concerns: The implications of Brexit, with this cluster being very pro-EU and pessimistic about the future of the Northern Ireland economy. The absence of a devolved Assembly is an issue. Pro-immigration and are more likely to personally know people who are migrants or refugees.**

The cluster demonstrates attitudes that are –

- Likely to see immigration as positive for culture and the economy in Northern Ireland, disagreeing that immigration is a drain on resources or a source of societal division. They strongly acknowledge the positive role that immigrant workers play in the local economy.
- Suspicious of the media, feeling that they report on refugees and immigrants unfairly and that their motivation is money rather than the truth.
- Strongly in support of allowing immigrants to bring their families with them and for citizenship for those who have been here a long time. Also showing strong support for victims of trafficking.
- Likely to agree that the economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful but feel that they can still do well and are marginally less disillusioned with society than average.
- Possibly influenced by their acute concerns about Brexit but feel that the economy and society have worsened over the past year and feel that both will be considerably worse in five years' time. On social issues the cluster expresses concern about the state of healthcare and continuing societal divisions.

## Closed Segment

### Concerned Traditionalists

More likely to be male and over the age of 35 years. A higher proportion of this cluster are homeowners with long association with Northern Ireland (both parents are likely to have been born in Northern Ireland). This cluster are more likely to be members of the Protestant/Unionist community and, while many are centrist in politics, they are more likely to identify with right-wing politics than the members of the other segments.

**Key concerns: Deeply negative about immigration and most likely to know someone who is against refugees and migrants. The cluster is very pro-Brexit and against the EU. They hold higher concerns than the other segments about the threat of terrorism (26% as compared to 16% on average); crime and violence (23% as compared to 15% on average) and loss of 'national identity' (21% as compared to 5% on average). They are less concerned than most about the lack of a devolved Assembly.**

The cluster demonstrates attitudes that are –

- Deeply negative about immigration, seeing it as a drain on the welfare state, divisive and bad for both culture and the economy in Northern Ireland. The segment feels that immigrants are prioritised for benefits thus making life more difficult for Northern Irish people.
- Opposed to measures to provide for the integration of immigrants, particularly any suggestion that they should be able to bring family members to join them. They also show lower than average support for trafficked workers, reflective of their suspicion of immigrants.

- Likely to be more positive about the performance of the Northern Ireland economy than others and (given the delivery of Brexit) are a little more optimistic than average that the economy and society as a whole will improve over the next five years.
- Likely to feel somewhat more than average that it is difficult for someone like them to do well in Northern Ireland and are deeply disillusioned with societal change, strongly agreeing that they sometimes feel like a stranger 'in my own country'.
- Slightly less of the view that the Northern Ireland economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful but, like many of the other segments, share deep disillusionment with traditional political parties.

## **Anxious Middle Segment**

### **Socially Concerned**

Slightly more female and working class, within an age band of 35 – 49 years. There is a greater likelihood that this cluster will have left school before A-Levels. They are more likely to be living in rented accommodation (private or the social housing sector) and are non-homeowners. In terms of politics, the segment is likely to be either centrist or else shows no political preference. There is a slight skew towards Catholic community background.

**Key concerns: High levels of concern about healthcare and the state of the economy in Northern Ireland, particularly in terms of unemployment and job prospects (31% expressed concern as compared to 15% overall). Homelessness, rising prices, poverty/social inequalities and education were also issues that were raised more frequently than average. They are less overly concerned about the implications of Brexit than other segments.**

The cluster demonstrates attitudes that are –

- Mixed in terms of their views about immigrants. This segment shows some limited recognition of the positive impact of immigration on culture and the economy but relates to the view that immigrants are a drain on the welfare state and are contributing to divisions in society.
- Based on the likelihood that they know people who are refugees or migrants and do acknowledge the role of immigrants in the economy, but still express some anti-immigrant feelings.
- Reasonably open to protection for refugees and believe that refugees should be allowed to bring their family members with them. They are also in favour of granting citizenship to long-term residents and are keen to see protection extended to victims of trafficking.
- Less suspicious than average of the media's reporting on refugees and immigrants but firmly of the belief that their motivation is money rather than truth, in line with the norm.
- Are more positive about the future personally, family, the economy and society and feel that things have improved over the past year. At the same time they show a sense of disillusionment about politics, feeling that traditional political parties do not care about people 'like me'.

The fact that the 'Open' segments represent some 55% of public attitudes in contrast to the 16% of 'Closed' Concerned Traditionalists is an important insight to provide a basis for policy-making on issues of immigration and refugees (notwithstanding the limited powers of the devolved administration in Northern Ireland). The issues and concerns raised by the 29% 'Anxious Middle' Socially Concerned cluster need to be addressed in order to prevent what are currently reasonably neutral attitudes to immigration becoming more negative over time.

## Recommendations

1. Attention should be given to the concerns and anxieties expressed by the Socially Concerned cluster in Northern Ireland, particularly to address misperceptions of immigrant and refugee access to welfare benefits, employment and public services. Effective communications strategies need to be designed and implemented to address these issues.
2. People in Northern Ireland describe their region as welcoming. This needs to be reinforced and built on by supporting and extending opportunities for people to engage in a positive manner with people who are migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. There are some excellent local examples of such contact in various parts of Northern Ireland (including Cities of Sanctuary, Small World Café and the first Community Sponsorship programme). These 'good news' stories should act as exemplars that can be shared through local community, faith-based, sporting, cultural and other networks to increase the range of people who have direct contact with migrants and who have an insight into the migrant and refugee experience.
3. There needs to be clear lines of funding and support for those NGO and community-based initiatives that are working with, and for, the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. The time limited funding available under the current Minority Ethnic Development programme, that requires repeated tendering and application, works against continuity of knowledge, experience and relationships within the sector. This should be reviewed to examine possible alternative approaches to delivery of funding.
4. There needs to be clear leadership shown at the Executive Office level to drive forward support and integration policies and measures that are appropriate to Northern Ireland. TEO should look to the example of Scotland as a model of how a devolved administration can develop region appropriate strategies, which include integration, detention and other policies.
5. There should continue to be a disaggregation of data sources for Northern Ireland with regard to the number of asylum claims, outcomes of asylum cases, the number of appeals, the number of family reunions, immigration enforcement (e.g. detention and deportation), etc. The lack of such data hinders public policy-making but also makes it difficult to draw on an evidence base to challenge public misperceptions.
6. Integration/inclusion of refugees and migrants continues to be important and should take place as early as possible. The successful implementation of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme for Syrian refugees underlines this point. It is essential that Northern Ireland should have a bespoke integration strategy, as is currently the case in Scotland, to ensure that a robust, adequately resourced integration strategy is in place. This would allow effective coordination and synergies at central government, local authority, NGO and community level to support the implementation of such a strategy.
7. The effective implementation of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme as currently applied to Syrian refugees should continue to be rolled out for refugees from other countries of origin. The learning from the design and implementation of the Scheme should be captured as a model of good practice and partnership.
8. There is wide spread agreement around (i) the need for special protection measures for people who are victims of trafficking; (ii) the proposition that people living a long time in Northern Ireland should be able to become citizens; and (iii) that no child should grow up undocumented in Northern Ireland. While a number of these issues fall within the remit of the UK Home Office, public representatives should advocate for policy changes to reflect these concerns. Where feasible the Northern Ireland departments should design policies to address specific regional issues.



9. As in many other European countries, the study showed that people in Northern Ireland have little knowledge of, and limited connection with, people in the Muslim community. This needs to be addressed as a two-way process to prevent misperceptions and reaction based on ignorance. Anxieties expressed about the building of mosques in local neighbourhoods not only raise concern about the freedom to worship, but also highlight the need for a greater understanding about Islam and Islamic cultural and religious traditions.
10. Given the possible impact of Brexit on the island of Ireland there needs to be a dedicated focus on the implications of a possible post-Brexit legislation, border control and policies as they impact on immigration and refugee protection. This is particularly important as it may apply to asylum-seekers and refugees that are detained for immigration purposes. Visa requirements should be made known and in the interests of cost effectiveness and efficiency, people with a right to remain in the Republic of Ireland should be returned to that jurisdiction, if they cross the Border without the required documentation, rather than placed in detention in either (or both) Larne House and the UK. Where individuals are placed in detention for immigration purposes, there should be independent standard setting, oversight and monitoring procedures in place to ensure quality standards in all detention facilities in Northern Ireland.
11. While the study did not address issues relating to race hate crime directly, the rise in PSNI recorded hate crime and the concerns expressed by the Confident Modernist cluster in the survey about racism and discrimination is a timely alert that action must be taken to combat racism and racially motivated crime. An enquiry is currently being conducted in Northern Ireland on this issue. In addition to awaiting this report, the lack of minority ethnic recruitment into the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a matter that requires attention.
12. In support of a more diverse and inclusive Northern Ireland it is important that leaders in public life, such as politicians, community leaders, religious leaders and other civil society activists, should actively encourage members of minority ethnic communities to participate in public life, thus enhancing their visibility as full and active members of society.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding the different segments of public opinion in Northern Ireland helps provide a basis to develop a clear strategy for both addressing concerns and anxieties as well as for countering potential polarisation and extremism. As this study shows, many people are open in their response to migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, but they do want the immigration system in their country to be managed humanely, competently and fairly. Equally, they want newcomers to integrate (including learning to speak English), respect local culture and to be able to contribute to society.

The evidence from the polling of public attitudes suggests that Northern Ireland likes to see itself as welcoming and tolerant, notwithstanding the reputation that has over-shadowed it from past years. However, in translating perception into practice there needs to be opportunities for positive contact with refugees and migrants. There also needs to be an awareness of the minority of people who seek to spread a narrative of fear, exclusion and a targeting of 'the other'. Social media needs to be monitored to pick up on such targeting. Work with young people is crucial to ensure that they are not drawn into the negative ambit of authoritarian populists and extremists.

The Social Change Initiative (SCI) commissioned this study to provide a better understanding of public attitudes. It was envisaged that this would offer the NGO and community-based sector a greater understanding of context, while providing policy-makers with insights for effective public engagement for policy change. SCI hopes that the study will contribute to the shared objective of a more welcoming, inclusive and diverse Northern Ireland.

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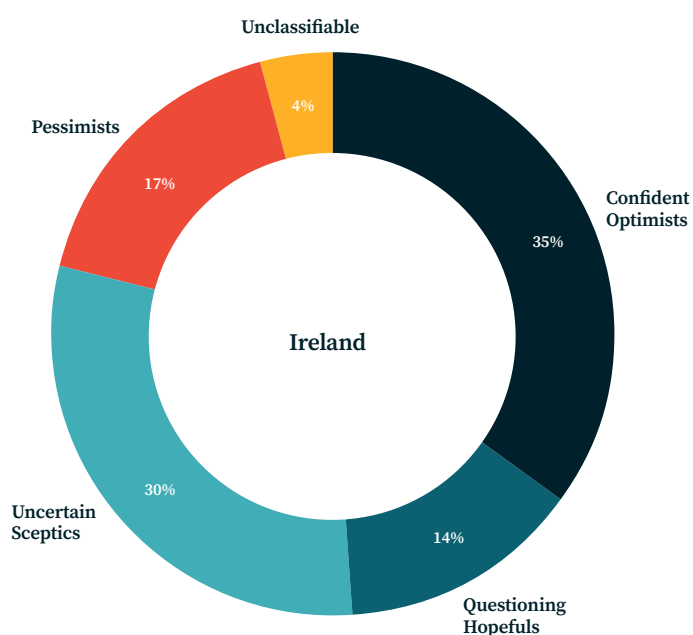
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# 1. Introduction

The Social Change Initiative (SCI) commissioned this study as part of an interest in how popular narratives frame discussion about immigration and refugee protection in Europe. It has been concerned about the apparent appeal of xenophobia and authoritarian populism over recent years and, based as it is in Northern Ireland, is acutely aware of the toxic consequences of ‘othering’ and scapegoating groups of people within society. SCI has worked with Purpose/More in Common (with generous financial support from the Human Dignity Foundation) to undertake detailed research into public attitudes in France, Germany, Italy and Greece.

This work examined public perceptions of a common set of forces that is contributing to social fracturing and divisions in these countries. These forces include economic insecurity, growing inequality, cultural and demographic change and the weakening of local communities and sense of national identity. It is clear that authoritarian populists and extremist advocates are exploiting these vulnerabilities by advancing divisive ‘us’ versus ‘them’ narratives, often focusing on migrants and refugees. Social media is also elevating conflict in public debate and bringing extremist narratives into the mainstream. SCI has been supporting country-based work to counter these narratives with strategic communications that can engage with the public by drawing on shared values and offering evidence-based progressive change.

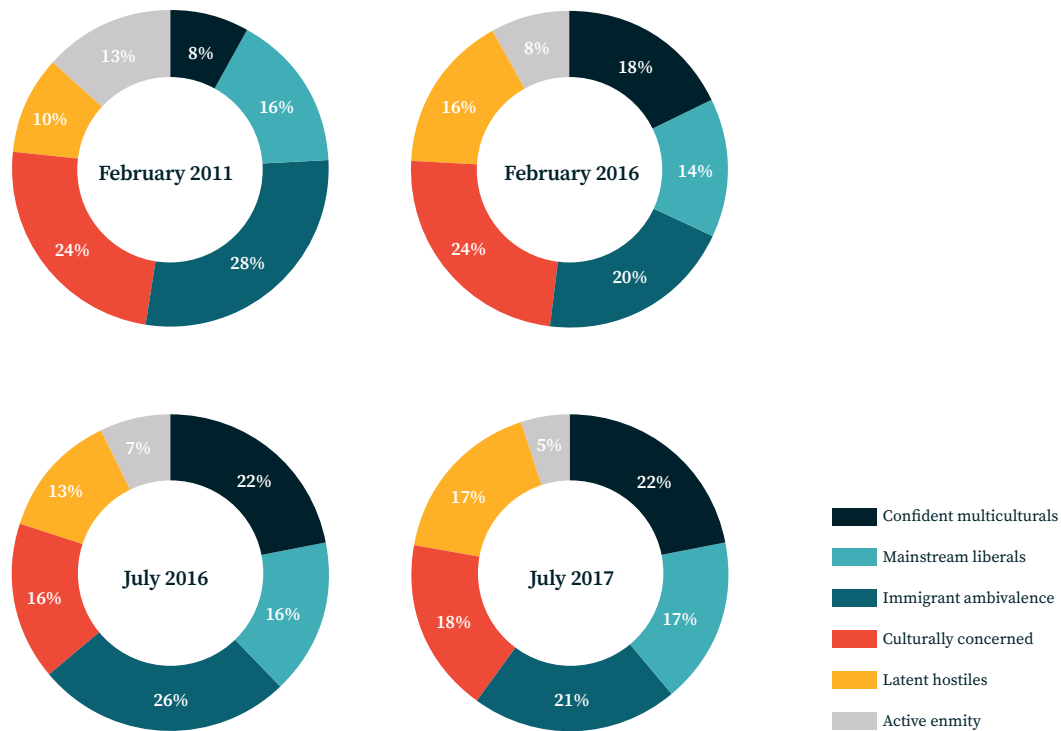
SCI worked with Martha Fanning Research and Bricolage to carry out similar public attitude research in the Republic of Ireland that was shared with organisations working to support refugees and migrants. Quantitative polling was supplemented by focus groups to listen carefully to the complexity of people’s thoughts and feelings rather than labelling them in a simplistic manner. Carried out in 2018, the Irish research returned four distinct clusters of public attitudes –



The Confident Optimists (35%) were ‘open’ to immigration and refugee protection, feeling that increased diversity was positive in Irish society. The Pessimists (17%) were largely ‘closed’ to immigration, blaming their own sense of being ‘left behind’ on refugees and migrants. The Uncertain Sceptics (30%) and the Questioning Hopefuls (14%) fell into clusters of what has been called ‘the anxious middle’. The largely middle-aged women in the Uncertain Sceptics segment had serious questions about the pressure on public services and resources that they saw immigration as posing. The younger cluster of mainly male Questioning Hopefuls were more optimistic, but still posed questions about government policy. However, in sharp contrast to the public attitude surveys that had previously been carried out in Europe, the results in the Republic of Ireland were much more positive.

SCI was aware of the parallel research that had been carried out in Britain by Hope Not Hate<sup>1</sup> which identified a number of 'tribes' in Britain –

Figure 1: The 'tribes' as a percentage of the population



This more nuanced segmentation returned the Confident Multiculturals and the Mainstream Liberals as the most 'open' clusters; the Latent Hostiles and Active Enmity clusters as the most 'closed' and hostile to immigrants and refugees, with the Immigrant Ambivalence and the Culturally Concerned composing the 'anxious middle' segments.

Aware that Northern Ireland had not been included in any of the research studies to date, SCI is grateful for the financial support from the St. Stephen's Green Trust and Unbound Philanthropy to enable it to commission Martha Fanning Research to complete public attitude polling in June 2019. The informed comment of the Law Centre (Northern Ireland) was also important. This study report brings together the polling data received and supplements it with additional local research that includes the detailed information provided by the Life and Times surveys carried out by ARK (Access, Research, Knowledge) Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>.

The core interest of this study is to gather evidence on what are the public attitudes in Northern Ireland towards refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants and how the underlying values and feelings expressed allow people to be grouped into clusters according to how networks of attitudes and opinions are connected. This then will facilitate activist and policy stakeholders to engage more effectively with the public on issues related to immigration. It may be useful, however, to locate this study in the specific circumstances of Northern Ireland before examining the attitude clusters in greater detail.

<sup>1</sup>Hope Not Hate (2018) Fear, Hope and Loss Report – <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/fear-hope-loss>

<sup>2</sup>[www.ark.ac.uk](http://www.ark.ac.uk)



## **2. The Specific Circumstances of Northern Ireland**

The history and position of Northern Ireland places it in a distinct, and often complex, situation. An integral part of the United Kingdom (UK), yet relating to the Republic of Ireland through geography, history and the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998), the region has a 310 mile land border with the south of Ireland. This provoked a 2017 study on life for asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland to conclude –

*“Proximity to the Irish Border – which people reportedly cross both ways to claim asylum – as well as security and policing make the situation more complex in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK. This potent constellation of factors makes Northern Ireland a unique place through which to examine the experience of asylum seekers and refugees.”<sup>3</sup>*

Any such examination needs to take into account a range of factors:

#### **Political circumstances:**

- Northern Ireland has a troubled history of conflicting national identities and aspirations. It is still struggling to deal with the legacies of violence, a sharply divided politics which has resulted in the lack of devolved government since 2017 and a politics that tends to focus on constitutional rather than socio-economic issues. Consequently, conclusions drawn about attitudes towards national identity and sense of belonging presented in the public attitude reports from Italy, France, Germany, Greece and the Republic of Ireland are not readily applicable in Northern Ireland where questions about national identity may give rise to the query ‘which national identity?’
- It has been suggested that the often mutually exclusive Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) identities and alignments that predominate in Northern Ireland leave limited room for either other or multiple identities<sup>4</sup>. The relatively small number of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland also raises problems of relative invisibility – or certainly lack of critical mass. Tackling sectarianism tends to dominate policy debate, although the Northern Ireland Life & Times (NILT) survey<sup>5</sup> added questions on minority ethnic and migration issues since 2005.
- The current Brexit issue in Northern Ireland has accentuated community division albeit that the majority vote in Northern Ireland in the 2016 referendum was to remain in the European Union. Depending on the nature of the Brexit arrangements concluded the Irish Border will become a focus for immigration issues as the only UK land border with the EU.

#### **Immigration issues:**

- Immigration, including policy on asylum seekers, is an excepted matter under para. 8, Schedule 2, of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998; as such it remains the responsibility of the UK Home Office. Northern Ireland, as a region, remains outside of the UK policy of dispersal which relocates people who have claimed asylum in the UK, however an agreed number of Syrian refugees are being housed in Northern Ireland under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme in recent years.
- Immigration falls within the remit of the Home Office, but, as in Scotland, the integration of refugees and migrants is the responsibility of the devolved administration in Northern Ireland. No formal strategy is yet in place despite the fact that a number of departmental initiatives have been developed and implemented. In the absence of an integration strategy the Northern Ireland Racial Equality Strategy (2015-2025) acknowledges that in terms of immigration - “At times our regional interest will not coincide with those of Great Britain”. This understanding should allow for the drafting of a bespoke integration strategy.
- The Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership, hosted by the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) and funded by the Home Office, was established in 2011. It works to ensure that Northern Ireland’s needs and concerns with regard to immigration are recognised within the constraints of a UK-wide strategy. It is an independent body made up of stakeholders that are drawn from local authorities, central government and the private and voluntary sectors. Its remit includes making Northern Ireland a more welcoming place for migrants and refugees.

