

ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEES IN IRELAND: UNDERSTANDING RECENT TRENDS AND DRIVERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For much of its history, Ireland has been a country of net emigration. However, there has been a demographic transformation of Irish society since the 1990s, which has seen the proportion born abroad increase to 20 per cent in 2022. At the same time, while Ireland has historically had very low numbers of forced migrants compared with other Western European countries, in 2022 there was a steep rise in the number of people seeking protection, the majority of whom were Ukrainian refugees but a sizeable minority of whom were asylum seekers. While anti-immigrant political parties are still absent in the Irish context, this period of demographic change has, in recent years, occurred alongside some protests across the country against the housing of asylum seekers in local areas, as well as several high-profile events, including arson attacks on hotels housing asylum seekers and a riot in Dublin city centre in November 2023, which has been linked, in part, to mobilisation by far right groups in Ireland. This has led to the perception and media narratives of an Irish populace increasingly anxious about immigration, which is a departure from previous narratives of Ireland as a particularly welcoming country.

Against this backdrop, this report undertakes a detailed examination of the current state of attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in Ireland. To do so, the report draws on several high quality, nationally representative surveys, along with a unique survey experiment, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of where attitudes towards immigration currently stand, how they have changed in recent years, how they differ for different types of migrants, and what factors in people's lives are associated with their attitudes towards migrants, immigration and the acceptability of protesting against international protection arrivals.

KEY FINDINGS

How supportive are people in Ireland of immigration and has this changed in recent years?

An analysis of a new, high-quality Irish survey of social attitudes, conducted by DCEDIY in March/April 2023 (the Equality Attitudes Survey), reveals that people in Ireland generally have very positive attitudes towards immigration. Over 73 per cent feel positive about immigration (regardless of its region of origin), over three-quarters agree Ireland should help migrants seeking protection (either Ukrainians or asylum seekers), and people are generally very comfortable with having migrants of all types as neighbours, in their children's classes or in love relationships with their children. In addition, using a unique survey experiment, analysis found the majority of people believed it was unacceptable to start a petition online to protest the housing of either Ukrainian refugees or asylum seekers in their local area.

Tracking trends in attitudes towards immigration over time (Eurobarometer and European Social Survey data) reveals that in general, Irish attitudes towards immigration significantly improved over the last ten years or so, and that in the most recent period (2020 to 2023), feelings towards immigration are generally positive. For example, the proportion of people who were positive about both EU and non-EU immigration was at least 16 percentage points higher by the end of 2023 than it was in 2014 (Eurobarometer data). In 2022, beliefs that immigrants make the country a better place to live, that the country's cultural life is enriched by immigrants, and that immigration is good for the economy were at a historic high, based on data going back to 2002, having improved significantly from dips during the recession (European Social Survey data).

However, in recent years there have been declines in some indicators of Irish attitudes towards immigration. For example, despite longer-term improvements in attitudes, people's positivity towards immigration from EU countries was 10 percentage points lower in 2023 than in 2020 (albeit still higher than 2014-2016). Several attitudes declined especially between June and November 2023, including people's positivity towards non-EU immigration (declined by 6 percentage points) and people's feelings immigrants contribute a lot to Ireland (declined by 5 percentage points). While the overall trend in the last ten years remains positive, this mirrors similar declines in positivity towards immigration across the EU27, and it is too early to tell if it will continue, plateau, or reverse.

Despite some recent decline in positivity towards immigration, attitudes in Ireland over the entire study period were more positive than average attitudes across the EU27. Indeed, this gap has widened over time, and in November 2023 Ireland had some of the most positive attitudes towards immigration of all EU27 countries.

Meanwhile, beliefs that Ireland should help refugees have remained high and mostly stable from 2015 (when they were first measured) to 2023, following a temporary positive bump in support in 2022. This bump led to a historic high level of support in 2022, which then returned to its previous levels by June 2023. Support for helping refugees also declined again between June and November 2023 (a 4 percentage-point decline in support). However, the proportion who support helping refugees is still between 80 and 90 per cent, as it has been since 2015.

Recently, there has been a sharp and substantial rise in the salience or importance of migration to respondents in Ireland, measured by the proportion of people who say immigration is one of the top two most important issues facing Ireland: from 3

per cent in July 2022 to 14 per cent in June 2023 and November 2023. This concern is now at its highest level since 2007.