<sup>3</sup>Murphy, F. & Vieten, U. (2017) What Life is Like for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Northern Ireland: QPOL, 12/12/2017, Queens Policy Engagement, Belfast.

<sup>4</sup>See WaterhouseBradley, B. (2019) Sectarian Legacies and the Marginalisation of Migrants, in Fanning, B. & Michael, L. (2019) (eds) Immigrants as Outsiders in the Two Irelands: Manchester University Press, 2019. See also Doeblner, S., McAreavey, R. & Shorthall, S. (2018) Is Racism the New Sectarianism? Negativity towards

Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in Northern Ireland from 2004-2015: Ethnic and Racial Studies, 2017, Vol. 41, No. 14, pp. 2426-2444 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/014198702017.1392027>)

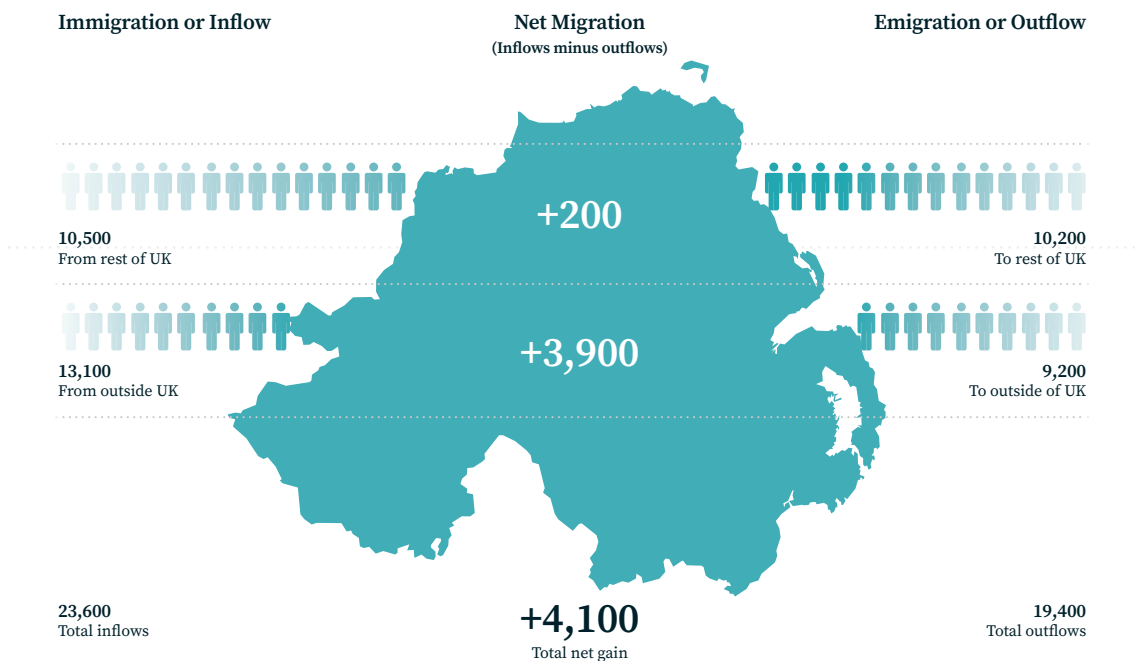
<sup>5</sup>NIL&T survey has operated annually since 1998.

## The nature of immigration:

- There was relatively little immigration into Northern Ireland over the years of ‘the Troubles’<sup>6</sup> – 1969-1994. However, a combination of the peace process that delivered the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998, EU enlargement in 2004, and a recovering economy in the first half of the 2000’s, saw the region becoming ethnically more diverse. In 2011, the Northern Ireland census registered 4.5% of the population born outside of the UK and Ireland, compared with 1.5% a decade earlier<sup>7</sup>. It was also noted that less than 1.8% of the population is of non-white ethnicity<sup>8</sup>. As such Northern Ireland remains the least diverse region of the United Kingdom and considerably less diverse than the Republic of Ireland.
- The Department for the Economy (EU Exit Analysis Branch) define migrants as all usual residents who were born and have lived outside of Northern Ireland, excluding in the UK<sup>9</sup>. The highest inflow of immigrants into Northern Ireland was recorded for 2007, just prior to the economic recession. The Republic of Ireland was the top country of origin of previous residence in 2018 (1,500 migrants); followed by Romania, Poland and Bulgaria, with then significant drops to China, India Lithuania and Syria. The highest level of net inward migration in 2018 was in Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon District Council area (1,100), followed by Belfast City Council area (900). Inflows of migrants are set against outflows of people from Northern Ireland, with Derry & Strabane Council and Causeway Coast & Glens experiencing net outflows.

## Inflows and Outflows

For the fifth successive year, the number of people who came to live in Northern Ireland exceeded the number who left (net inflow of 4,100 people) in the year ending mid-2018.



<sup>6</sup>The Troubles refers to the conflict between 1969-1998 that still leaves an unaddressed legacy characterised by spatial, communal and political divisions.

<sup>7</sup>McDermott, P. (2013) ARK Research Update – A Shared Society? Attitudes on Immigration and Diversity: Belfast.

<sup>8</sup>Noted in Office First Minister/Deputy First Minister, Racial Equality Strategy, 2015-2025.

<sup>9</sup>Analysis of Migrant Workers from the Northern Ireland Census, 2011: Dept. for the Economy, EU Exit Analysis Branch, March 2018 – (<https://economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/ASU-Census-Analysis-Final-Report.pdf>).

An asylum seeker is someone who has entered Northern Ireland and claims asylum from persecution in their country, having a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm for a particular reason. While their claim is being assessed the person is considered to be an asylum seeker. If permission to stay is granted, that person is deemed a refugee. The term refugee is defined in international law. Numbers of people in this position can be difficult to calculate as asylum and refugee statistics for Northern Ireland are conflated with those for Scotland. Estimates have varied, with a 2018 report suggesting some 200 – 300 new asylum seekers in Northern Ireland each year, and a Law Centre (NI) Briefing, the same year, reporting that there were 750 people in receipt of asylum support in Northern Ireland.

- Most asylum seekers are not permitted to work while in the asylum system often resulting in poverty and poor standards of accommodation. Adult asylum seekers are at risk of detention at any point during the asylum process. There are no limits on the length of immigration detention in the UK. Prior to 2011 immigration detainees in Northern Ireland were held in prison facilities or in police custody. Larne House (Larne) Short Term Holding Facility opened that year with 19 beds, where detainees can be held for up to five days. Options beyond that include releasing detainees back into the community; transferring them to an Immigration Removal Centre in Britain or removing them from the UK (including to the Republic of Ireland). Larne House is operated by a private company.
- Refused asylum seekers are people whose asylum claim has been rejected by the Home Office. In some cases, that person cannot return to their country of origin for various reasons, e.g. there is no safe route of return. Some refused asylum seekers may make a fresh claim for refugee status based on new evidence. Destitution is a constant problem for people in these circumstances given that many asylum seekers have no entitlement to asylum support and can be left in this position for months, and even years, during which time they are entirely reliant on friends or charitable support.
- Two other ways to become a refugee in Northern Ireland are through family re-unification or as a member of the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. The UK agreed to accept a specific number of Syrian refugees in 2015 under the UN Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (20,000 by 2020, of which Northern Ireland would take responsibility for 2,000). The initial group of Syrian refugees arrived in Belfast under this scheme in December 2015, and groups continue to arrive at regular intervals and are re-housed across the region. A third option is through the recently established pilot Community Sponsorship scheme, which is a community-based sponsorship initiative, with one programme being approved in Northern Ireland to date.
- Regular Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys carried out by ARK, catalogue changing public attitudes over a number of years. The survey data played an important role in providing independent evidence to inform policy-making, including in the area of racial equality and community relations.

Unlike many other European countries there is little sense of crisis over immigration in Northern Ireland although there has been evidence of increasing numbers of racially motivated hate crimes. Politically motivated trends in both the UK and Republic of Ireland (such as Far Right pronouncements or attacks on Direct Provision Centres) have an impact on attitudes and reaction in Northern Ireland and, as such, need to be kept under review.

<sup>10</sup>As noted in Devine, P. & Michael, L. (2018) Welcome Home? Attitudes to Asylum Seekers and Refugees: QPOL, 2018 ([www.qpol.qub.ac.uk/welcome-home-attitudes-towards-asylum-seekers-refugees/](http://www.qpol.qub.ac.uk/welcome-home-attitudes-towards-asylum-seekers-refugees/))

<sup>11</sup>Ibid

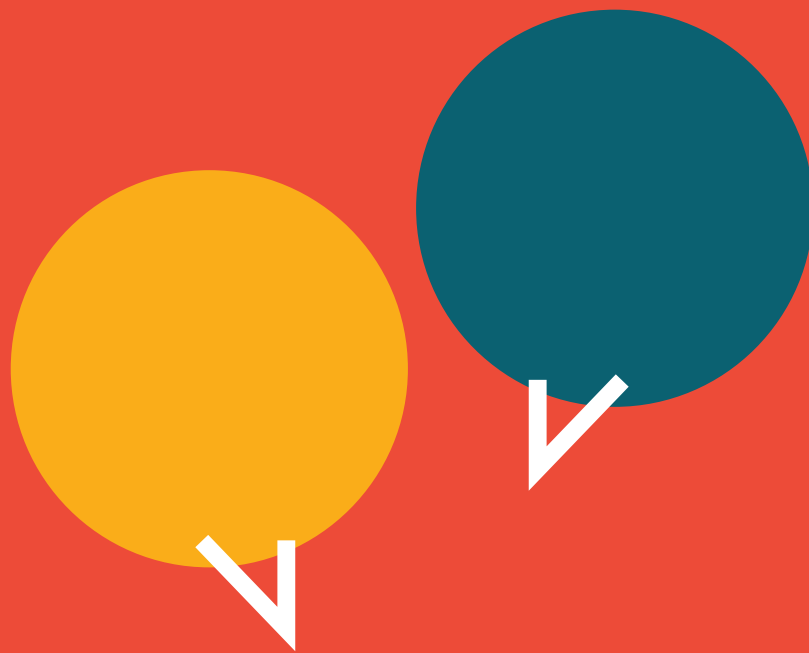
<sup>12</sup>Asylum Seekers & Refugees in Northern Ireland: Law Centre, NI (November 2018).

<sup>13</sup>Hanna, R. & Browne, S. (2017) Living in Limbo: The Life of Refused Asylum Seekers: NICRAS, Belfast ([www.nicras.org.uk](http://www.nicras.org.uk))

<sup>14</sup>Devine, P. (2018) Recording Social Attitudes and Informing Social Policy in Northern Ireland: Key Findings from 20 Years of ARK's Life and Times Survey: Belfast, November 2018

<sup>15</sup>[http://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/inline-files/20-Years\\_ARK\\_surveys.pdf](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/sites/default/files/inline-files/20-Years_ARK_surveys.pdf)





### **3. Attitudinal Segments In Northern Ireland**

Attitudinal segmentation is important in order to allow greater understanding of the aspirations, anxieties and concerns of different groups of people on issues of immigration and refugee protection, but also to develop more effective communication and messaging with the respective public clusters. Such communication is seen as particularly effective when it can speak to the values that various groupings of people hold. It has been argued that by understanding viewpoints on contested social and political issues in terms of values – a process called moral translation – it may be possible to find common ground between previously opposed sides, defuse conflict or at least facilitate greater shared understanding<sup>16</sup>. At a less ambitious level SCI believes that a clearer understanding of public attitudes enables interested stakeholders (whether voluntary sector or government) to design and implement more effective policy-making and communications strategies.

The four segments in this report each reflect a group comprising between 16 and 39 per cent of the Northern Irish population, based on differences in their views across a range of issues relating to their sense of identity, personal optimism/pessimism, and the open and closed issues of immigration, refugees, diversity and sense of priorities. As already noted:

- Two segments espouse open views: the Confident Modernists and the Uncertain Pragmatists
- One segment espouses closed views: the Concerned Traditionalists, and
- One segment espouses a mixture of open and closed views, being driven by different concerns and priorities: the Socially Concerned.



## The Open Groups (55%)

The Confident Modernists and the Uncertain Pragmatists share many open traits and beliefs on issues of identity, immigration and refugees. They are both very pro-European and in favour of immigration, seeing it as increasing the cultural vibrancy of life in Northern Ireland as well as being beneficial to economic growth. They are in favour of ensuring that Northern Ireland is a welcoming and tolerant region that values rights and, where required, special protections for migrants. That said, they can be distinguished by not only demographic characteristics, but also by the more modern secular outlook of the younger Confident Modernists as compared to the economic pragmatism of the more established Uncertain Pragmatists.

<sup>16</sup>Dixon, T., Hawkins, S., Heijbrek, L., Juan-Torres, M. & Demoures, F. X. (2018) Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Italy: More in Common – [www.moreincommon.com](http://www.moreincommon.com). P. 34.

## **Confident Modernists: 16%**

### **Keywords**

Confident, articulate, well educated, human rights advocates (particularly on LGBTQ rights and women's reproductive rights), young, aspirational.

### **Political Identity**

Strongest identification with left, centre left of any segment, not necessarily party political aligned. Slight skew towards Catholic community background.

### **Central Issues**

Very strong on women's reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights; pro-immigration; concerned about racism and discrimination; concerned about the impact of Brexit.

The Confident Modernists are aspirational but with a tinge of scepticism about a future in Northern Ireland that is seen as regressive in terms of social policies. As such, they are less concerned than the majority about a return to devolved government in Northern Ireland (27% expressing concern as compared to an average of 34%). Strongly female, and under the age of 35 years, they are still finding their way in life, either living in rent accommodation or still living in the parental home. They tend to be from a more middle-class background and while being from a mix of community backgrounds, demonstrate a slight Catholic skew. In line with the Public Attitude studies in France, Germany and the Netherlands (as well as that carried out in the Republic of Ireland), the Confident Modernists tend to include large numbers of people with higher level educational attainment.

This cluster has a fairly average level of disillusionment about society and politics in Northern Ireland. They are more likely than average to feel that traditional political parties don't care about people like them (only 8% disagreeing) and believing that the Northern Ireland economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful (58% in agreement). They are more conflicted than most over the economic consequences of globalisation, although with only 24% firmly rejecting the idea that globalisation is positive for Northern Ireland.

Whether it is because they find themselves out of step with traditional political priorities in Northern Ireland, the Confident Modernists do feel that they 'Sometimes feel like a stranger in my own country' (38%) and do not believe that people like them have a say in politics and society (46%). They express less concern that Northern Irish identity is disappearing – potentially because they are less likely to associate with more traditional aspects of that identity. They are very sceptical about the role of the mainstream media, with 68% of the segment believing that the media is more interested in making money than telling the truth. Slightly less of the segment (50%) have particular concerns about the role of the media in fair and accurate reporting about subjects like immigration.

Notwithstanding higher level educational attainment, the Confident Modernists are more inclined to see deterioration in all aspects of their lives over the past year. This is particularly in relation to society (44% feel it is worse) and the economy (52% feel it has worsened). The latter may also relate to the segment's strong concerns about the implications of Brexit on Northern Ireland. While being a little more hopeful than average about the future five years, in personal and economic life, the pessimism about future economic prospects is still apparent, with only 19% feeling that it will improve. The personal and family prospects perceived are between 8% and 7% respectively, more optimistic than average.

This open cluster are much more likely to see the positives associated with immigration, believing more than most that immigration is good for cultural life in Northern Ireland (only 8% disagreeing), making the region a more vibrant and exciting place to live. Similarly, 64% feel that immigration is good for the Northern Ireland economy, bringing in new skills, opportunities and the drive to succeed. Unlike people in the anxious middle and closed segments, the Confident Modernists are less likely to support negative views of immigration, such that it is draining public resources or dividing society into sharply contrasting groups of opinions and beliefs (over and above those divisions traditionally associated with Northern Ireland). Although many opted for a 'neither/nor' response to questions on greater access to Northern Ireland for economic migrants and whether employers should prioritise hiring local people over immigrants, 39% were in favour of making it easier for people to come to Northern Ireland for work, as compared to 21% who disagreed. The reply to the question

of local workers being prioritised over immigrants delivered a more balanced result – 26% agreeing with the proposition as against 29% who disagreed; however, 48% disagreed with the suggestion that immigrants have made it more difficult for Northern Irish people to get jobs.

More than average expressed concern about racism and discrimination (22% noted by Confident Modernists as compared to 4% on average), some 26% feel that public services treat migrants unfairly. While many are unsure (32%), a greater proportion (33%) disagree. There is greater agreement over the need to extend special protection to migrants that have been trafficked into Northern Ireland to work illegally in the agricultural and fishing sectors or that have been trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation. The majority (62%) of Confident Modernists support special protection measures for trafficked agricultural and fishery workers, rising to 79% for protection for trafficked sex workers. The majority of this cluster also believe that immigrants working in Northern Ireland should be able to bring their family members to join them (42% in agreement as compared to 23% who disagree).

Attitudes to refugees are also supportive, with 51% of Confident Modernists expressing the view that refugees coming to Northern Ireland enrich culture and society (10% disagreed), and the same numbers (51% in agreement; 13% disagreed) saying that refugees should be allowed to bring their family members with them and, indeed, that people in Northern Ireland for a long period of time should be able to become citizens (70% in agreement with only 6% rejecting the idea). As with the majority of segments, the Confident Modernists are strongly of the belief that in the interests of integration and inclusion, refugees who come to live in Northern Ireland should be encouraged and helped to learn English (76% in agreement).

The Confident Modernists are an important group as the potential activists and advocates of the future. Young, idealistic and envisaging a more open, inclusive and tolerant Northern Ireland, they have the ability to push for progressive policies but are conscious of the possible economic pressures on their own prospects over future years.

## **Uncertain Pragmatists (39%)**

### **Keywords**

Pro-European. Established middle-class. Appreciative of economic impact of immigration. Older, slightly more male with third level education.

### **Political Identity**

Heavily identified with centrist political parties.

### **Central issues**

Concerned about Brexit. Pessimistic about the economy. Absence of devolved Government in Northern Ireland. State of the healthcare system and concerned about continuing societal division.

This influential segment tends to be slightly more male, established middle-class who are home owners and are a mix of religious backgrounds (although with a slight Catholic skew). They are older, being predominantly 50 years plus. The Uncertain Pragmatists feel that both societal and economic conditions have worsened over the past years (60% in terms of the economy and 50% with regard to society). The majority feel that personal and family circumstances have tended to remain the same, although some 32% believe that they are personally better off. Cluster pessimism is particularly apparent when people are asked about future prospects. Those who feel that the economic future will be worse over the next five years rises to 59%, with 53% reporting that they feel the same about society. Only 10% of Uncertain Pragmatists believe that the economy and society will improve. This is undoubtedly linked in part to concerns expressed about the implications of Brexit. When asked about their personal and family prospects people were somewhat more optimistic, with 76% feeling that they would be personally better off or at least the same, and the same percentage reporting that this would also apply to their family position.

Interestingly, the Uncertain Pragmatists also tend to agree that the economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful (51% agree), that traditional political parties do not care about people 'like me' (70% agree),

and that the mainstream media is more interested in making money than in telling the truth (64% agree with this statement). Notwithstanding these high figures, this cluster is marginally less disillusioned with society than the average, although 42% still disagree with the proposition that 'people like me have a say in politics and society'. It is this cluster that indicated the highest level of concern about the continuing absence of a devolved government in Northern Ireland (as recorded in June 2019).

There is little indication that the Uncertain Pragmatists are overly concerned about issues of disappearing identity (however they may interpret the latter). A smaller number (29%) note that Northern Irish identity is disappearing, as compared to 31% that are unsure and 36% who feel that identity is secure. Similarly, fewer of this segment accept the statement 'Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country', (49%) as compared to the 28% who subscribe to this view.

Buoyed by a degree of personal stability – notwithstanding economic pessimism over the implications of Brexit – the Uncertain Pragmatists see immigration as positive for both culture and the economy in Northern Ireland. They disagree with any suggestion that immigration is a drain on resources or a source of societal division, and strongly acknowledge the positive role that immigrant workers play in the local economy. Indeed they are marginally more enthusiastic than their younger counterparts in the Confident Modernist segment (67% as compared to 64%) in seeing immigration as being good for the economy, bringing new skills, new opportunities and the drive to succeed. Like the Confident Modernists, the Uncertain Pragmatists reject any suggestion that immigration is bad for Northern Ireland given the pressure on public resources (only 23% agree this might be the case as compared to an overall average of 39% of the public), or that immigration might be divisive (only 19% consider this to be the case). Again, the Confident Modernists are marginally more likely to consider immigration a possible drain on resources (29%).

The Uncertain Pragmatists are strong in their belief that it should be easier for people to come to Northern Ireland to work (18% disagree, although 44% take no position on this issue) and they reject the notion that employers should prioritise hiring people from Northern Ireland over migrants (32%, with 39% opting for a neither/nor response) or that immigrants have made it more difficult for Northern Irish people to get jobs (50% feel that this is not the case as compared to 21% who consider that it is possible). People in this segment are very clear in their belief that immigrants often do jobs that need doing but that Northern Irish people do not want to do (79% agree), that immigrants are often prepared to work harder than local workers (67% agree) and that migrant workers are often prepared to work for lower pay than local workers (77% agree). Again, the emphasis on economic need is paramount contrasting the Uncertain Pragmatists from the Confident Modernists who are less convinced about these propositions (only 57% of the Confident Modernists believe that immigrants are often prepared to work for lower pay rates and 68% that they are prepared to do jobs that local people are not prepared to take). Such differences may well reflect the different experience between older established respondents and the younger, less economically secure cohort of respondents in the Confident Modernist cluster.

Interestingly, the Uncertain Pragmatist segment is more likely to personally know people who are refugees or migrants in Northern Ireland. They are more inclined to believe that immigrants working in Northern Ireland should be able to bring family members to join them (47% in support and 29% expressing no opinion) and the same in terms of people who are refugees – 55% express the view that refugees should be allowed to bring family members, with only 15% rejecting the idea. As is the case with migrants, members of this segment (only 8% disagreeing) think that refugees coming to Northern Ireland enrich the local culture and society. They are strong in the belief, however, that refugees should learn English in order that they can integrate more successfully in the local society (83% in favour).

As is the case with the Confident Modernist cluster, the Uncertain Pragmatists are very sympathetic to the idea that special protection should be put in place for agricultural and fisheries workers who have been trafficked illegally into Northern Ireland (65% in favour of this and only 7% rejecting it), and an even higher percentage is in favour of special protection for workers who have been trafficked illegally for sexual exploitation (78% in favour and only 4% opposed). There is also a high level of support for the right of people living a long time in Northern Ireland being able to become citizens (70% supportive as compared to 6% who disagree).

The Uncertain Pragmatists are a sizeable bloc of the public that are very open to the benefits of immigration and a more vibrant cultural and economic society in Northern Ireland. Their sharp focus on the economy, however, alongside pessimism about the future implications of Brexit, makes them vulnerable to potential uncertainties about what a possible faltering economy will mean for their younger family members.

## Closed Group

### Concerned Traditionalists (16%)

#### Keywords

Negative. Traditionalist. Optimistic for Brexit. Fearful. Anti-immigration.

#### Political Identity

More likely to identify with right wing politics than other segments, although the majority are centrists.

#### Central issues

Immigration. The threat of terrorism, crime and violence. Greater concern about 'loss of national identity'.

The Concerned Traditionalists stand at the other end of the spectrum of public attitudes from both the Confident Modernists and the Uncertain Pragmatists. They regarding immigration as a major issue of concern and are most likely to know someone who is out-spokenly against refugees and immigrants. This segment is most likely to be male in composition, over the age of 35 years and to be members of the Protestant community. They tended to be rooted in Northern Ireland, with both parents likely to have been born in the region. A higher proportion of this cluster is home owners in both rural and urban areas. They are most likely to relate to the statement 'Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country', 59% agreeing as compared to 22% disagreeing, and are more likely than average (54% as compared to the average of 37%) to hold that 'Northern Irish identity is disappearing nowadays'. These are people who feel that established certainties are slipping away, resulting in a sense of fear and anxiety.

The Concerned Traditionalists are a little more likely than average to feel that it is becoming more difficult for someone like them to do well in Northern Ireland (38%). Half of the segment expresses the view that the economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful, although this is somewhat less than the overall average (at 56%). Just under a third of the segment (31%) feel that 'People like me have a say in politics and society', although this is in line with the Northern Ireland average. What is out of kilter is the number of people who disagree with this statement (50% as compared to the 41% on average who disagreed). The Concerned Traditionalists are less likely to be uncertain in their responses. The segment is also forthright in their views about the mainstream media, with 74% believing that they are more interested in making money than telling the truth.

Unlike the other segments in this study, the Concerned Traditionalists tend to be optimistic about the future, largely fuelled by their support for Brexit and a post-Brexit economy. Looking back over the past year, some 29% of Concerned Traditionalists felt that economic conditions had got worse, but this compared to the average of 45%. Similarly, looking forward over the next five years, only 23% of the cluster feel that the economy will be weaker compared to 37% overall. The Concerned Traditionalists are less certain about societal trends. Only 11% reported them improving over the past year and just over double that (26%) think that they will improve over the next five years. The vast majority of the cluster thinks that personal and family circumstances will either get better or remain the same in the immediate future. Interestingly, only 19% of Concerned Traditionalists raised Brexit as a key issue as compared to 41% of the population as a whole, and less (23%) were concerned about the lack of a devolved Assembly compared to 34% of people more generally.

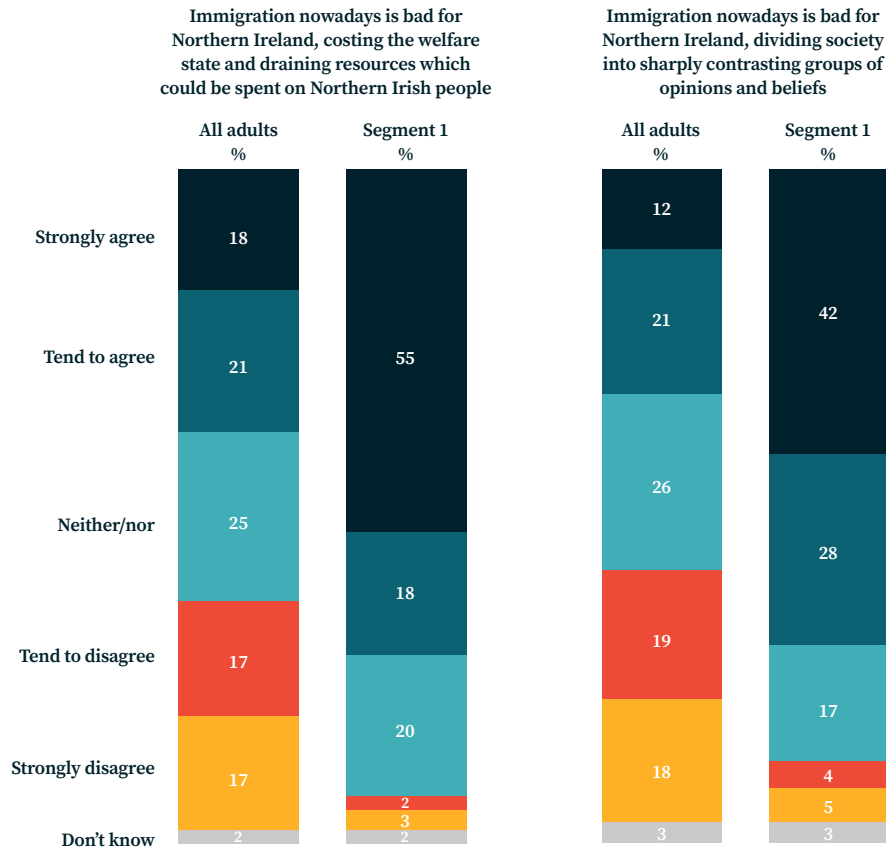
The deep negativity shown by Concerned Traditionalists to immigration is graphically represented in the bar chart on p. 23. The chart highlights the sharp divergence in attitude over the perceived impact of immigration on Northern Ireland in contrast to the study average. Concerned Traditionalists also firmly reject any suggestion that immigration contributes to cultural vibrancy (66% reject this, with only 10% being open to the possibility) or to economic success (62% say no, with again, 10% agreeing that this might be possible).

The negativity about immigration applies to the perception that immigrants are given priority over established residents in terms of welfare benefits, housing and public services – 80% of Concerned Traditionalists either strongly agree (54%) or tend to agree (26%) with this proposition. They also believe that immigrants have made it more difficult for local people to get jobs (70% hold this view) – although they are prepared to concede that immigrants often do jobs that need doing but that local people are loath to do (45% agree) and that immigrants are often prepared to work for lower wages than Northern Irish workers (64% agree). They are less likely to

## Segment 1

is deeply negative about immigration

All adults 16+: 502



believe that immigrants are often prepared to work harder than local workers (only 25% agree) and they are strongly against any suggestion that it should be easier for people to come to Northern Ireland to work (only 6% feel that this should be the case). The solution, as far as Concerned Traditionalists are concerned is for employers to prioritise local people over immigrants for employment (75% accept this proposition).

Not surprisingly, Concerned Traditionalists are opposed to any measures that might increase the number of migrants and refugees in Northern Ireland, particularly where this might entail the ability to bring their family members with them into the region. Only 9% are open to immigrants bringing in family members (as compared to 71% opposed) and somewhat more (20%) are prepared to countenance this for refugees, compared to 63% who disagree. Few (14%) accept that refugees coming to Northern Ireland enrich culture and society; although if they do come, 90% of Concerned Traditionalist respondents want to see them learning English.

The response of this segment to the suggestion of special protection for illegally trafficked workers in the agricultural and fisheries industry or for the purposes of sexual exploitation is rather more nuanced. There is greater sympathy with illegally trafficked workers for sexual exploitation, with 63% of Concerned Traditionalist agreeing that special protection is necessary (as compared to 14% who disagree). As this may apply in the agricultural and fisheries sector, 47% agree, but an additional 30% are unsure. Similarly, there is little enthusiasm shown for people living in Northern Ireland for a long time to be able to become citizens, with 39% disagreeing, 19% accepting the proposition and 37% unsure.

In short, the Concerned Traditionalists see the diversity represented by immigrants and refugees as a threat to a Northern Ireland that is already undergoing change. While the segment is optimistic about the possible implications of Brexit, this seems to take the form of more inward looking protectionism in terms of employment and culture rather than the outward looking perspective of both the Confident Modernists and the Uncertain Pragmatists.

## Anxious Middle Group

### The Socially Concerned (29%)

#### Keywords

Working class and middle aged (35-49 years). Worried about public services. Lower educational attainment. Slight Catholic skew.

#### Political Identity

Identify with centrist politics or express no preferences. Marginalised.

#### Central issues

Healthcare. Unemployment and jobs. Homelessness. Rising prices. Poverty and social inequality. Education.

The Socially Concerned segment, which is largely female and working class, is essentially neutral about immigration issues, showing above average concern instead about social and economic issues, such as healthcare, unemployment and homelessness. They are more likely than the 'open' segments to agree with the statement 'It is increasingly difficult for someone like me to do well in Northern Ireland' (38% agreeing and 30% being unsure), a response rate more in line with the 'closed' Concerned Traditionalists. Like many other segments, the Socially Concerned feel that the Northern Ireland economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful (58%, with only 12% disagreeing).

The sense of political marginalisation is reflected in the fact that this segment expresses few views on either Brexit or the restoration of devolution in Northern Ireland. There is a sense of lack of control that is captured in replies to the statement 'Traditional parties don't care about people like me'. Alongside the 70% of Socially Concerned respondents that agreed with this proposition were an additional 21% who were unsure. Only 5% disagreed. There was less unanimity, however, in response to the statement 'People like me have a say in politics and society' – 34% agreed; 33% disagreed and 29% were unsure. A distinction between the Socially Concerned and the Concerned Traditionalists was this element of uncertainty.

On issues of identity and sense of belonging, the Socially Concerned fell between the 'open' and the 'closed' segments. When the statement was posed, 'Northern Irish identity is disappearing nowadays', 46% of the segment agreed, as compared to 20% who disagreed. Less of the segment accepted the idea that they feel like strangers in their own country, with 29% rejecting the notion and 30% being unsure, as compared to 38% who agreed.

The Socially Concerned are largely in rented accommodation (private or social housing), are non-home owners and who left school with lower educational qualifications. They are, however, reasonably positive about their personal and family circumstances, with 40% feeling that they have either seen an improvement or 44%, the same, standards as a year previously, and 47% thinking things will get better, or at least remain the same (37%) into the future. They are equally optimistic about family prospects as well as for the economy and society. Only 13% believe that the economy will be worse over the next five years and 10% are pessimistic about society. This is in marked contrast to the average response rates which saw 37% seeing the economy getting worse and 33% being pessimistic about the future of society. This sense of relative optimism demonstrated by the Socially Concerned differentiates them from the 'left behind' clusters that show up in the other Public Attitude studies completed.

Specific questions posed on attitudes towards immigration sees the Socially Concerned somewhat more sceptical than the two segments in the more 'open' clusters. Asked whether immigration is currently bad for Northern Ireland by costing the welfare state and draining resources that could be spent on local services, 49% of the Socially Concerned agreed that this was so, with 20% disagreeing. Equally, 37% of the Socially Concerned was prepared to see immigration as being divisive in society, with an additional 33% being unsure. On a more positive note, 40% of the segment agreed that immigration was good for Northern Ireland society (21% disagreed) and 39% felt that immigration was good for the Northern Ireland economy, with 25% disagreeing. In short, the positivity was a little below the norm set by the average responses and there was a high proportion of uncertainty displayed by the Socially Concerned.



While the Socially Concerned are likely to know people who are refugees and migrants, anti-immigrant feelings were most explicit around issues of employment and welfare. While not as emphatic as those views expressed by the Concerned Traditionalists, 58% of the Socially Concerned agree that immigrants are given priority over established residents with regard to welfare benefits, housing and public services (12% disagree). Large numbers (67%) also feel that immigrants have made it more difficult for local people to get jobs, and only 10% disagreed with the suggestion that 'Employers should prioritise hiring people from this country over immigrants'. There is agreement, however, that immigrants often do jobs that need doing but that local people do not take up (only 12% disagreed); immigrants are prepared to work harder than local people (52% agreed, with another 30% being unsure) and that immigrants are often prepared to work for lower pay than local people (70% agreed, with only 6% disagreeing). These results show a sense of fairness in the segment's assessment of the nature of employment of many immigrant workers, although there are still concerns about pressure on employment opportunities. This is reflected in the spread of answers to the statement 'It should be easier for people to come to Northern Ireland to work' – 37% of Socially Concerned agree; 27% disagree and 33% are unsure.

People in the Socially Concerned segment are open to seeing special protection for illegally trafficked workers that are abused. Only 6% reject the idea of extending special protection to illegally trafficked agricultural and fisheries workers, as compared to the 61% in support. There is even a higher level of agreement that workers trafficked illegally for the purposes of sexual exploitation should be protected, with 68% in agreement and only 7% disagreeing. This openness (and corresponding sense of uncertainty) follows through in consideration of whether immigrants and refugees should be able to bring family members to join them. Greater preference is given to refugees, where 48% of the Socially Concerned believe that they should be able to bring family members (20% disagreeing) as compared to 39% who would allow the same facility to immigrants working in Northern Ireland (23% disagreed). In general, only 13% of the Socially Concerned disagree with the statement 'Refugees coming to Northern Ireland enrich our culture and society', although 40% are unsure. In line with all other segments, 76% are firmly of the opinion that refugees who come to live in Northern Ireland should learn English.

The position of the Socially Concerned on the spectrum between the 'open' and the 'closed' segments is highlighted by the concerns expressed about perceived preferential access to welfare benefits, employment opportunities and public services. This anxious middle cluster has a fluid response to the impact of immigrants and is open to welcoming refugees. It is similar to the Uncertain Sceptics (30%) in the Republic of Ireland, who are also predominantly female and are concerned about pressure on scarce resources. Given the large numbers of the Socially Concerned who express uncertainty in their views and responses, this is a sizeable segment whose perceptions and questions need to be engaged with as a matter of urgency.

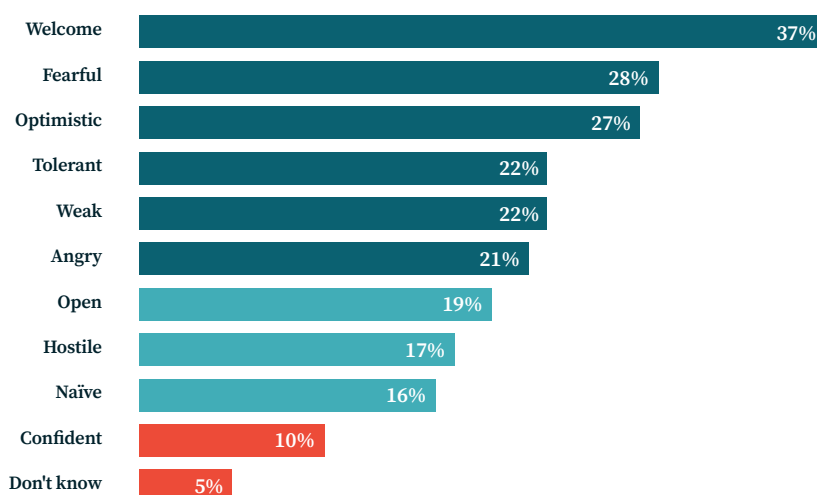


**4. Perceptions of  
Northern Ireland and  
Comparative Sense of Well-Being**

Findings from the SCI commissioned Public Attitude survey allowed multivariate and cluster analysis to segment the public into the four clusters described – Confident Modernists, Uncertain Pragmatists, Concerned Traditionalists and the Socially Concerned. The main rationale for this approach was to understand the scale of different viewpoints in society so as to be able to engage with them in a more understanding and effective manner. The survey data also highlighted public attitudes that give a sense of public perception on the state and nature of Northern Ireland as a whole. In line with research carried out in France, Germany, Italy, Greece and the Republic of Ireland<sup>17</sup> people in Northern Ireland were asked to indicate what words and phrases best describe Northern Ireland today. The responses are captured below –

### Words and phrases which describe Northern Ireland today

All adults 16+: 803 / 502



The Republic of Ireland research also returned ‘welcoming’ as the top descriptor (32%), but only noted ‘fearful’ at 15% - the second highest description in the context of Northern Ireland. The descriptor ‘tolerant’ warranted a higher score in the Republic (28%) than in Northern Ireland (22%), as did the descriptor ‘open’ – 26% in the Republic; 19% in Northern Ireland. On the flip side, 17% in Northern Ireland saw the region as ‘hostile’ as compared to only 8% south of the Border and 21% in Northern Ireland described the region as ‘angry’ compared to 13% in the Republic. It would seem there are rather more mixed views in Northern Ireland about the nature of society than how people in the Republic of Ireland perceive their society.