Do attitudes differ towards different immigrant groups?

People in Ireland do hold different attitudes towards different groups of migrants. They are more positive about immigration from other EU Member States and Ukraine than immigration from outside the EU/Ukraine. They are more supportive of helping Ukrainian refugees than they are of asylum seekers. They are also more comfortable with having European migrants in their everyday lives, somewhat less comfortable with Ukrainian refugees, and least comfortable with asylum seekers.

People's attitudes towards asylum seekers and helping refugees, in particular, can form a distinct cluster. While most people who are comfortable with one group of migrants are comfortable with all migrants, a minority of people in Ireland (7 per cent) tend to be very comfortable with Ukrainians and Europeans, but not comfortable with asylum seekers. Similarly, while people who support helping refugees are also positive about immigration to Ireland overall, a significant proportion of people who do not believe, or are unsure, that Ireland should help refugees are still positive about immigration overall. In other words, just because someone is positive towards some groups of migrants or about immigration overall does not mean this extends to feeling comfortable with, or believing Ireland should help, people seeking protection.

In addition, people's high support for helping refugees appears conditional on the potential costs that providing support might bring. According to a survey experiment, while the majority of people (56 per cent) support helping refugees where no costs of providing support are mentioned, this drops to 38 per cent when supporting refugees could put pressure on services, and 27 per cent if it means raising taxes.

What drives attitudes towards immigrants and immigration?

Education and perceived financial strain are some of the most consistent predictors of immigration attitudes. People with lower qualifications and those who find 'making ends meet' more difficult are less positive about immigration overall, believe protesting local international protection arrivals is more acceptable, and feel less comfortable with most migrant groups.

Broader policy concerns about the problems facing Ireland and the world are also associated with people's immigration attitudes. People who feel that 'the economic situation and cost-of-living' are the most important issues facing either Ireland or the world have somewhat less-positive attitudes towards immigration in

general, compared to those who feel things like ‘the environment’, ‘climate change’, ‘poverty’ or ‘racism and discrimination’ are the most important issues. Those worried about the ‘economic situation and cost-of-living’ are similarly less comfortable with migrants, especially Ukrainian refugees, and asylum seekers.

People’s perceptions of the past and future are associated with their immigration attitudes. Those who feel that their quality of life was better in the past or who have less confidence in the future are less positive about immigration overall, and feel less comfortable with migrants in their everyday lives, especially with asylum seekers. People who are less civically engaged (who do not vote or volunteer) are also less positive about immigration in general.

We see evidence of a link between left-right political orientation and support for immigration, with those who identify as politically left wing more opposed to protests against housing people seeking protection, and more in favour of policy supports for refugees (Chapter 5). This may indicate the emergence of a left-right split in attitudes to immigrants in Ireland.

Role of survey mode and survey questions on what attitudes people report

The mode of surveying people can affect how comfortable people report being with migrants. People who are interviewed on the telephone report being less comfortable with all migrant groups, but especially with asylum seekers, compared to people who are interviewed in person. This difference by survey mode is not found for how positive people feel about immigration in general. As this finding is after controls for socio-demographic characteristics, we interpret this as an indication of the role of social desirability bias on survey responses, rather than sample selection bias. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that social desirability bias influences responses more strongly in person than on the phone, and suggests that positive sentiment reported in person may be somewhat overstated.

How questions are framed also plays an important role, as mentioned above, with support decreasing when costs and trade-offs are explicitly stated.

People report no difference in how acceptable they feel it is to protest against either Ukrainian refugees or asylum seekers in a survey experiment designed to reduce the impact of social desirability bias but do report feeling different levels of comfort towards these groups in a traditional survey setting.

IMPLICATIONS

The results provide a measure of reassurance that attitudes towards immigration are broadly positive in Ireland and have remained so in recent years. However, there are areas of potential concern. One is the recent declines in people's overall positivity towards immigration, their belief that immigrants contribute a lot to Ireland, and that Ireland should help refugees, particularly between June and November 2023. There has also been a significant rise in how important people feel immigration is as a policy and political issue in Ireland (the salience of immigration). Prior research suggests that where immigration is viewed as a very important or salient issue in a country, this can be associated with more negative attitudes to immigration, if coupled with negative changes in an individual's circumstances or rapid changes in their environments (such as an increase in diversity or economic hardship). Despite these very recent trends, it remains too early to say whether people's perceptions of immigration will decline further, stabilise, or improve again.