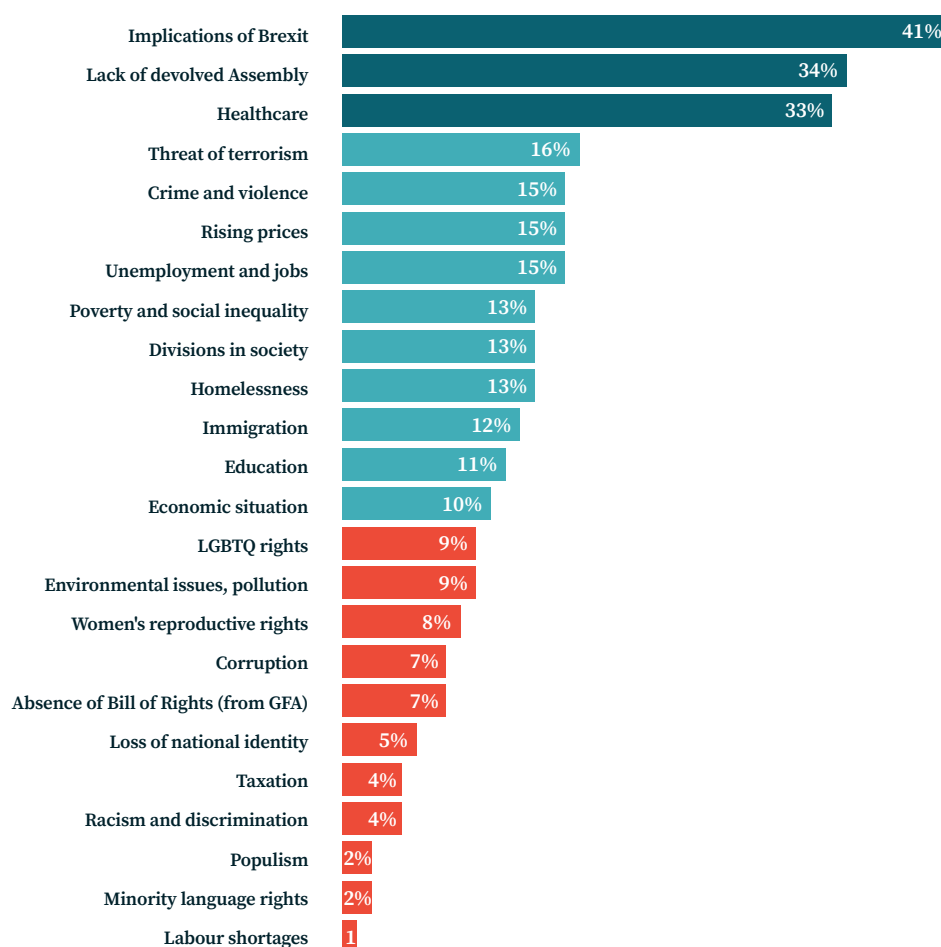
Comparative analysis with other countries sees Italians describing their country in largely negative terms (August 2018), with some 53% applying the description ‘weak’, followed by ‘angry’ and ‘divided’. Only 5% opted for terms such as ‘optimistic’ or ‘open’, and even less described Italy as ‘confident’. In Germany (2017) the main words selected were ‘fearful’ (42%), ‘naïve’ (35%) and ‘angry’ (30%). The first positive descriptor was ‘open’ (20%). In France (2017), the word ‘worried’ attracted the highest identification (65%), followed by ‘angry’ (50%), ‘weak’ (36%) and ‘naïve’ (33%). The much more positive self-perception in both Northern Ireland and the Republic stands in contrast with this more general negativity.

If the words and phrases that people select are important in ascertaining their perception of the state, so too are the issues that emerge as being the key concerns that influence the public view of current challenges. While the four different segments hold very different priorities (as detailed above), the overall public perception highlights the importance of Brexit, the lack of devolved government and the current state of healthcare as the three key concerns. The threat of terrorism, crime and violence and poverty related issues form a mid-level cluster, with immigration standing at 12% - considerably lower in public concern than many other European countries. Two other clear distinctions with research findings from Italy, Greece, France and Germany is the lack of reference or concern given to ‘Loss of national identity’ or ‘populism’.

<sup>17</sup>Similar research was also completed in The Netherlands that SCI was less directly involved with. Data is expected to be available for public attitudes in South Africa in Spring 2020.

## Key issues effecting Ireland today

All adults 16+: 803 / 502



Segmentation sees the 'open' clusters of the Confident Modernists and Uncertain Pragmatists agreeing on the implications of Brexit, but the Confident Modernists also emphasising women's reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights and racism and discrimination. The 'closed' cluster of the Concerned Traditionalists referred to the threat of terrorism, crime and violence as well as to immigration; and the anxious middle - the Socially Concerned, focusing on the socio-economic issues of unemployment, rising prices, healthcare and homelessness.

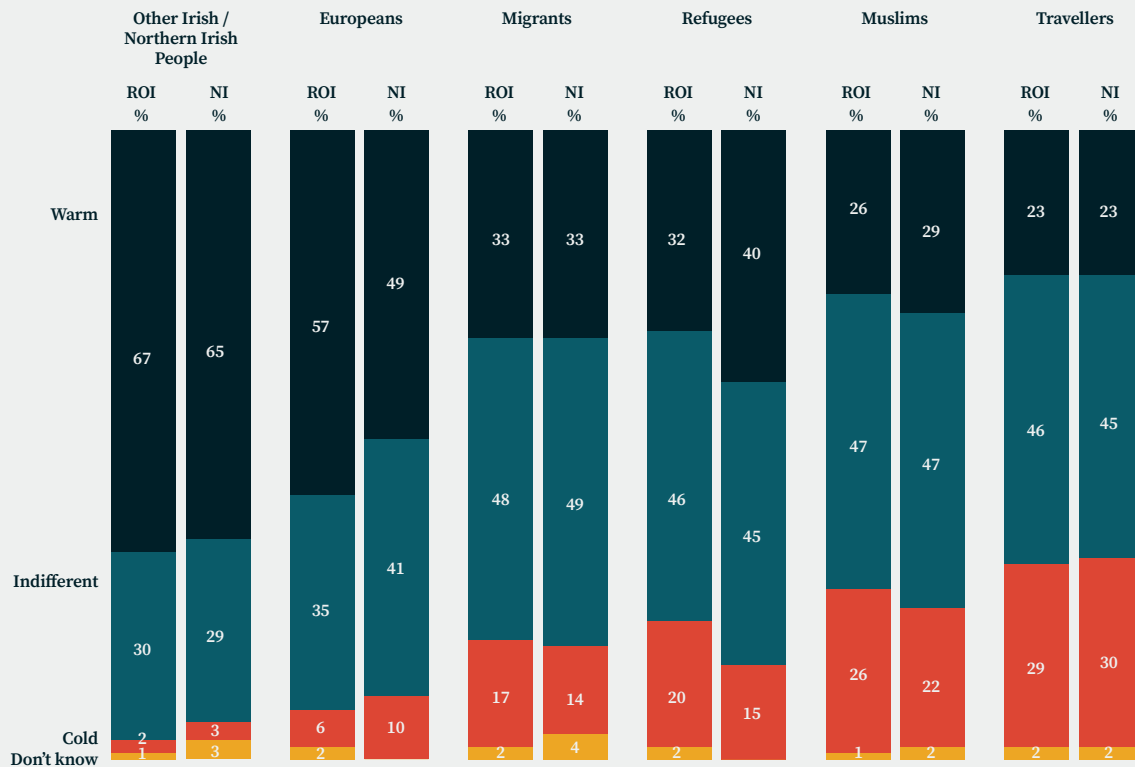
### (i) Perceptions concerning sense of connection and identity

The European country studies carried out by Purpose/More in Common (2017-2019) highlighted the centrality of the issue of national identity in providing a wider context to attitudes towards migrants and refugees. While it is acknowledged that an analysis of sense of identity is often complex given its contradictory character, as has already been noted this is particularly the case in Northern Ireland given the divided nature of society.

A number of questions were posed in the opinion research that touched on sense of connection and identity (however defined). People were asked about their sense of warmth/coolness towards people from different communities. Warm feelings suggest that respondents identify positively with that individual or group, while cold feelings suggest weak connection or even hostility towards them. The categories that people were asked to respond to included (a) Other Northern Irish people; (b) Europeans; (c) Migrants; (d) Refugees; (e) Muslims; and (f) Irish Travellers. A similar range of options (replacing Northern Irish with Irish) was presented in the attitude research carried out in the Republic of Ireland (2018), with the following comparative results –

## Thermometer: Warmth/Coolness towards different communities

All adults 16+: 803 / 502



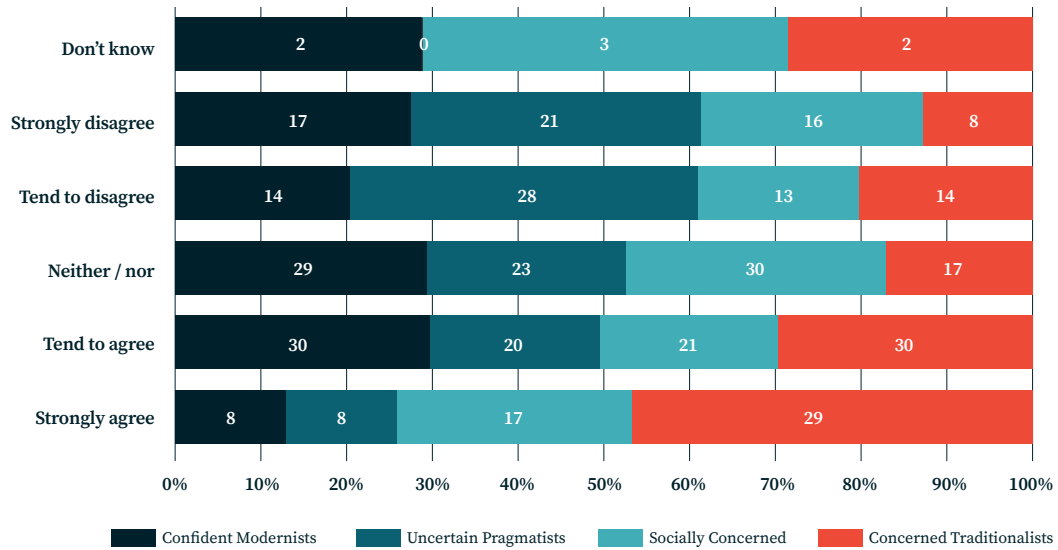
The only minor difference to be noted is the slightly greater warmth towards refugees in Northern Ireland and rather less shown towards other Europeans as compared to the results south of the border. The public on both parts of the island indicated greatest levels of coolness towards the Irish Traveller community, with the Muslim community also being less accepted than other migrant or refugee communities. Data in the Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey confirms the negativity towards the traveller community.

When questioned about their sense of connection more generally, people in Northern Ireland showed a strong sense of connection with their local community/neighbourhood, with 17% indicating that this was very strong and an additional 40% suggesting that it was 'somewhat strong' (only 4% claimed that it was 'very weak'). A sense of connection to Northern Ireland as a region was also strong – overall some 57% (28% very strong and 29% somewhat strong) with only 5% responding that it was very weak and 8% somewhat weak. Alongside this people tended to identify as being proud to be from Northern Ireland – 36% were very proud; 27% were somewhat proud and 5% said that they were not proud at all. Respondents were divided as to whether 'Northern Irish identity is disappearing nowadays' – 37% agreed that it was, while 30% disagreed with this proposition.

When examined on a comparative basis across the four population segments, 32% of the Confident Modernists disagree with the suggestion that Northern Irish identity is disappearing (24% agree that it is), in line with the other 'open' Uncertain Pragmatist category, within which 36% feel confident about identity (29% believe it may be disappearing). This compares to 46% of Socially Concerned and 54% of Concerned Traditionalists who agree with the statement that Northern Irish identity is disappearing. The possible implications of such change may well vary as to whether this is a matter of concern to the various clusters. Clearly it is an important destabilising issue for the Concerned Traditionalists, resulting in a more defensive position with regard to perceived 'outsiders'.

The statement posed 'Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country' offers greater insight into how people are likely to respond to refugees and migrants –

## Sometimes I feel like a stranger in my own country



Again, the divergence between the Concerned Traditionalists and the Uncertain Pragmatists is clear. There is more ambiguity in the response of the Confident Modernists (38% who agree with the statement) as to whether they are influenced by the position adopted by politicians and policy-makers in Northern Ireland on reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights; issues that have already been identified by this cluster as priorities for them. This takes the idea of identity as going beyond that of blood, religion or place of birth (exclusionary identity), although this is not something that is likely to attract support from the ‘closed’ Concerned Traditionalists.

Previous attitudinal studies carried out by SCI and Purpose/More in Common<sup>19</sup> highlighted the proposition that ‘the ideological foundations that underpin the issue of welcoming refugees and immigrants have – for some – more to do with identity than the economy.’<sup>20</sup> The Greek study also noted the importance of identity as a defining political characteristic. As noted above the Concerned Traditionalists expressed the greatest concerns about a sense of Northern Irish identity being under threat.

### (ii) Perceptions concerning economic prospects

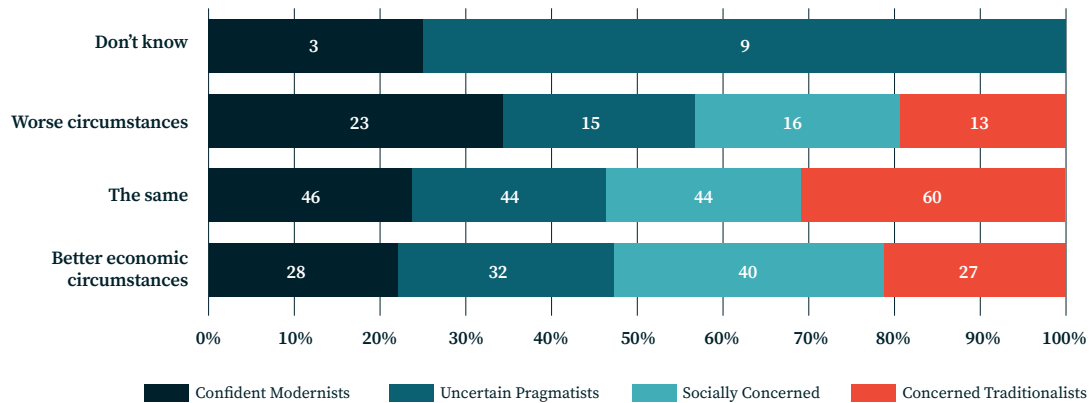
Questions were put to the study respondents to ascertain their sense of optimism or pessimism concerning their economic circumstances. This relates to the findings in previous public attitudes studies commissioned by SCI which suggested that the way in which a population sees the economy (and societal change) informs their opinions of the country’s ability to receive refugees and immigrants.<sup>21</sup> Two scenarios were presented (i) how people see their personal economic perspective currently as compared to one year ago, and (ii) how they envisage circumstances five years hence for them personally –

<sup>19</sup>Purpose/More in Common/SCI (2017) Attitudes towards Refugees, Immigrants and Identity in France; Purpose/More in Common/SCI (2016) Attitudes towards Refugees, Immigrants and Identity in Germany; More in Common/SCI/Ipsos (2019) Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Greece.

<sup>20</sup>Purpose/More in Common/SCI (2017) Attitudes towards Refugees, Immigrants and Identity in France. P. 35.

<sup>21</sup>See More in Common/Purpose 2016, Attitudes towards Refugees, Immigrants and Identity in Germany (Berlin) and More in Common/Purpose, 2017, Attitudes towards Refugees, Immigrants and Identity in France (Paris).

**Rear-view Mirror: Economic Assessment Now as compared to 1 year ago**



Despite higher educational attainment, the younger Confident Modernist segment feel that circumstances are not really improving; indeed, many indicate that for them the situation has deteriorated. Interestingly, despite their concerns expressed about the state of healthcare and employment, the Socially Concerned cluster feels that overall their economic circumstances have improved over the past year, while the Uncertain Pragmatists are reasonably optimistic.

Looking forward, respondents were asked how they viewed prospects over the future five years in terms of personal circumstances. This elicited a more contradictory response –

**Perception about the future economic prospects: now versus 5 years time for you personally –**

Perception	Concerned Traditionalists	Uncertain Pragmatists	Socially Concerned	Confident Modernists
Better	27%	32%	47%	47%
Same	60%	44%	37%	34%
Worse	13%	15%	11%	14%
Don't know	0%	9%	5%	5%

A large proportion of Concerned Traditionalists feel that their personal situation is likely to remain the same or improve (buoyed by their positive perception of Brexit). The Uncertain Pragmatists and Confident Modernists share serious reservations about the impact of Brexit but given higher than average educational qualifications are not overly pessimistic about their personal circumstances into the future. The anomaly is the response of the Socially Concerned, a cluster that is reasonably optimistic about personal future prospects notwithstanding serious concerns over socio-economic issues.

Asked about future prospects for the overall Northern Ireland economy and society the responses received are in starker contrast –

#### Perceptions of Position of the Economy and Society in Northern Ireland over the next Five Years

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists		Socially Concerned		Uncertain Pragmatists		Confident Modernists		Total	
	Econ.	Soc.	Econ.	Soc.	Econ.	Soc.	Econ.	Soc.	Econ.	Soc.
Better	30%	26%	39%	38%	10%	10%	19%	19%	23%	22%
Same	39%	40%	33%	36%	20%	25%	29%	38%	28%	33%
Worse	23%	26%	13%	10%	59%	53%	40%	33%	37%	33%
Don't Know	8%	8%	15%	17%	11%	12%	2%	10%	12%	12%

These responses show greater optimism amongst the Concerned Traditionalists and the Socially Concerned – although the latter cluster expresses greater concerns over the future of society. The Uncertain Pragmatists demonstrate the highest level of pessimism both in terms of the economy and society, followed by the Confident Modernists. These results are in marked contrast to the responses received in the Republic of Ireland, where the cluster most critical of immigration were those who felt that neither the economy nor society was delivering for them. Indeed, this group (Depressed Rejectionists) believed that not only had the Irish economy got worse over the past year (62%) but was likely to continue to get worse (68%) over the next five years. Only 4% reported any perceived improvement and a mere 2% expected any future improvement. The Depressed Rejectionists were equally down beat about the state of society in the Republic – 88% feeling that it had deteriorated and 83% believing that this trend would continue. The responses from Northern Ireland are much more nuanced in their projections.

Two other statements posed relating to the economy were (i) Economic consequences of globalisation are very positive for Northern Ireland; and (ii) The Northern Ireland economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful. There was little overall disagreement over the positive impact of globalisation, with 37% of the respondents seeing it in positive terms as compared to 22% disagreeing. Understandably many (41%) either opted for ‘Neither/Nor’ or ‘Don't Know’. The most sceptical responses were provided by the Confident Modernists, followed by the Socially Concerned. The Uncertain Pragmatists are the most enthusiastic supporters of globalisation at 46%, with only 17% rejecting the proposition. These returns are interesting given that globalisation is often conceived as synonymous with traditional jobs disappearing and with increasing population flows and immigration, although again, attention needs to be paid to the current Brexit debate, including the issue of ‘free market economics’.

The second question saw general agreement across the four clusters that the Northern Ireland economy does advantage the rich and powerful. At 50% and 51% respectively the Concerned Traditionalists and the Uncertain Pragmatists were most sceptical of this proposition. The other two clusters indicated agreement at 58%. The highest level of rejection of this suggestion came from the Uncertain Pragmatists.



### (iii) Perceptions concerning politics and society

Data has already been provided as to how the different clusters assess improvements or deterioration in societal prospects; a number of additional questions/statements were posed to elicit feelings about politics, the media, society and sense of agency. The Northern Ireland poll asked about whether people feel that they have a say in politics and society and whether people feel that traditional political parties care about them –

(i) *People like me have a say in politics and society*<sup>22</sup>

(ii) *Traditional parties don't care about people like me*

#### Perceptions concerning politics and society

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists		Socially Concerned		Uncertain Pragmatists		Confident Modernists		Total	
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2
Strongly Agree	12%	38%	12%	36%	6%	35%	6%	31%	9%	35%
Tend to agree	19%	34%	22%	34%	22%	35%	25%	43%	22%	36%
Neither Nor	16%	15%	29%	21%	27%	21%	19%	15%	25%	19%
Tend to disagree	29%	5%	16%	3%	24%	7%	27%	4%	23%	5%
Disagree	21%	4%	17%	2%	18%	0%	19%	4%	18%	2%
Don't Know	4%	3%	4%	4%	2%	2%	4%	3%	3%	3%

Those clusters feeling that they have least say in politics and society are the contrasting segments of the Concerned Traditionalists and the Confident Modernists, clearly coming from very different political and ideological perspectives. The Uncertain Pragmatists, possibly because of their dissatisfaction with Brexit are also feeling excluded from influencing politics and society. There is general overall agreement across all four clusters that traditional political parties in Northern Ireland do not care about people 'like them'. Again, this may well reflect the fact that the devolved arrangements in Northern Ireland have not been operating over an extended period.

Questions about the role of the mainstream media – 'The mainstream media is more interested in making money than telling the truth' – also elicited a strong degree of cynicism, with 30% of all respondents strongly agreeing with this statement and 39% tending to agree. Only 8% either strongly disagreed or tended to disagree. The Concerned Traditionalists and the Socially Concerned were most distrustful of the mainstream media – although distrust was shared across all segments.

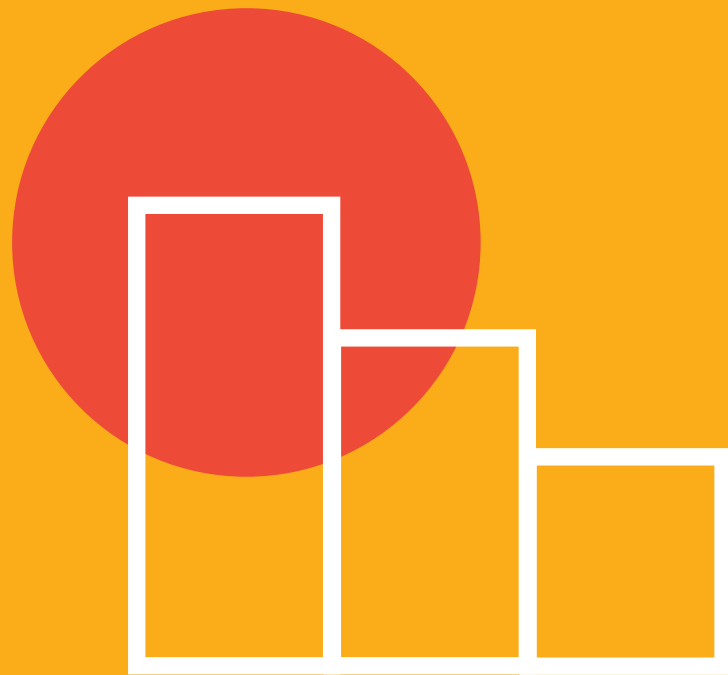
The other issue is whether people feel that they can be confident about doing well in Northern Ireland. This indicates how comfortable they feel and, arguably, whether they are predisposed to be open to others –

<sup>22</sup>As of 21st October 2019, the issue of reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights was applied to Northern Ireland through parliamentary action taken in the Westminster Parliament in the long-term absence of the Stormont Assembly.

*'It is increasingly difficult for someone like me to do well in Northern Ireland'.*

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists	Socially Concerned	Uncertain Pragmatists	Confident Modernists	Total
Strongly Agree	12%	17%	8%	11%	12%
Tend to Agree	26%	21%	18%	19%	21%
Neither/Nor	33%	30%	31%	31%	31%
Tend to disagree	14%	18%	25%	27%	22%
Strongly disagree	12%	10%	16%	9%	12%
Don't Know	2%	4%	2%	2%	3%

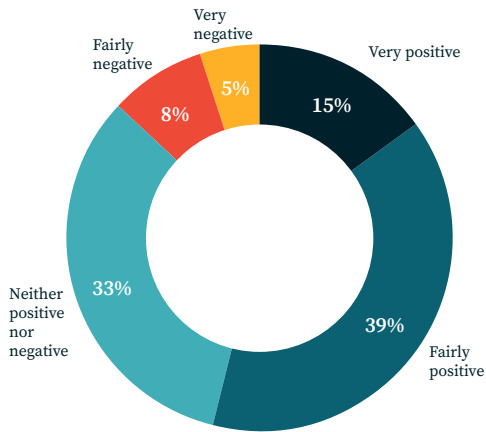
The Uncertain Pragmatists feel most comfortable as to their ability to thrive in Northern Ireland, followed by the Confident Modernists. The Concerned Traditionalists and the Socially Concerned share a sense of reservation about how well they are likely to do in Northern Ireland, with slightly fewer Concerned Traditionalists disagreeing with the statement than the Socially Concerned segment. The fact that the Concerned Traditionalist cluster was also the most adamant in responding that they sometimes felt like a stranger in their own land (see above) indicates that they are more likely to be inclined to 'other' those who are seen to be different or incomers rather than welcoming difference and change.



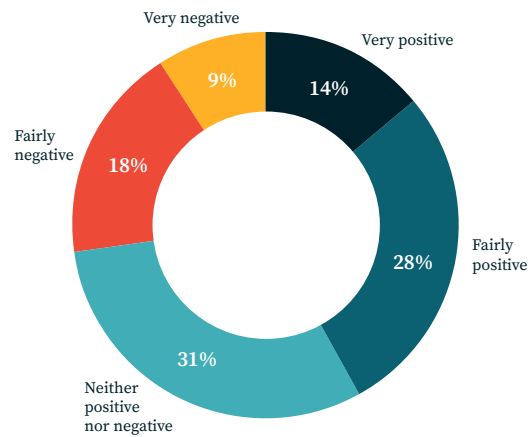
**5. Attitudes to  
Immigrants and Immigration  
in Northern Ireland**

Ireland, both North and South, has a long history of emigration. On the basis of this, study respondents were asked how they rated the impact of Northern Ireland emigrants on the world as compared to how they viewed the impact of immigrants on Northern Ireland –

### Impact of Northern Ireland Emigrants on the World



### Perceived Impact of Immigrants on Northern Ireland



Perhaps not overly surprisingly, the perception of respondents is that the Northern Irish offer greater benefits to their country of migration (54% feeling this is ‘very’ or ‘fairly positive’) as compared to 42% who apply the same assessment to incoming immigrants to Northern Ireland. Similarly, only 13% think of the impact of Northern Irish emigrants in negative terms, whereas 27% apply a negative frame to new communities in Northern Ireland.

In 2018 the Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey interviewed 1,201 adults aged 18 years plus, asking a series of questions about minority ethnic communities. One statement posed the statement - ‘I would willingly accept someone from a minority ethnic background as a resident of Northern Ireland, living and working here’. Of those interviewed 96% agreed that they would. A further question probed ‘Are you prejudiced against people from a minority ethnic background?’ The answer to this returned 3% who admitted to being very prejudiced; 16% a little prejudiced and 78% who were not prejudiced at all. Of this cohort the religious breakdown was 85% of Catholics who did not see themselves as prejudiced; 72% of Protestants and 74% of people who said they were neither Catholic nor Protestant. In parallel with this, 14% of Catholics admitted to being very or a little prejudiced alongside 25% of Protestants – a finding that would seem to chime with the composition of the Concerned Traditionalists.

#### (i) Immigrants and the economy

In 2018, the Department for the Economy Analysis of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland<sup>23</sup> made the point that 83% of migrant workers from the EU26 and 74% of migrant workers from the rest of the world were economically active. Indeed, alongside migrants from the Republic of Ireland, those coming to Northern Ireland from outside the EU were the most highly qualified (49% at degree level).

The SCI study posed a number of statements concerning the employment of immigrants. Responses showed the very different views of the four population segments –

(i) *‘Immigrants have made it more difficult for Northern Ireland people to get jobs’*

(ii) *‘Employers should prioritise hiring people from this country over immigrants’*

<sup>23</sup>Department for the Economy (2018) – Op. Cit.

## Immigrants and the economy

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists		Socially Concerned		Uncertain Pragmatists		Confident Modernists		Total	
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2
Strongly Agree	48%	63%	33%	28%	2%	7%	3%	13%	16%	23%
Tend to agree	22%	12%	34%	37%	19%	21%	18%	13%	24%	23%
Neither Nor	18%	13%	23%	21%	26%	39%	25%	41%	24%	30%
Tend to disagree	4%	3%	7%	6%	28%	21%	31%	14%	18%	13%
Disagree	5%	5%	6%	4%	22%	11%	17%	15%	14%	9%
Don't Know	3%	3%	6%	4%	3%	1%	5%	4%	4%	2%

The Confident Modernists and the Uncertain Pragmatist clusters disagree with the suggestion that immigrants have made it more difficult for Northern Ireland people to get jobs (48% and 50% respectively), while the Concerned Traditionalists are at the opposite end of the spectrum with 70% agreeing with the proposition. The Socially Concerned cluster is more aligned with the Concerned Traditionalists (67%) on this issue.

The second statement regarding the prioritising of local workers, garners less clarity amongst the comparative cluster positions. In line with their overall opinions, the Concerned Traditionalists are clearly in support of this statement (75%), the Socially Concerned are swayed by this proposition (65%), whilst the Uncertain Pragmatists and the Confident Modernists are united in disagreement (32% and 31% respectively, with many opting for a 'Neither/nor' response.

Three follow up statements explored people's attitudes to immigrants in the workplace in Northern Ireland –

*(i) Immigrants often do jobs that need doing but Northern Irish people don't want to do*

*(ii) Immigrants are often prepared to work harder than Northern Irish workers*

*(iii) Immigrants are often prepared to work for lower pay than Northern Irish workers*

There was general agreement across the segments that these statements could be true – 67% of all respondents agreed that immigrants often do jobs that need doing but that Northern Irish people would prefer not to do; 70% felt that immigrants are often prepared to work for lower pay and, somewhat less, 55%, believe that immigrants are often prepared to work harder than workers from Northern Ireland.

The Concerned Traditionalists (45%) are the least likely to agree that immigrants are doing jobs that Northern Irish people do not want to do, whereas the Uncertain Pragmatists (79%) are the most likely to concur with this statement. Similarly, the Concerned Traditionalists most readily reject the suggestion that immigrants are prepared to work harder than Northern Irish people (only 25% agreeing that this might be the case) compared to 67% of Uncertain Pragmatists who believe that this is true. The third statement sees the Uncertain Pragmatists again being in the highest agreement (77%), although in this case it is the Confident Modernists

(57%) that are least likely to agree, with the Concerned Traditionalists being in greater agreement at 64%.

In the case of the first two statements the Socially Concerned are not as emphatic in their views as the Concerned Traditionalists but are closer to them in terms of perception. The first statement was accepted by 60% of the Socially Concerned and the second statement elicited 52% agreement. Some 70% of Socially Concerned believes that immigrants are often prepared to work for lower pay.

The 2018 Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey posed a similar question – Do migrant workers take jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland? This survey found only 22% in agreement with this question; 16% who opted for ‘Neither/Nor’ and 59% that either disagreed or strongly disagreed. While worded differently these results are somewhat more open than the SCI Attitudinal Study returns. When analysed by religious background of respondents it was found that Catholics were more likely to disagree with the suggestion that migrant workers took jobs away from people born in Northern Ireland (65%) as compared to people from the Protestant community (53%) or those with no stated religious affiliation (52%).

An overall statement was posed in the SCI study about immigration being good for the Northern Ireland economy –

*‘Immigration nowadays is good for the Northern Ireland economy, bringing in new skills, new opportunities and drive to succeed’*

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists	Socially Concerned	Uncertain Pragmatists	Confident Modernists	Total
Strongly Agree	0%	14%	23%	20%	16%
Tend to Agree	10%	25%	44%	44%	33%
Neither/Nor	25%	30%	20%	23%	30%
Tend to disagree	24%	19%	9%	7%	19%
Strongly disagree	38%	6%	2%	3%	6%
Don't Know	3%	4%	2%	4%	4%

The stark disagreement between the Concerned Traditionalists and the ‘open’ clusters of the Uncertain Pragmatists and the Confident Modernists is clear. The Socially Concerned cluster - the anxious middle - are considerably less convinced of the overall benefits of immigration for the Northern Ireland economy. The position adopted by some of the latter may be reflected in a comment captured during a Northern Ireland gathering in the National Conversation conducted by British Future and Hope Not Hate across the UK in 2017/2018<sup>24</sup> -

*“I just think there are positive and negative aspects (of immigration) in my mind. When I was working with people of different nationalities...I was in the health service, and they certainly have a lot to contribute, but then there are obviously down sides to immigration, a lot of them (British people) perceive them (migrants) as coming and using, costing us money, which I don't think is necessarily the case. But I'm sitting right in the middle on this.”<sup>25</sup>*

Many of the Socially Concerned cluster seem to be adopting the same position.

<sup>24</sup>This was a citizens’ panels initiative conducted by British Future and Hope Not Hate to ascertain views to immigration. Badged the National Conversation it reported that opinions voiced in Northern Ireland reflected those raised elsewhere across the UK, with three differences (i) Brexit was a more salient issue; (ii) many involved referred to their own family history of migration; and (iii) there was greater understanding of why international migrants socialized within their own community. Rutter, J. & Carter, R. (2018) National Conversation on Immigration: Final Report: British Future & Hope Not Hate, London. [www.nationalconversation.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/FINAL-2-nationalconversation-september-report-2018-09-final.pdf](http://www.nationalconversation.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/FINAL-2-nationalconversation-september-report-2018-09-final.pdf). Citizens’ Panels were held in Ballymena, Derry and Dungannon alongside a stakeholder meeting in Belfast.

## (ii) Immigration and society

In 2013, McDermott<sup>26</sup> wrote about attitudes in Northern Ireland on immigration and diversity. The most positive returns were in relation to the impact on cultural life –

	Northern Ireland	Economy	Cultural Life
Very bad	5%	10%	4%
Bad	19%	22%	17%
Neither/Nor	31%	26%	30%
Good	38%	38%	39%
Very good	7%	7%	11%

SCI commissioned research, five years later, explored perceptions about the impact of immigration on local culture and society –

- (i) *‘Immigration nowadays is good for Northern Irish cultural life, making Northern Ireland a more vibrant and exciting place to live.’*
- (ii) *‘Immigration nowadays is bad for Northern Ireland, dividing society into sharply contrasting groups of opinions and beliefs.’*

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists		Socially Concerned		Uncertain Pragmatists		Confident Modernists		Total	
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2
Strongly Agree	3%	42%	16%	12%	25%	4%	24%	3%	18%	12%
Tend to agree	7%	28%	24%	25%	39%	15%	41%	19%	30%	21%
Neither Nor	24%	17%	36%	33%	21%	26%	14%	23%	25%	26%
Tend to disagree	30%	4%	13%	17%	12%	25%	2%	23%	15%	19%
Disagree	33%	5%	8%	9%	0%	28%	6%	26%	9%	18%
Don't Know	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	3%	6%	3%	3%

<sup>25</sup>Ballymena: How do attitudes to immigration in Northern Ireland compare with the rest of the UK? – [nationalconversation.uk/Ballymena-how-do-attitudes-to-immigration-in-northern-ireland-compare-with-the-rest-of-the-uk/](http://nationalconversation.uk/Ballymena-how-do-attitudes-to-immigration-in-northern-ireland-compare-with-the-rest-of-the-uk/)

<sup>26</sup>McDermott, P. (2013) A Shared Society? Attitudes on Immigration and Diversity: ARK Research Update, Belfast

These results again highlight the ambiguity of the Socially Concerned segment, many of which opted for a Neither/nor position, and with fewer numbers convinced that immigration is good for cultural life than either the Confident Modernists or the Uncertain Pragmatists. However, they are still less negative than the Concerned Traditionalists who register 63% disagreement with the suggestion.

The second statement again places the Socially Concerned in a mid-way position between the adamant Concerned Traditionalists (70% of whom feel that immigration is divisive) and the Confident Modernists (22% who agree that immigration may be divisive). The Uncertain Pragmatists are the most dismissive of this proposition, with 53% expressing disagreement.

The 2018 Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey also posed a question as to whether migrant workers make Northern Ireland open to new ideas and cultures. The responses highlighted strong agreement, considerably higher than the opinions reflected in the SCI study –

	All Adults	Catholic Religion	Protestant Religion	No stated Religion
Strongly agree	31%	35%	26%	26%
Agree	50%	52%	53%	41%
Neither/Nor	11%	7%	13%	17%
Disagree	6%	4%	6%	13%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%	1%	0%
Don't know	2%	1%	2%	3%

The somewhat weaker levels of agreement within the Protestant community may reflect the Concerned Traditionalist segment that the SCI study identified. Interestingly, when analysed by age range there is a stronger scepticism of this proposition expressed by both the 18-24 year old age range and people aged 65 and over. While the latter is to be expected, the former is more disturbing. The strongest agreement with the statement is amongst the middle-age 35-44, 45-54 and 55-64 ranges.

Issues were raised about the perceived impact of immigration on public services and the welfare state in both the Life & Times polling and the SCI commissioned research. The SCI poll explored two statements -

- (i) *'Immigration nowadays is bad for Northern Ireland, costing the welfare state and draining resources which could be spent on Northern Irish people.'*
- (ii) *'Immigrants are given priority over established residents re benefits, housing or using public services.'*



Answer	Concerned Traditionalists		Socially Concerned		Uncertain Pragmatists		Confident Modernists		Total	
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2
Strongly Agree	55%	54%	21%	24%	5%	6%	9%	5%	18%	19%
Tend to agree	18%	26%	28%	34%	18%	23%	20%	21%	21%	27%
Neither Nor	20%	10%	30%	25%	24%	28%	22%	29%	25%	24%
Tend to disagree	2%	5%	12%	7%	25%	23%	22%	21%	17%	15%
Disagree	3%	0%	8%	5%	26%	16%	25%	17%	17%	11%
Don't Know	3%	5%	2%	5%	2%	4%	2%	7%	2%	5%

Once again, there is no confusion as to where both the Concerned Traditionalists and the Uncertain Pragmatists stand on these two statements – clearly at either end of the spectrum of opinion. The Confident Modernists are closely aligned with the Uncertain Pragmatists, but the Socially Concerned segment is decidedly in the middle. Many are unsure about their views on this issue, but a majority feel that immigration might be a drain on public services and immigrants might benefit from being given priority over established residents. Housing may well be of particular concern given that levels of housing segregation in Northern Ireland have been slow to change, whilst the private rented sector has overtaken the social housing sector as the second largest tenure in the region since 2009.<sup>27</sup> This can translate into perceived pressure on scarce resources; a point re-iterated by Murphy & Vieten<sup>28</sup> in considering the experiences of African refugees and asylum seekers.

Another area of public services that can be seen as under potential pressure is that of education. A School Census called by the Department of Education (NI) in 2001/02 showed 868 children (0.5% of the official register) in primary schools had English as a second language. By 2017/18 this figure had increased to 11,423 children (6%). Comparative post-primary figures were 463 young people in 2001/02 (0.3%) which rose to 18,283 in 2017/18 (some 2%).<sup>29</sup> Devine<sup>30</sup> also commented on concerns raised in the various Life & Times surveys about the possible strains on schools, housing and the Health Service, although tracking these over time (2005-2016), there was a peak in concerns expressed in 2007/08 and a decline in these anxieties by 2016, with the Health Service and housing remaining the greatest points of contention. The 2018 Life & Times Survey re-iterated concerns expressed about the Health Service (49% of respondents) and schooling (45%), although much fewer respondents (21%) believed that migrant workers come to Northern Ireland to avail of social security benefits.

Two other statements were posed in the SCI study to explore attitudes to immigration –

- (i) *'It should be easier for people to come to Northern Ireland to work.'*
- (ii) *'Immigrants working here should be able to bring family members to join them.'*

<sup>27</sup>Gray, A-M., Hamilton, J., Kelly, G., Lynn, B., Melaugh, M. & Robinson, G. (2018) Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, No. 5: Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, Belfast.

<sup>28</sup>Murphy, F. & Vieten, U. African Asylum Seekers and Refugees in both Irelands, in Fanning, B. & Michael, L. (eds) (2019) Immigrants as Outsiders in the two Irelands – Op. Cit.

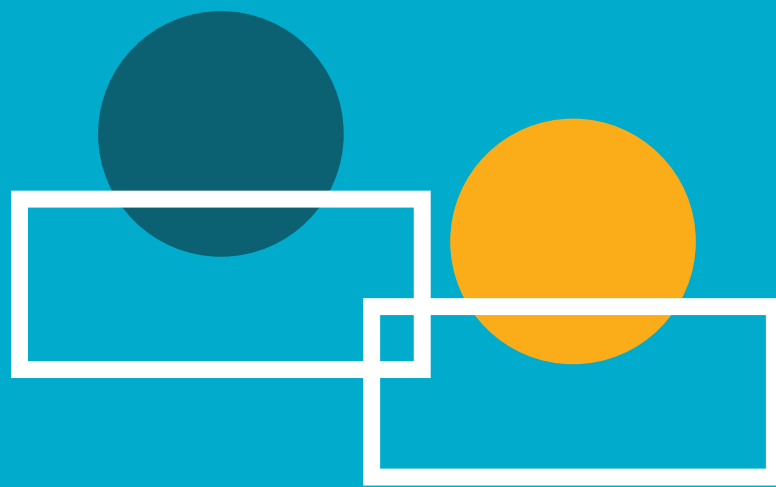
<sup>29</sup>Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report (2018) – Op. Cit.