Attitudes towards asylum seekers have also emerged as a potential area of concern. Not only are comfort levels lower towards asylum seekers compared to other migrant groups, but they are also distinct in that there is a minority who are comfortable with other groups of migrants but not comfortable with asylum seekers. Furthermore, factors that predict negative sentiment towards migrants (for example, feeling that life was better in the past, less optimism about the future, or lower levels of education) seem to be more strongly related to attitudes towards asylum seekers. This suggests that when there are social and political challenges, attitudes to asylum seekers are most likely to be affected.

Given the current cost-of-living crisis, and longer-term worries over access to housing and pressure on health services, it is concerning that people who feel they are 'struggling to make ends meet' report more negative attitudes across all dimensions of immigration, while those who feel either 'the economic situation/cost-of-living' or 'access to housing and healthcare' is the most important issue facing Ireland are also less positive about immigration and/or comfortable with migrants. This demonstrates that broader policy concerns among people can spill over to shape their worries about immigration. It also shows that attitudes towards immigrants are heavily influenced by social and economic conditions. Therefore, while it is tempting to see migrant integration narrowly, in terms of language learning and labour market engagement, this report also indicates that many other policies can be seen as migrant integration policies, too.

This report also demonstrates that people's support for immigration and refugees can depend on the perceived costs and implications for society. To maintain positive attitudes, this should not come at the cost of pressure on services or, in

particular, be directly linked to tax increases. It is therefore crucial to ensure that migrant integration is properly funded to maintain social cohesion, so that the population does not come to believe that supporting migrants comes at their expense. It may be particularly important that areas hosting refugees and asylum seekers are supported to expand services to meet the needs of this population, so that services for the rest of the population are not affected, leading to a perceived burden.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction, methodology and literature review

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2022, as Ireland emerged from long and strict COVID-19 lockdowns, a large number of people arrived to seek protection in the country. Most (over 67,000) of these were people fleeing the war in Ukraine. But 13,651 international protection applicants¹ also arrived in the country in 2022, an increase from previous very low levels by European standards. These higher-than-usual flows of people seeking protection continued into 2023, with 13,277 people arriving to seek asylum and a cumulative total of around 100,000 Ukrainians arriving by the end of the year.² At the same time, general immigration flows also increased significantly from previous years, likely in part due to post-COVID catch up migration, with travel restrictions causing ‘forced immobility’ (McAuliffe et al., 2021). In the year to April 2023, over 140,000 people immigrated to Ireland, a 16-year high,³ and issuance of employment permits (required by non-EU labour migrants) increased by 144 per cent from 2019 (the last year not affected by COVID-19 restrictions).⁴

While there was an outpouring of solidarity for Ukrainian arrivals, with many accommodated through offer-a-home schemes, the state accommodation system struggled to scale up as vastly and quickly as was required to shelter new arrivals, amid a shortage of housing nationally.⁵ This is the first time Ireland has experienced refugee inflows on this scale in its history.⁶ As a result, hundreds of new accommodation centres (often hotels or converted buildings not designed for accommodation) have opened across the country, and have often been met with both solidarity and resistance. Protests upon the opening of housing centres are not a new phenomenon in Ireland, with incidents of arson and protests that shut down projects for centres for asylum seekers not uncommon in the years prior to the increase.⁷ However, with the unprecedented scale-up of accommodation across the country, there has been a corresponding increase in protests, with anti-immigrant activists taking the opportunity to agitate in communities and trying to

¹ International Protection Office (2023). ‘Monthly Statistical Report: December 2022’.

² Department of the Taoiseach (2023). ‘Government approves changes to measures for those fleeing war in Ukraine’, (*Press Release*, 12 December). Available at www.gov.ie.

³ Central Statistics Office (2023). ‘Population and Migration Estimates, April 2023’.

⁴ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2022). ‘Employment permit statistics 2021’.

⁵ In Ireland, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is responsible for providing accommodation and reception conditions for both asylum applicants and beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine, albeit through separate internal structures.

⁶ As Arnold et al. (2018) note, the flow of displaced persons to Ireland during the 2015 refugee and migrant crisis in Europe was much lower than in many other EU countries. The peak of asylum applications in 2015 in Ireland was 3,276.