<sup>30</sup>Devine, P. (2018) Attitudes to Minority Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland, 2005-2016: ARK Research Update, Belfast.

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists		Socially Concerned		Uncertain Pragmatists		Confident Modernists		Total	
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2
Strongly Agree	1%	2%	15%	15%	13%	16%	10%	8%	11%	12%
Tend to agree	5%	7%	22%	33%	22%	31%	29%	34%	20%	25%
Neither Nor	23%	16%	33%	30%	44%	29%	38%	28%	36%	28%
Tend to disagree	17%	17%	21%	14%	13%	15%	13%	17%	16%	13%
Disagree	50%	54%	6%	6%	5%	6%	8%	6%	13%	15%
Don't Know	3%	4%	3%	1%	4%	4%	2%	7%	3%	4%

The Uncertain Pragmatists, the Confident Modernists and the Socially Concerned all showed a degree of uncertainty over the proposition that it should be easier for people to come to Northern Ireland to work, although between 35 – 39% of these clusters are open to the suggestion, with the Confident Modernists most in agreement (39%). The Concerned Traditionalists were vehemently in opposition to the suggestion, recording 67% in disagreement.

The second proposition about bringing family members also demonstrated strong disagreement from the Concerned Traditionalists (71%). The Uncertain Pragmatists and the Socially Concerned clusters were the most in agreement (at 47% and 48% respectively), with the Confident Modernists being slightly less enthusiastic (42%). However, when the Neither/Nor uncertain responses are added to the positive agreement figures, all segments – apart from the Concerned Traditionalists – are potentially open to considering this suggestion.



## **6. Attitudes towards Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

In a study published in 2010 a number of specific challenges were listed as facing asylum seekers in Northern Ireland. These included –

- The lengthy and uncertain application process;
- Fear of detention and removal;
- Barriers of language and understanding;
- Culture shock and isolation;
- Enforced idleness;
- Poverty and even destitution;
- Negative attitudes experienced;
- Poor health, including stress and depression; and
- Difficulties to transition as a refugee.<sup>31</sup>

While the study focused on children, the challenges are applicable to adult asylum seekers as well. Four years later (2014) a Northern Ireland Assembly, Research & Information Service Research Paper<sup>32</sup> re-iterated many of the concerns listed above, while noting the responsibilities that devolved government departments have towards refugees and asylum seekers, with particular reference to integration. The continuing complications of the asylum process were underlined as was the need for oversight of the detention facilities in Larne House and support for destitute asylum seekers who are appealing the decisions made on their status.

The Northern Ireland Assembly report provided figures for applications for asylum in Northern Ireland over the period 2009-2012 which recorded the slow rise in asylum applications from 2009 (130 applications; 20 successful applications) to 2012 (240 applications; 80 successful applications). One of the problems referred to was lack of access to disaggregated data for Northern Ireland, which made policy planning difficult.

A study compiled by EMBRACE in 2016 provided data on people seeking asylum in Northern Ireland. At that point in time it was noted that while one-fifth of asylum applications are made by families, the majority of asylum seekers are single adults. Countries of origin most frequently cited include China, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. EMBRACE also reported that 25 children arrived into Northern Ireland as unaccompanied minors between 2011 and August 2015, the youngest 12 years of age. Updated figures for 2016/17 mentioned 13 unaccompanied child referrals. These children are placed in the care system and a Guardianship scheme that has been developed is referred to by the voluntary sector as a model of good practice. In summer 2017, Bryson Intercultural/Migrant Help recorded 720 people in supported accommodation.

Activists working in support of refugees and asylum seekers also comment on examples of good practice taken forward by The Executive Office in Northern Ireland, which include a Crisis Fund administered by the Red Cross in Northern Ireland; access to healthcare for all asylum-seekers (under the Persons Not Ordinarily Resident Regulations (NI) 2015); the safeguarding of legal aid for asylum-seekers and refugees; access to disability benefits for refugees; the provision of English language classes; and community assistance to newly arrived refugees through the Extern Refugee and Asylum Floating Support.

The Feeling Thermometer presented above (p.29) indicated that people in Northern Ireland feel warmer towards refugees (40%) than those in the Republic of Ireland (32%) and are more open to refugees than they are to immigrants (33%) – unlike in the Republic of Ireland which is marginally the other way round. Responses from the study also highlight that there is a reasonably good understanding of the distinction between refugees, asylum seekers and migrants –

<sup>31</sup>Geraghty, T., McStravick, C. & Mitchell, S. (2010) New to Northern Ireland: A Study of the Issues Faced by Migrant, Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children in Northern Ireland: National Children's Bureau. [www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/17%20ntni\\_web\\_final.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/17%20ntni_web_final.pdf)

<sup>32</sup>Potter, M. (June 2014) Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland: NIAR 348-14

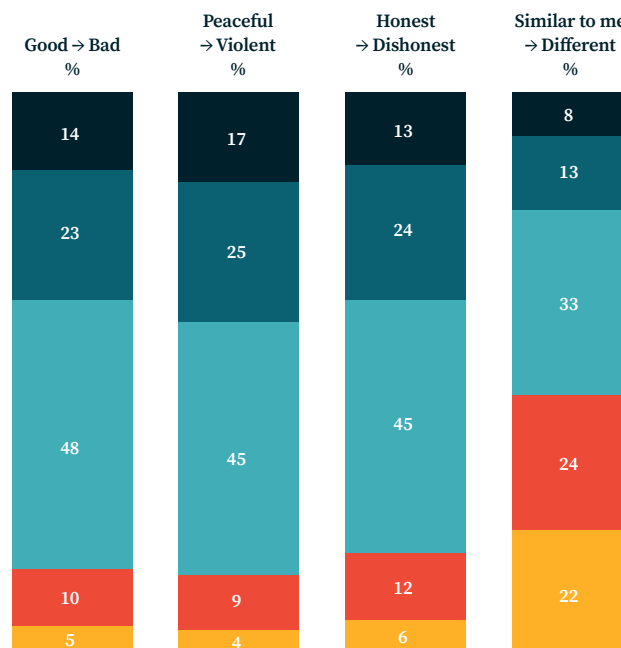
<sup>33</sup>McNulty, M. (2016) Refugees in Northern Ireland, 2016: Some Basic Facts: Belfast.

## Understanding of Terms

	A person who has fled from his/her country because they fear for their personal safety, often because of violence or war	A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied to live in another country, but whose application is still in process	A person who moves from one country to another to improve their economic and professional prospects	A person who moves to a specified country from another country for any reason
Refugee	58%	11%	5%	7%
Asylum seeker	45%	46%	5%	9%
Economic migrant	3%	13%	80%	8%
Immigrant	4%	30%	14%	76%
Don't know	3%	6%	4%	5%

One useful approach to probe people's perceptions of refugees (and migrants) is to ask the extent to which they can relate to people who belong to either of these categories. This helps identify their vulnerability to 'us-versus-them' narratives that can be used to target newcomers. The Northern Ireland responses showed many people opting for a mid-range between the most positive response (5) and the least positive (1). Refugees tend to be seen as peaceful (42% on 4/5 scale) as distinct from potentially violent (14% on 1/2 scale), although less likely 'to be like me'. The 46% who are likely to see refugees as being different to them may just be a statement of fact about a very different life experience, but it can also leave people open to castigating refugees as outsiders –

## Basic Attitudes to Refugees



Perception of difference, however, can be balanced by a sense of empathy with those who have suffered. A set of statements was posed to examine the basis for connection with the refugee experience -

- (i) *'If I were from another country and fleeing terrible circumstances, I would want Northern Ireland to offer me protection.'*
- (ii) *'If Northern Ireland and Europe welcome large numbers of refugees, this will encourage many more people in places like Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and African countries to move to Europe.'*
- (iii) *'Northern Ireland people know what it is to feel hunger, poverty and political oppression and should help people in those circumstances'*
- (iv) *'We should accept refugees in Northern Ireland as we have always had a culture of solidarity and compassion.'*

Response	Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Statement 4
Strongly agree	32%	24%	25%	22%
Tend to agree	33%	29%	28%	29%
Neither/Nor	25%	32%	31%	27%
Tend to disagree	4%	8%	7%	10%
Strongly disagree	2%	3%	6%	9%
Don't Know	4%	5%	2%	3%

The appeal to historic memory and compassion receives strong support from respondents, although the suggestion that this should lead to accepting refugees as stated in Statement 4, gives rise to stronger disagreement (19%). The fact that 65% of people agree that they would want protection in the event of fleeing 'terrible circumstances', may seem somewhat at odds with the 53% who agree with Statement 2 about a possible 'pull' factor if protection is offered, but in fact both positions may be valid. The attitude study does not require people to be consistent in their expressed opinions. This also applies to the linking of the concept of compassion with a value statement - *'Compassion for those suffering is the most important virtue in a person'* - which saw 54% of people in Northern Ireland agreeing with this statement, 24% being unsure and 16% disagreeing. However, translating this into policy and practice may still be challenging.

Michael and Devine focused on sentiment towards refugees and asylum seekers in their analysis of the 2017 Northern Ireland Life & Times and the Youth Life & Times surveys.<sup>34</sup> It showed that there was general support for the statement 'I think it is our duty to provide protection to refugees who are escaping persecution in their home country', to which 62% of adults and 60% of young people either agreed or strongly agreed. It was also noted that the 'sense of duty' sentiment was strong and that 9:10 NILT respondents who believed that immigration should be increased also felt that we have a duty to protect refugees, but only 3:10 who favoured a decrease in immigration felt this.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Michael, L. & Devine, P. (2018) A Welcoming Northern Ireland? Understanding sentiment towards asylum seekers and refugees: Research Update, ARK, Number 124: Belfast.

<sup>35</sup>Devine, P. & Michael, L. (December 2018) Welcome Home? Attitudes to Asylum Seekers and Refugees: QPOL, Belfast ([www.qpol.qub.ac.uk/welcome-home-attitudes-towards-asylum-seekers-refugees/](http://www.qpol.qub.ac.uk/welcome-home-attitudes-towards-asylum-seekers-refugees/))

The success of the re-settlement of Syrian refugees in Northern Ireland under the Vulnerable Refugees Resettlement scheme has been widely cited as a model of good practice and partnership involving the statutory and voluntary sectors. It is felt that the matching of compassion with examples of good management can be powerful in underpinning positive public attitudes. It is also important that good practice is recognised, maintained and the application from the learning extended to the treatment of refugees from other countries alongside Syria.

**(i) Contribution of refugees to society**

As was the case with immigrants, the question was posed in the SCI commissioned study that –

*Refugees coming to Northern Ireland enrich our culture and society.*

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists	Socially Concerned	Uncertain Pragmatists	Confident Modernists	Total
Strongly agree	6%	16%	18%	18%	16%
Tend to agree	8%	28%	40%	33%	30%
Neither	22%	40%	32%	32%	33%
Tend to disagree	30%	11%	6%	7%	11%
Strongly disagree	31%	2%	2%	3%	4%
Don't Know	3%	2%	2%	7%	3%

The division between the Concerned Traditionalists (61% in disagreement) and the Uncertain Pragmatists (58% in agreement) remains, with the Confident Modernists being slightly less convinced than the Uncertain Pragmatists. A large proportion of the Socially Concerned (40% opted for Neither/nor) are uncertain, although at 13% in disagreement are much more open than the Concerned Traditionalists. Considerably more agreement was found across all the segments that refugees who come to live in Northern Ireland should learn English. Polling amongst all adults show that 81% either strongly agree or tend to agree with this statement, whilst only 5% disagree.

For refugees to be integrated and contribute to Northern Ireland a sense of longer-term stability is important. For this reason, the question was asked whether people felt that –

- (i) *Refugees should be permitted to live permanently in Northern Ireland, regardless of whether the situation in their country improves.*
- (ii) *Refugees should be required to leave Northern Ireland and return to their country when the situation improves; or*
- (iii) *Don't Know.*

The results showed that 41% of the public responses in Northern Ireland were in favour of allowing people to reside permanently in the region, while 44% favoured a policy of return if the situation allowed for this. This was a considerably more generous response than that received in the Republic of Ireland, where only 29% favoured permanent residence.

The question was also posed concerning family re-unification –

*Refugees should be allowed bring their family members*

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists	Socially Concerned	Uncertain Pragmatists	Confident Modernists	Total
Strongly agree	3%	15%	19%	15%	15%
Tend to agree	17%	33%	36%	36%	32%
Neither	15%	30%	26%	28%	26%
Tend to disagree	18%	14%	12%	8%	13%
Strongly disagree	45%	6%	3%	5%	11%
Don't Know	2%	1%	2%	8%	13%

There is clearly greater agreement between the Uncertain Pragmatist, Socially Concerned and Confident Modernist clusters than the Concerned Traditionalists on this issue, with the latter (63%) disagreeing with this proposition.

**(ii) Refugee contact and integration**

Fanning & Michael noted that

*'We utilize the term "integration" to mean a two-way process of adaptation between migrants and host society, and the ease with which migrants can access and be included in the existing social structures of the host country.'*

They warn, however, about the implicit assumption that successful 'integration' entails some degree of conformity to the host society and pose the question – conformity to what given societal complexities?<sup>37</sup> It is suggested that at its most basic 'integration' should reduce the extent that refugees and migrants are considered/treated as outsiders either by the host community, or in terms of how immigrants see themselves. The Migration Integration Policy Index 2015<sup>38</sup> ranks 38 countries across Labour Market Mobility; Family Reunification; Education; Healthcare; Political Participation; Access to Permanent Residence; Access to Citizenship and Anti-Discrimination measures. A paper prepared on the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland (2013) made the point that their specific experiences needed to be taken into account as a key to understanding the complexities of integration.<sup>39</sup>

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership<sup>40</sup> called for a refugee integration strategy to be put in place as early as 2013, arguing that this should commence at the start of asylum proceedings.<sup>41</sup> The Northern Ireland Assembly Research Briefing Paper<sup>42</sup> expressed concern that this recommendation had not been actioned in 2014, but Northern Ireland still remains the only region of the UK without such a policy notwithstanding the fact that the Northern Ireland Executive believes that there is a 'strong case' for a refugee integration strategy.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Fanning, B. & Michael, L. (2019) – Op. Cit. p. 3.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid. p. 229.

<sup>38</sup>Migration Integration Policy Index, 2015 – [www.mipex.eu/key-findings](http://www.mipex.eu/key-findings)

<sup>39</sup>Malischewski, C-A. (2013) Integration in a Divided Society? Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland: Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford. Working Paper Series No 91.

<sup>40</sup>NISMP is hosted by NILGA (Northern Ireland Local Government Association) since 2011. It is a multi-agency, cross-party and cross-Department body working to reflect the regionally specific needs of Northern Ireland in the development and implementation of UK immigration policy and practice.

<sup>41</sup>NISMP (2013) A Proposal for a Refugee Integration Strategy for Northern Ireland: Belfast.

<sup>42</sup>Potter, M. – Op. Cit.

<sup>43</sup><http://www.strongertogether.ni.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/racial-equality-strategy-2015-2025.pdf> (para 6.19)



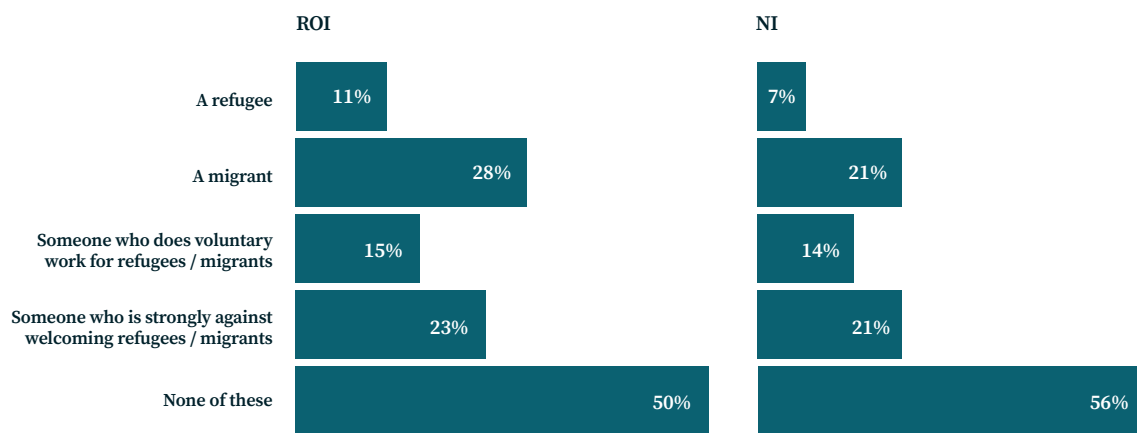
A Racial Equality Strategy (2005-2010) was published in 2005, followed by a Racial Equality Strategy (2015-2025).<sup>44</sup> A Strategy framework of action was outlined –

- (i) *To tackle racial inequalities and to open up opportunities to all;*
- (ii) *To eradicate racism and hate crime; and*
- (iii) *Along with ‘Together: Building a United Community’ policy, to promote good race relations and social cohesion.*

While it was agreed that the Northern Ireland Executive would lead on the implementation of the Strategy, at least on commentator<sup>45</sup> suggested that although the strategy was commendably ambitious, it required appropriate monitoring and dedicated budget lines to ensure effective implementation. The lack of accountability of current policy was also pointed out, made even more difficult given the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Voluntary organisations active in working with refugee and asylum-seeker groups have consistently highlighted the importance of contact as an aspect of understanding, acceptance and integration. The SCI commissioned research probed how wide-spread this contact was and what was the nature of the contact –

**Numbers of People who have known anyone who is...**



<sup>44</sup>[www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm/racial-equality-strategy-2015-2025.pdf](http://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm/racial-equality-strategy-2015-2025.pdf).

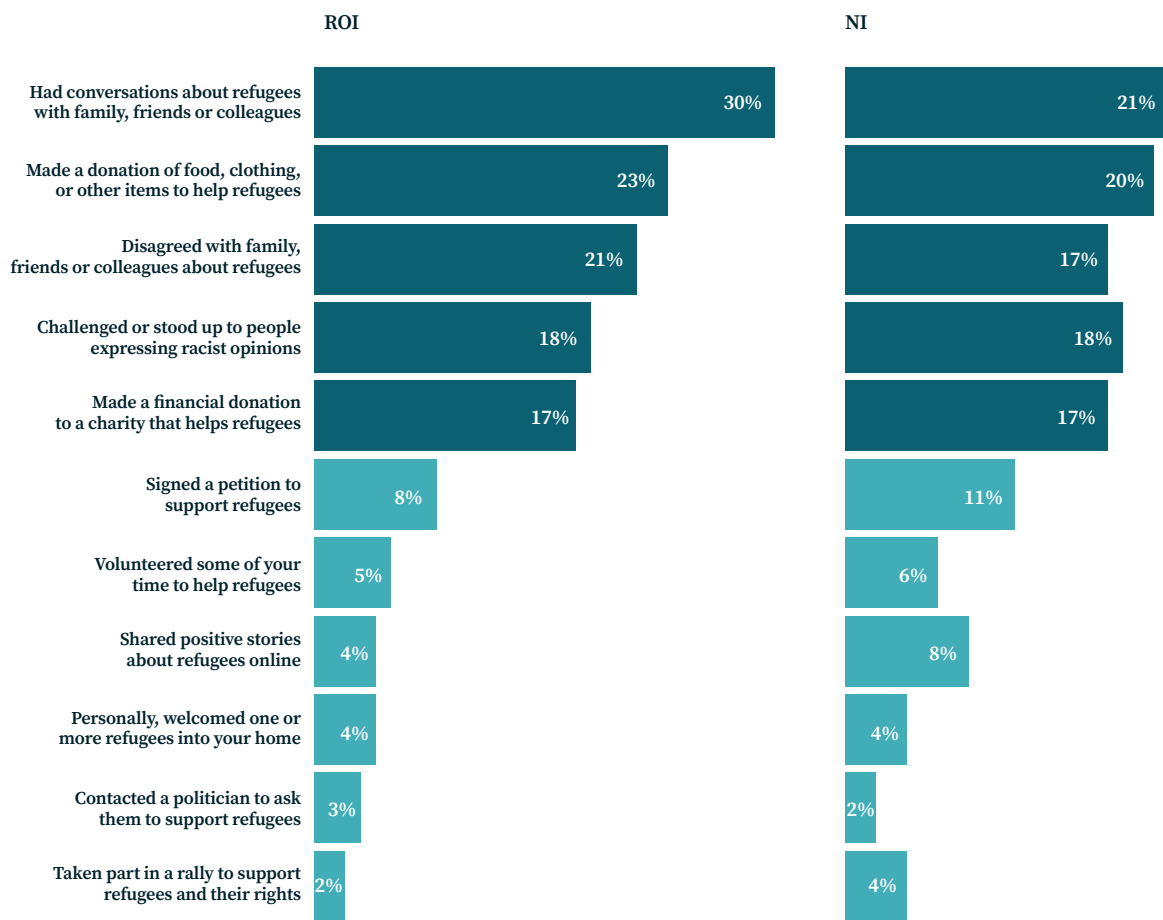
<sup>45</sup>Waterhouse-Bradley, B. (2019) Sectarian Legacies and the Marginalisation of Migrants, in Fanning, B. & Michael, L. (eds) (2019) – Op. Cit. pp. 33-46

It can be seen that there is somewhat less contact between the public and either refugees or migrants in Northern Ireland currently than in the Republic of Ireland. The greater numbers of refugees living in the Republic may well explain the opportunities for greater levels of contact, although in absolute numbers this is still small. Given the differences in size of the refugee and migrant population it is interesting to note that the percentage of people who are engaged in voluntary work with refugees and migrants is much the same in Northern Ireland and the Republic. So too is knowledge of someone strongly against welcoming migrants and/or refugees.

Respondents were also asked about their experience of refugees specifically. Again, experiences in Northern Ireland and the Republic are somewhat similar, with more people in the North saying that they have signed petitions supporting refugees and indeed shared positive stories on-line. They were less inclined to have had conversations about refugees with family, friends or colleagues –

### Nature of Contact and Communication with Refugees

All adults 16+: 803 / 502



A specific question was asked in Northern Ireland as to whether the public were aware of the Larne House immigration Detention Centre – 79% of respondents were not.

The Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey, 2018, asked a number of questions about whether people had friends from a range of groups, including Travellers and other minority ethnic backgrounds. The replies indicated that some 12% of people indicated that they had friends with minority ethnic backgrounds; increasing to 28% who had Polish friends and reducing to 6% for friends from the Traveller community. The Youth Life & Times Survey, 2018, also asked to what extent 16/17 year olds socialised with or played sport with

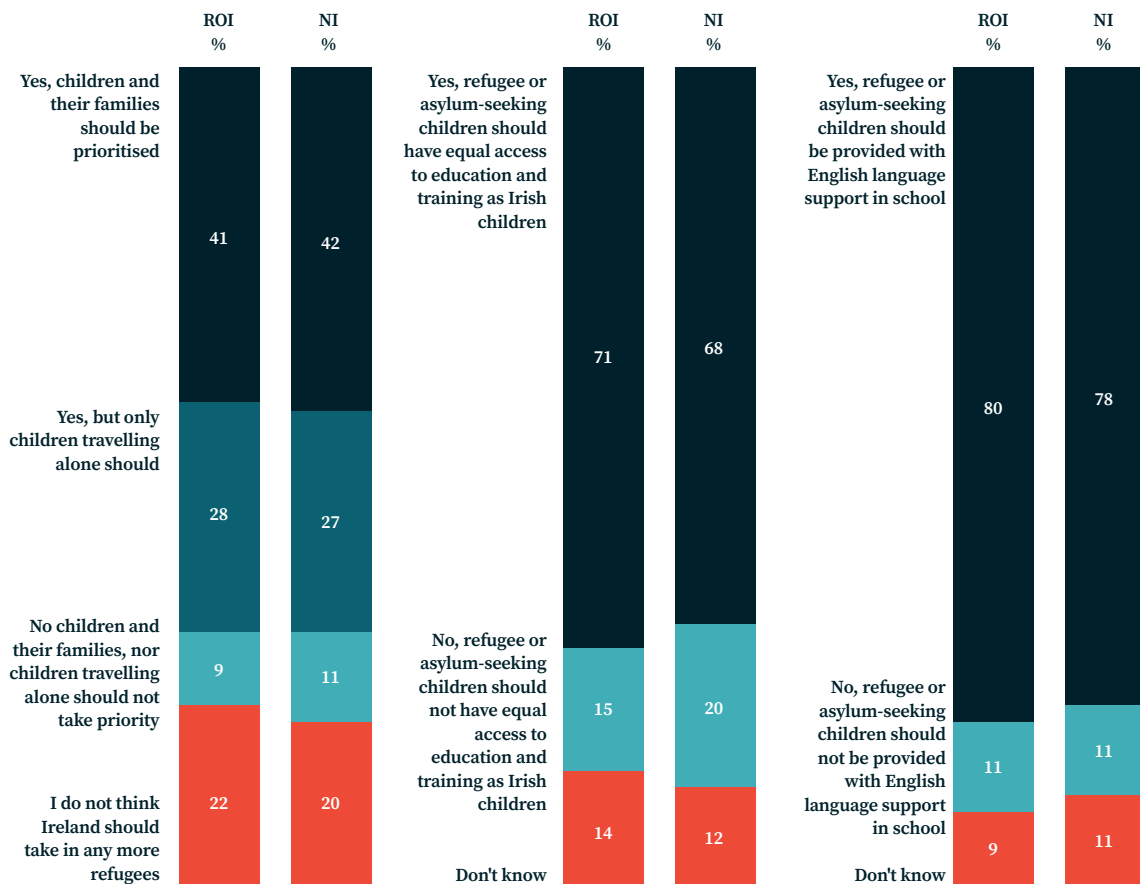
people from different ethnic backgrounds than their own – 29% replied ‘Often’; 29% said ‘Sometimes’; 23% said ‘Rarely’; and 14% indicated ‘Never’.

An early study by Hayes & Dowds (2006) examined the impact of social contact on attitudes towards immigrants in Northern Ireland (using the Northern Ireland component of the European Social Survey that suggested that social exposure is the most important predictor of pro-immigrant attitudes). They<sup>46</sup> found that whereas 76% of respondents who had immigrant/refugee friends showed pro-immigrant attitudes in relation to immigrants of the same race, as well as 67% being favour of immigrant settlement by people of different races, this compared with 52% and 40% respectively for people who did not have this contact. Opportunities for positive contact remain important, particularly those that involve young people.

**(iii) Attitudes to refugee children**

Questions were asked in the SCI commissioned research in both Northern Ireland (2019) and the Republic of Ireland (2018) about attitudes to refugee or asylum-seeking children. The questions posed included –

- (i) *‘Do you think children and their families, or children travelling alone, should be prioritised when the state is taking refugees from abroad, or neither?’*
- (ii) *‘Do you think refugee or asylum-seeking children should have equal access to education and training in Ireland/Northern Ireland as Irish/Northern Irish children, or not?’*
- (iii) *‘Do you think refugee or asylum-seeking children should be provided with English language support in school?’*



<sup>46</sup>Hayes, B. & Dowds, L. (2006) Social Contact, Cultural Marginalisation or Economic Self-Interest? Attitudes towards Immigrants in Northern Ireland: Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies, Vol. 32, No. 3, April 2006. Pp. 455-476.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Report in 2014 raised concerns about provision for child asylum seekers, although by 2017 a Law Centre (NI) report commended the care model that had been put in place.<sup>47</sup>

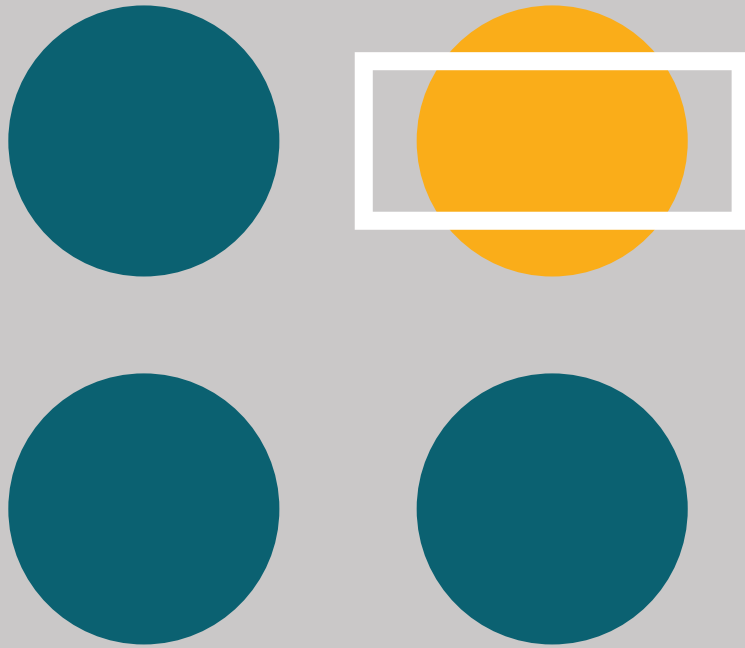
Public attitudes compiled from the polling undertaken in both Northern Ireland and the Republic return very similar attitudes towards asylum-seeking children and children travelling with refugee families. The majority feel that families with children should be prioritised, while a smaller proportion think that only unaccompanied children should be prioritised. Overall, there is considerable empathy shown for the plight of children whether by themselves or as part of refugee families.

Similarly, access to education and English language support for children received very high levels of support, although 1:5 respondents in Northern Ireland (20%) questioned whether refugee or asylum-seeking children should have equal access to education and training as children born in Northern Ireland. In fact, refugee and migrant children are entitled to a free place in nursery, primary and post primary schools in Northern Ireland on the same basis as the indigenous population. In 2007, Department of Education (NI) established a regional support service – The Intercultural Education Service – which aims to provide a ‘consistent level of support and specialist advice. . . to all schools’ (DENI 2009).<sup>48</sup>

A statement that won overwhelming support from the poll respondents both North and South related to the issue of children without documentation. In answer to the statement No child should grow up undocumented in Ireland/Northern Ireland, 74% in Northern Ireland either strongly agreed (45%), or tended to agree (29%) that this should be the case, as compared to 6% who disagreed. Comparative figures for the Republic of Ireland were 74% overall in agreement with the statement (44% in strong agreement and 30% tending to agree) with only 5% rejecting the statement.

<sup>47</sup>Law Centre NI (May 2017) Support for Unaccompanied Minors: Belfast.

<sup>48</sup>Noted in Geraghty, T., McStravick, C. & Mitchell, S. (2010) New to Northern Ireland: A Study of the Issues faced by Migrant, Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children in Northern Ireland: National Children’s Bureau.



## **7. Attitudes relating to Prejudice and Discrimination**

While the SCI commissioned research had limited statements relating directly to prejudice and discrimination in Northern Ireland, as noted above, the Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey has been probing this issue since 2005. Devine tracked the results in her ARK Research Update in 2018<sup>49</sup> and noted that notwithstanding some three-quarters of NILT respondents saying that there was some level of racial prejudice in Northern Ireland (either ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’) the levels of self-reported prejudice are low. A rather disturbing finding was that the highest percentage of those who felt they were ‘Very prejudiced’ or ‘A little’ prejudiced were in the 18-24 year age band (8% and 23% respectively). The Youth Life & Times Survey<sup>50</sup> returned a 75% figure for those that were ‘Not prejudiced at all’ – 76% Catholic and 67% Protestant. Overall, women claim to be less prejudiced than men.

The 2018 NILT Survey examined people’s reactions to Irish Travellers, Muslims, people with minority ethnic backgrounds and Eastern Europeans. Those identified as least welcome, whether as work colleagues, neighbours, a relative by marriage or a friend of members of the Traveller community and Muslims. Responses concerning relations with the Muslim community included –

Statement	Yes	No	Catholic	Protestant	None (religion)	Men	Women
I would willingly accept Muslims as tourists in Northern Ireland	95%	5%	97%	93%	91%	93%	96%
I would willingly accept Muslims as a resident in my local area	85%	15%	90%	83%	80%	83%	87%
I would accept a Muslim as a colleague at work	85%	15%	91%	82%	80%	83%	87%
I would accept a Muslim as a close friend	79%	21%	84%	75%	74%	77%	79%
I would accept a Muslim as a relative by marriage	73%	27%	79%	69%	70%	73%	73%

The most negative responses were recorded from the 18-24 year old and the 65 plus age range.

The questions and statements posed in the SCI commissioned research focused on attitudes to Muslim refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Three of the six propositions suggested –

- (i) *‘Most Muslims in Northern Ireland would rather live under Sharia Law than Northern Irish law.’*
- (ii) *‘Islam and Northern Ireland society are incompatible.’*
- (iii) *‘Islam is a peaceful religion.’*

<sup>49</sup>Devine, P. (2018) Attitudes to Minority Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland, 2005-2016: ARK Research Update, Belfast.

<sup>50</sup>[www.ark.ac.uk/ylt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt). June 2018.

	Statement 1 – Sharia Law	Statement 2 – Islam is incompatible	Statement 3 – Islam is a peaceful religion
Strongly agree	19%	13%	11%
Tend to agree	20%	16%	22%
Neither/Nor	22%	29%	28%
Tend to disagree	9%	18%	15%
Strongly disagree	6%	15%	16%
Don't Know	24%	8%	8%

While the lack of clarity about Sharia Law (some 46% either opting for ‘Neither/nor’ or ‘Don’t know’) may be understandable, it is concerning that 31% of people disagreed with the suggestion that Islam is a peaceful religion, while a sizeable proportion of people admitted to being unsure.

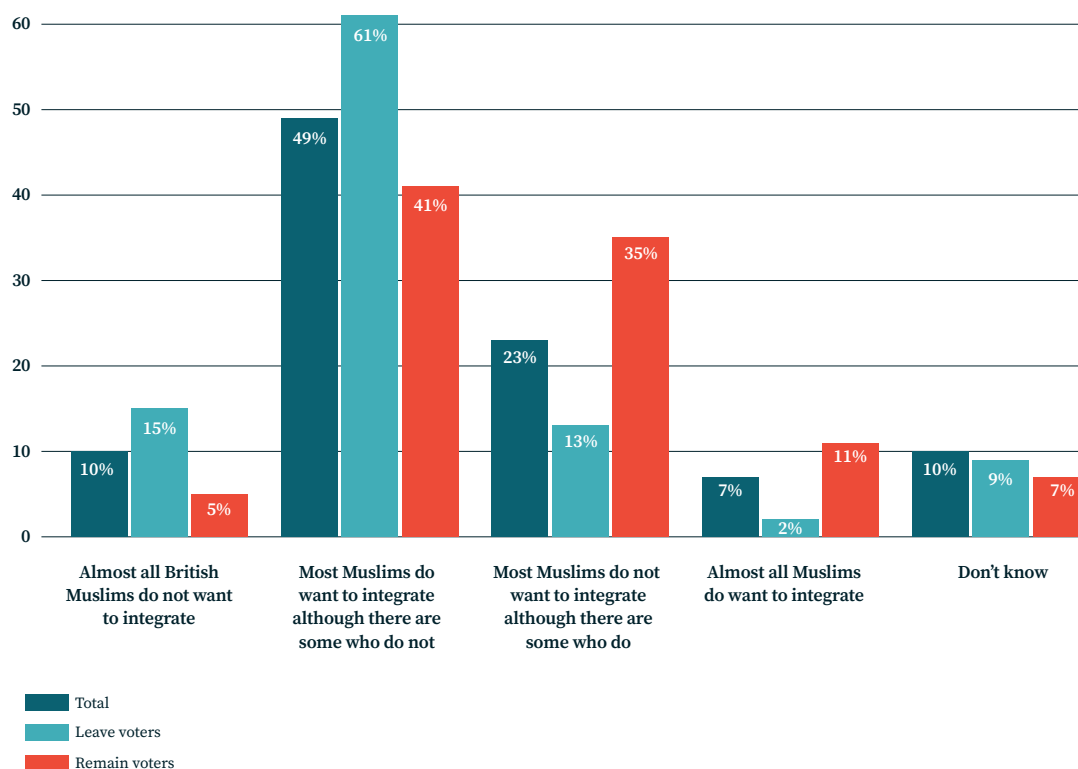
The responses received in the Republic of Ireland were similar to those in Northern Ireland with rather higher belief in the South that Islam and Irish society are incompatible (34% in agreement). There was also a similarity in responses to the next three statements –

- (i) *‘I would not mind if a mosque were built near my home.’*
- (ii) *‘Most Muslims hold similar values to me.’*
- (iii) *‘Muslims are discriminated against in Ireland/Northern Ireland.’*



It can be seen that more people in both Northern Ireland and the Republic are concerned about a mosque being built near their home (39% in Northern Ireland and 40% in the Republic respectively) as compared to those who are not concerned – 30% in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. The relatively low numbers (24% in Northern Ireland) that agree with the statement that Muslims hold similar values to me (contrasted with 40% in disagreement) is also a matter of concern. Intolerance shown to Muslims by younger people in Northern Ireland has been noted by a number of analysts and researchers.<sup>51</sup>

Hope Not Hate<sup>52</sup> reported on research carried out in England and Wales on attitudes to the Muslim community as differentiated between people who are in favour of Brexit or who want to remain in the EU –



It was reported that 49% of people who voted for the Conservative Party in 2017 believed that Islam was incompatible with the British way of life and 47% believed that there were no go areas in parts of Britain that were dominated by Sharia law. These levels of misperception put the Northern Irish results in context but is also a warning of how quickly rumours and stereotyping can take hold.

The Equality Commission (NI) has argued the need for legislative reform to strengthen the rights of individuals in Northern Ireland against racial discrimination and harassment,<sup>53</sup> citing an EU Minorities Discrimination Study which found that people from minority ethnic groups were more than five times more likely to experience multiple discrimination than members of the majority community. The SCI study suggests that some 33% of respondents feel that Muslims, specifically, are discriminated in Northern Ireland (25% reject this).

The inter-relationship between prejudice, discrimination and racism is often both fluid and complex, with the additional dimension of the legacy of sectarianism in a society where divisions have run deep over many decades. At the harder edge of race crime, the PSNI (Police Service Northern Ireland) statistical briefings

<sup>53</sup>Equality Commission (NI) (2014) Promoting Racial Equality: Priorities and Recommendations: Belfast.



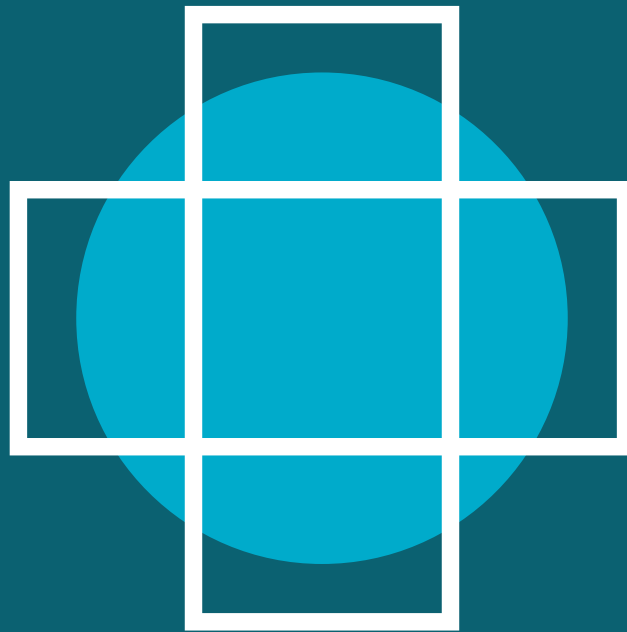
noted that race hate crimes increased annually after 2011 (the highest recorded in 2015/16), then levels fell in 2015/16 and 2017/18, before showing an increase in 2018/19. Racist hate motivated incidents were recorded as 1,095 (51 people charged) and racist hate motivated crimes stood at 667 (17 people charged).<sup>54</sup> While 2:5 racist incidents and crimes occurred in the Belfast City Policing District, the local authority areas with the largest increase in incidents and crimes were Causeway Coast & Glens, Mid & East Antrim and Mid Ulster. The Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report (2018) also reported data on the victims of racist hate crimes, with attacks on members of white minority ethnic groups and Asians decreasing, and attacks on Nigerians, Somalians and black skinned people increasing.<sup>55</sup> The number of minority ethnic police officers in Northern Ireland increased from 0.5% in 2011 to 0.52% in 2017, although there are still outstanding issues that were raised as early as 2013 by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. The latter called for more minority ethnic police officers, better detection rates to address racist signal incidents and the criminalisation of hate speech.<sup>56</sup> More recently Belfast City Council has commissioned a report on discrimination against the Muslim community.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup>[www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/hate-motivation-statistics/](http://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/hate-motivation-statistics/)

<sup>55</sup>Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (2018) – Op. Cit.