⁷ See *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2018*, p. 80-81. For example; Bowers, S. (2019). ‘Large crowd continues protest over direct provision centre in Oughterard’ (*Irish Times*, 28 September); Boland, R. (2019). ‘“There will always be two groups in Achill now”’ (*Irish Times*, 7 December).

raise the national salience of immigration as a political issue. This culminated in some incidents of violence towards the end of 2023, including rioting in Dublin city centre in November,⁸ as well as arson attacks on hotels that were intended for asylum seeker accommodation (or simply rumoured to be so).⁹ Increasing media coverage has also led to a perception of increasing anxiety in Irish society about immigrants and immigration. There is a clear delineation between groups in these narratives, with media coverage and political attention focused on asylum-related migration rather than overall increases in immigration.

Previous research in other contexts has found that local resistance to the opening of centres can create a perception of widespread resistance that is not in fact reflected in public opinion (Zorlu, 2017). This has been seen in narratives in Ireland, with significant media coverage and increasing political discussions on the topic. There is therefore a need for better evidence on whether attitudes to immigrants and immigration in the population overall have changed, as well as an increasingly urgent need to understand how attitudes differ towards different groups, and what factors drive these attitudes. While previous literature has looked at attitudes towards immigrants in Ireland (Turner and Cross, 2015; McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; Gusciute et al., 2021), very little has focused on different groups, such as asylum seekers and refugees, which are currently highly salient and which have been shown in previous literature to often be perceived as distinctive (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014).

This leads us to pose the following questions:

- (1) Have attitudes in Ireland towards immigration in general (from both within and outside the EU), or perceptions of the importance of immigration as an issue, shifted noticeably since the recent rise in the number of Ukrainians and asylum applicants arriving in early 2022? (see Chapter 2).
- (2) Do people have similar attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees and asylum applicants? Are attitudes towards asylum applicants and Ukrainian refugees linked to wider attitudes towards immigration in Ireland, or do negative attitudes towards refugees/protection applicants form a distinct cluster, separate from wider perceptions of immigration? (see Chapters 3 and 5).
- (3) What are the main drivers of attitudes towards the arrival of asylum applicants, Ukrainian refugees and immigrants in general? Are negative attitudes linked to material threats, such as housing or cost-of-living, or fears

⁸ Rioters burned buses and a tram and looted shops, potentially causing up to €20 million in damage; see Hilliard, M. (2023) 'Dublin riots: Escalating cost of unrest could "run to €20m"' (*Irish Times*, 24 November).

⁹ See Lally, C. and J. Fallon (2023). 'Galway hotel fire: Gardaí believe blaze at premises due to house 70 asylum seekers started deliberately' (*Irish Times*, 17 December); Lally, C. and J. Horgan-Jones (2024). 'Fire at Dublin building intended as homeless accommodation confirmed as arson' (*Irish Times*, 1 January).

of broader cultural change and stereotypes about minority groups? (see Chapter 4).

BOX 1 TERMINOLOGY NOTE

Throughout this report we reference multiple types of migrant, and often look at how attitudes differ towards these different groups. It is therefore useful to outline how we define the main groups referenced:

- **Asylum seeker:** someone who makes an application for international protection (or asylum) in Ireland, under the International Protection Act 2015, and whose case is then considered by the Irish authorities.
- **Refugee:** for simplicity, this is used to mean anyone who qualifies for protection according to the definitions of the International Protection Act 2015, including both Geneva Convention (or refugee) status and subsidiary protection status (also known as a beneficiary of international protection or a 'qualified person' under the 2015 Act). Generally, this is used to refer to those who have been through the international protection process and received a positive decision.
- **Ukrainian refugee:** in this report, this is taken to mean those who have arrived from Ukraine following the Russian invasion in February 2022, and who benefit from Temporary Protection. The EU Temporary Protection Directive was adopted in 2001 in response to large movements of refugees from former Yugoslavian countries from conflicts in the 1990s. Temporary protection is an exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons who are unable to return to their country of origin. It requires a decision of the European Commission to be triggered, which happened for the first time in March 2022 in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It should be noted that this term is not strictly accurate, as not all beneficiaries of temporary protection are Ukrainian, but is used for simplicity throughout this report, as well as to reflect the wording of surveys used in this report.
- **People seeking protection:** this is used to refer to all of the above in this report.