<sup>56</sup>Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2013) Racist Hate Crime: Human Rights and the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland: Belfast.

<sup>57</sup><https://conflictresearch.org.uk/anti-muslim-hate-crime-and-discrimination-in-belfast-city/>



## **8. Protection for Refugees and Migrants**

The final section of the SCI commissioned study focused on perceptions of, and attitudes to, people who are undocumented and at risk of exploitation. An extensive study was carried out in 2011, commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, into ‘forced labour’ in Northern Ireland. This did offer a comprehensive list of recommendations, but with limited success in implementation.

To set the context a statement was offered about the experience of many Northern Irish people who had emigrated to the USA – ‘Northern Irish undocumented people in the USA should be able to get back into the immigration system’ -45% of respondents in Northern Ireland either strongly agreed (17%) or tended to agree (28%) with this statement. While 33% opted for ‘neither/nor’, only 11% disagreed. Agreement to a similar statement was even higher in the Republic of Ireland, where 60% agreed in comparison to 9% who expressed disagreement.

The statement was suggested –

*‘People living in Northern Ireland for a long time should be able to become Northern Irish citizens.’*

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists	Socially Concerned	Uncertain Pragmatists	Confident Modernists	Total
Strongly Agree	3%	22%	31%	29%	24%
Tend to Agree	16%	34%	39%	41%	34%
Neither/Nor	37%	25%	22%	19%	25%
Tend to disagree	23%	12%	4%	2%	9%
Strongly disagree	16%	4%	2%	4%	5%
Don't Know	5%	2%	3%	5%	3%

Results show the Concerned Traditionalists, disagreeing by 39% with this proposition, being considerably out of step with the other three segments. The latter are much more open to this policy position.

Two statements were also presented that related specifically to special protection for migrants that have been trafficked illegally into Northern Ireland –

- (i) *‘Special protection should be in place for agricultural or fisheries workers who have been trafficked illegally into Northern Ireland.’*
- (ii) *‘Special protection should be in place for workers who have been trafficked illegally into Northern Ireland for sexual exploitation.’*

<sup>58</sup>Allamby, L., Bell, J., Hamilton, J., Hansson, U., Jarman, N., Potter, M., & Toma, S. (2011) Forced Labour in Northern Ireland: Exploiting Vulnerability: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York. Recommendations pp. 51/58.

Answer	Concerned Traditionalists		Socially Concerned		Uncertain Pragmatists		Confident Modernists		Total	
	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2	Q.1	Q.2
Strongly Agree	24%	32%	31%	41%	37%	49%	28%	48%	32%	44%
Tend to agree	23%	31%	30%	27%	28%	29%	34%	31%	29%	29%
Neither Nor	30%	18%	23%	19%	19%	12%	25%	11%	23%	15%
Tend to disagree	5%	5%	6%	4%	5%	2%	4%	2%	5%	3%
Disagree	13%	9%	3%	3%	2%	2%	5%	3%	4%	4%
Don't Know	5%	5%	6%	7%	8%	5%	5%	4%	7%	5%

Across all segments there is general support for special protection for people who have been trafficked, despite some level of disagreement (and uncertainty) from the Concerned Traditionalists. There is greater support for the application of special protection measures for workers who have been trafficked illegally to Northern Ireland for sexual exploitation – 78% agreement from the Uncertain Pragmatists, 79% agreement from the Confident Modernists and 68% agreement from the Socially Concerned. In this case even 63% of the Concerned Traditionalists agreed that such measures should be put in place.

Given the illegality of human trafficking, accurate figures of the extent of this issue can be difficult to obtain, but in 2017, ex-PSNI Assistant Chief Constable, Will Kerr, described trafficking and human slavery in Northern Ireland as being more prevalent than previously thought, a conclusion supported by previous Minister for Justice, David Ford. Statistics are available from the National Crime Agency about the number of potential victims of trafficking, but it is generally felt that such figures are conservative given under-reporting. Findings showed that victims of such trafficking were mainly from Eastern Europe, Vietnam and Nigeria.<sup>59</sup> Women's Aid (NI) has also reported that it is supporting increasing numbers of women that have been trafficked. The fact that there is such clear public support for special measures is encouraging given the apparent increasing need.

<sup>59</sup>Report in Belfast Telegraph, 11/8/2017.

## 9. Research Methodology

This study employs a population clustering segmentation analysis method that draws on a range of attitudinal characteristics of survey respondents. Segmentation identifies groups of people who respond differently to stimuli, in this case various communications around refugees and migrants, to aid future communications strategies. The starting point is multivariate analysis; allowing us to simultaneously analyse multiple combinations of variables that may be interrelated. This form of segmentation provides a rich composite picture of how a population is divided in its views, going beyond basic demographic factors to show how networks of attitudes and opinions are connected. It identifies the profile of the population segment most ready to take action to support values of openness and diversity and to be welcoming of refugees and immigrants. The study also identifies the profile of people that are most likely to be anxious or hostile to ‘incomers’ and perceived ‘outsiders’ to Northern Irish society. Most importantly, it builds profiles of those groups with mixed views, and helps to identify those who are most open to information and mind-change on the subject of immigration.

Originally the European research methodology was designed by Purpose and More in Common for application to public opinion polling in Germany, France, Italy and Greece.<sup>60</sup> The Social Change Initiative (SCI) commissioned a parallel study of Public Attitudes to Immigration and Refugee Protection in the Republic of Ireland (2018). This current research was commissioned by SCI, with financial support from the St. Stephen’s Green Trust, Unbound Philanthropy and the Social Change Initiative. When applied to Northern Ireland, Martha Fanning Research adapted the cluster analysis approach, which searches through large amounts of data to identify those giving similar answers to specific combinations of questions. This approach takes a holistic view of each individual rather than merely looking at individual responses to individual questions. The overall objective of the research is to support organisations working with refugees, asylum-seekers and immigrants and to inform good policy-making.

The research was undertaken through an online survey in June 2019, with a representative sample of 500 adults. Quotas were set on gender, age, social class, region and area to ensure that the results reflect known demographic characteristics for Northern Ireland. Respondents answered questions relating to their demographic characteristics, including gender, age, geography, educational level, income, and ethnicity. They were then asked 42 questions relating to the issues of greatest concern to them, their political views and affiliations, familiarity with refugee and immigration issues, their understanding of different terminology in the refugee and migration discussion, their personal experience with refugees and their attitudes to specific identity groups within the refugee and migrant community. To fully understand people’s opinions the survey included questions to elicit respondents’ replies to some statements which were true or factual, some which were untrue and others which were both untrue and provocative. These statements were for research purposes and do not reflect the views of the authors or distributors of the study. A presentation of the research findings was shared with some NGO activists and agency representatives in September 2019 to check on the validity of the initial conclusions. Unlike the Public Attitude studies carried out in Italy, Greece, France, Germany and the Republic of Ireland the Northern Ireland the research did not benefit from the qualitative focus group dimension to hone strategic messaging. It is hoped that this work can be taken forward in different ways in the future.

<sup>60</sup>Attitudes towards Refugees, Immigrants, and Identity in France (July 2017): SCI, Purpose & IFOP and Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Germany (July 2017): SCI, Purpose & Ipsos MORI – are available on the SCI website – [www.thesocialchangeinitiative.org](http://www.thesocialchangeinitiative.org).

# 10. Conclusion

The four public opinion clusters identified in the Northern Ireland research can be placed on a spectrum between 'open' and 'closed' attitudes to immigration and refugee protection. The Confident Modernists and the Uncertain Pragmatists most clearly at the open end of this spectrum, representing some 55% of the Northern Ireland public; the Concerned Traditionalist (16%) represent the closed segment and the Socially Concerned (29%) are in the anxious middle category. As such it is this latter segment that is the key cohort to focus attention on. While broadly neutral on refugees and migrants, their concerns about healthcare, employment and housing could push them towards anti-immigration views in any economic downturn. Their relative disillusionment about the state of politics and society, which they feel they cannot influence, also suggests that they might be vulnerable to suggestions that they are being 'left behind' with preferential favour being shown to immigrants and refugees. What maintains a greater equanimity with this segment currently is their disproportionate positivity about their personal, family, the economy and society's impact/performance over both the past year and into the next five years. As such, they are prepared to acknowledge the role of immigrants in the economy but still express some misgivings around the perceived preferential access to employment and welfare that they think immigrants and refugees benefit from.

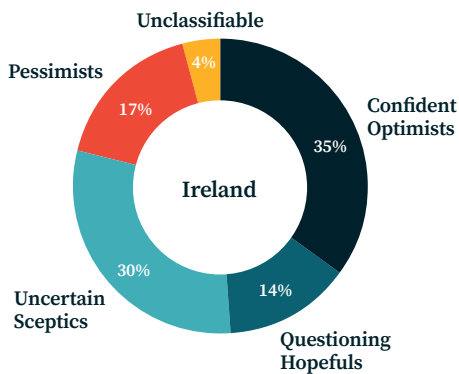
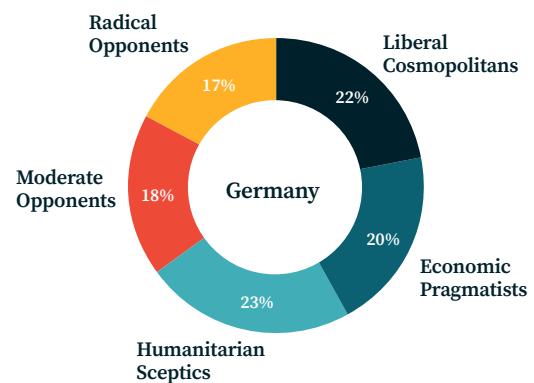
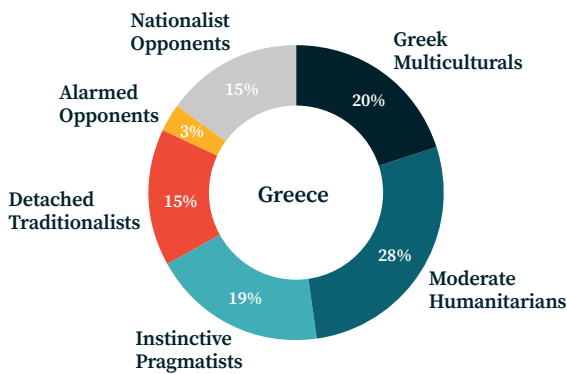
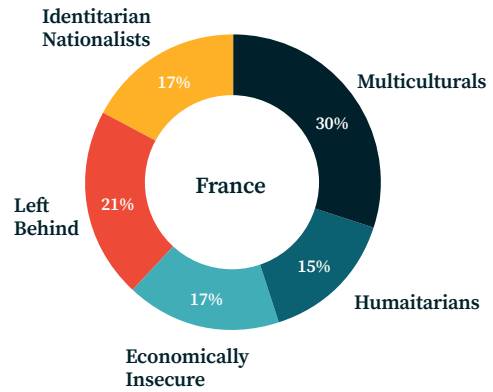
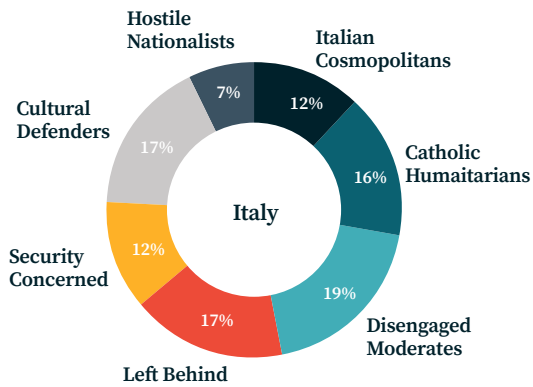
Any downturn in expected economic prospects might push the Socially Concerned towards the attitudes expressed by the Concerned Traditionalists. It is thus important that any communications strategy should seek to engage with this segment both to address any misperceptions that they currently hold and to encourage the sense of empathy that they display towards refugees, and specifically those refugees and migrants that are particularly vulnerable.

The more closed Concerned Traditionalist segment will be more difficult to engage with, but notwithstanding the fact that this cluster are more likely than average to feel that it is becoming more difficult for someone like them to do well in Northern Ireland, they are relatively optimistic about the future of the region in the context of Brexit. Approaches to this group may be most effective through faith-based channels and institutions, given the decided Protestant/Presbyterian identity shown. In socio-economic and attitudinal terms this cluster is somewhat different from the composition of the closed groups in the European research, although there is a danger that if they are not challenged in their more extreme attitudes that they could continue to track to the right.

## Comparative Population Segments in Germany, France, Italy, Greece and the Republic of Ireland

- The open clusters are the Liberal Cosmopolitans in Germany (22%); the Italian Cosmopolitans (12%) and the Catholic Humanitarians (16%) in Italy; the Multiculturals (30%) in France; the Greek Multiculturals (20%) in Greece and the Confident Optimists (35%) in the Republic of Ireland.
- The closed clusters are the Radical Opponents (17%) and the Moderate Opponents (18%) in Germany; the Hostile Nationalists (7%) and the Cultural Defenders (17%) in Italy; the Identarian Nationalists (17%) in France; the Nationalist Opponents (15%) and the Alarmed Opponents (3%) in Greece and the Pessimists (17%) in the Republic of Ireland.
- The anxious middle segments are the Economic Pragmatists (20%) and the Humanitarian Sceptics (23%) in Germany; the Disengaged Moderates (19%), the Left Behind (17%) and the Security Concerned (12%) in Italy; the Humanitarians (15%), the Economically Insecure (17%) and the Left Behind (21%) in France; the Moderate Humanitarians (28%), the Instinctive Pragmatists (19%) and the Detached Traditionalists (15%) in Greece and the Questioning Hopefuls (14%) and the Uncertain Sceptics (30%) in the Republic of Ireland.

The two 'open' segments in Northern Ireland share many positive attitudes towards migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees but are very different in composition. Politically progressive, the Confident Modernists are rather pessimistic about their own life experience believing that all aspects of life have deteriorated over the past



year. While being sceptical about the longer-term prospects for Northern Ireland they are more hopeful than average about their personal future. Less concerned than others about the disappearance – or otherwise – of Northern Irish identity, they welcome the vibrancy and diversity that new communities bring and have a strong focus on rights-based approaches, including special protection measures for people that have been illegally trafficked. In some areas, such as access to employment opportunities, the Confident Modernists respond to questions with a degree of uncertainty that suggests the need for information about current policies in the migration field.

While the openness of the youthful Confident Migrant segment is very welcome, the work carried out through the Northern Ireland Life & Times and Youth Life & Times surveys highlights the need to prioritise work with

young people who do not necessarily share the progressive attitudes displayed by this segment and who may not have ready access to information over and above provided through often politically partial social media.

The other 'open' segment is the Uncertain Pragmatists who acknowledge that they are comfortable in Northern Ireland -notwithstanding their deep pessimism over the prospects of Brexit – and who are very open in their attitudes to immigration (in fact in some instances more consistently open than the Confident Modernists). The main question with regard to this cluster is how to build on the positive attitudes displayed. Opening opportunities for them to become more involved in contact, integration and inclusion approaches would consolidate the pre-existing interest and extend it from the functional economic sphere to a more holistic sense of engagement.

In comparison to the European segmentation pictured above, the Northern Ireland results are positive. The depth of opposition shown by the Concerned Traditionalists to immigration is clearly linked to a conservative political position, but also to concerns over a potential loss of identity and place that brings in current uncertainties over the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. While work needs to be carried out to address the anxieties of the Socially Concerned segment as a matter of some urgency, there is also the opportunity to consolidate the support of the Confident Modernist and Uncertain Pragmatists who should not be taken for granted.



# 11. Recommendations

1. Attention should be given to the concerns and anxieties expressed by the Socially Concerned cluster in Northern Ireland, particularly to address misperceptions of immigrant and refugee access to welfare benefits, employment and public services. Effective communications strategies need to be designed and implemented to address these issues.
2. People in Northern Ireland describe their region as welcoming. This needs to be reinforced and built on by supporting and extending opportunities for people to engage in a positive manner with people who are migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. There are some excellent local examples of such contact in various parts of Northern Ireland (including Cities of Sanctuary, Small World Café and the first Community Sponsorship programme). These 'good news' stories should act as exemplars that can be shared through local community, faith-based, sporting, cultural and other networks to increase the range of people who have direct contact with migrants and who have an insight into the migrant and refugee experience.
3. There needs to be clear lines of funding and support for those NGO and community-based initiatives that are working with, and for, the minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland. The time limited funding available under the current Minority Ethnic Development programme, that requires repeated tendering and application, works against continuity of knowledge, experience and relationships within the sector. This should be reviewed to examine possible alternative approaches to delivery of funding.
4. There needs to be clear leadership shown at the Executive Office level to drive forward support and integration policies and measures that are appropriate to Northern Ireland. TEO should look to the example of Scotland as a model of how a devolved administration can develop region appropriate strategies, which include integration, detention and other policies.
5. There should continue to be a disaggregation of data sources for Northern Ireland with regard to the number of asylum claims, outcomes of asylum cases, the number of appeals, the number of family reunions, immigration enforcement (e.g. detention and deportation), etc. The lack of such data hinders public policy-making but also makes it difficult to draw on an evidence base to challenge public misperceptions.
6. Integration/inclusion of refugees and migrants continues to be important and should take place as early as possible. The successful implementation of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme for Syrian refugees underlines this point. It is essential that Northern Ireland should have a bespoke integration strategy, as is currently the case in Scotland, to ensure that a robust, adequately resourced integration strategy is in place. This would allow effective coordination and synergies at central government, local authority, NGO and community level to support the implementation of such a strategy.
7. The effective implementation of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme as currently applied to Syrian refugees should continue to be rolled out for refugees from other countries of origin. The learning from the design and implementation of the Scheme should be captured as a model of good practice and partnership.

8. There is wide spread agreement around (i) the need for special protection measures for people who are victims of trafficking; (ii) the proposition that people living a long time in Northern Ireland should be able to become citizens; and (iii) that no child should grow up undocumented in Northern Ireland. While a number of these issues fall within the remit of the UK Home Office, public representatives should advocate for policy changes to reflect these concerns. Where feasible the Northern Ireland departments should design policies to address specific regional issues.
9. As in many other European countries, the study showed that people in Northern Ireland have little knowledge of, and limited connection with, people in the Muslim community. This needs to be addressed as a two-way process to prevent misperceptions and reaction based on ignorance. Anxieties expressed about the building of mosques in local neighbourhoods not only raise concern about the freedom to worship, but also highlight the need for a greater understanding about Islam and Islamic cultural and religious traditions.
10. Given the possible impact of Brexit on the island of Ireland there needs to be a dedicated focus on the implications of a possible post-Brexit legislation, border control and policies as they impact on immigration and refugee protection. This is particularly important as it may apply to asylum-seekers and refugees that are detained for immigration purposes. Visa requirements should be made known and in the interests of cost effectiveness and efficiency, people with a right to remain in the Republic of Ireland should be returned to that jurisdiction, if they cross the Border without the required documentation, rather than placed in detention in either (or both) Larne House and the UK. Where individuals are placed in detention for immigration purposes, there should be independent standard setting, oversight and monitoring procedures in place to ensure quality standards in all detention facilities in Northern Ireland.
11. While the study did not address issues relating to race hate crime directly, the rise in PSNI recorded hate crime and the concerns expressed by the Confident Modernist cluster in the survey about racism and discrimination is a timely alert that action must be taken to combat racism and racially motivated crime. An enquiry is currently being conducted in Northern Ireland on this issue. In addition to awaiting this report, the lack of minority ethnic recruitment into the Police Service of Northern Ireland is a matter that requires attention.
12. In support of a more diverse and inclusive Northern Ireland it is important that leaders in public life, such as politicians, community leaders, religious leaders and other civil society activists, should actively encourage members of minority ethnic communities to participate in public life, thus enhancing their visibility as full and active members of society.





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