1.2 THE IRISH CONTEXT AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

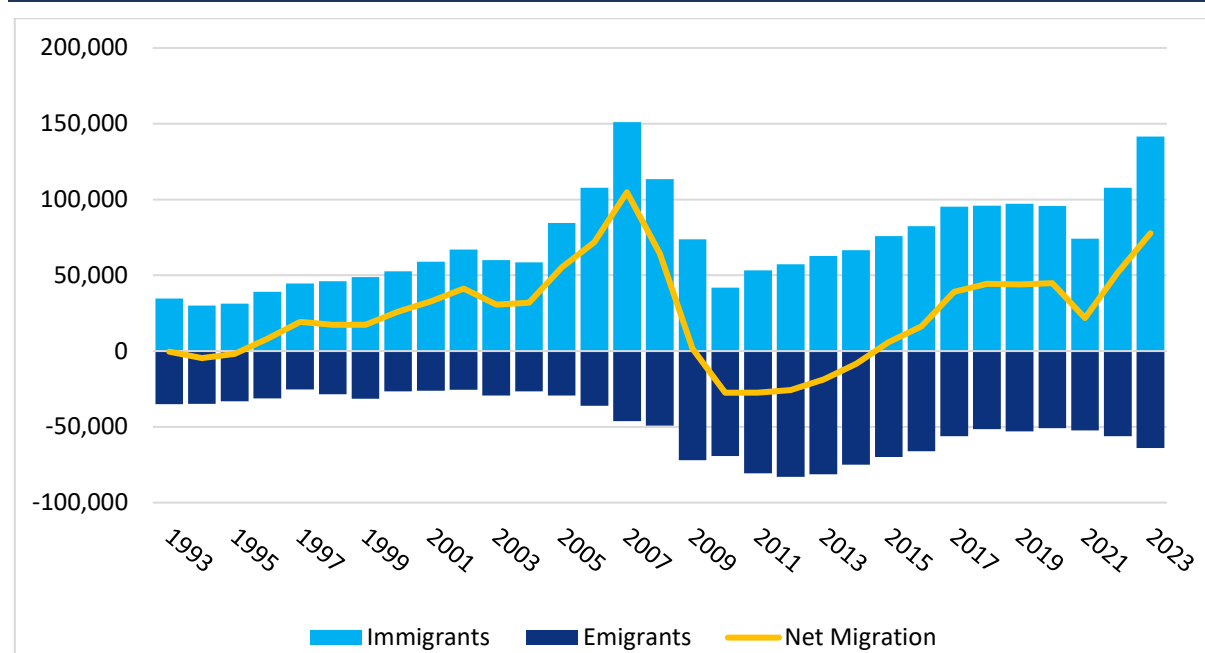
Ireland has historically experienced much larger emigration flows than immigration flows, only experiencing significant immigration of non-Irish nationals in the 1990s,¹⁰ a period of significant economic growth (see Figure 1.1). Since then, Ireland has rapidly become a highly diverse country, with 20 per cent of the usually

¹⁰ Central Statistics Office (2023) 'Ireland and the EU at 50' (CSO statistical publication, 17 October 2023). Available at www.cso.ie.

resident population born abroad, according to the 2022 Census.¹¹ Immigration fell significantly after the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent recession, which affected Ireland very heavily, requiring a bailout which came with conditions of significant austerity. The economic crash – which led to unemployment levels of up to 15.5 per cent – led to Ireland once again becoming a country of net emigration, with net migration slowly recovering as the economy recovered (see Figure 1.1). The decline in inward migration during the COVID-19 travel restrictions was followed by a significant increase in inward migration in 2022 and 2023 (see McGinnity et al., 2023a; Murphy and Sheridan, 2023).¹² A significant portion of this inward migration was from Ukraine.¹³

Immigration to Ireland has historically been largely from within the EU, with Ireland one of only three countries that provided immediate free movement to the countries that acceded to the EU in 2004. The rapid expansion of immigration in the period 2004-2007 (see Figure 1.1) was predominantly labour migration from Eastern Europe. Of the 20 per cent resident migrants (born abroad) in 2022, over 60 per cent of these were from the UK or EU (McGinnity et al., 2023a).

FIGURE 1.1 EMIGRATION, IMMIGRATION AND NET MIGRATION IN IRELAND (1993-2023)



Source: Central Statistics Office (2023) 'Population and Migration Estimates'.

¹¹ Central Statistics Office (2023) 'Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results: Migration and Diversity' (CSO statistical publication, 30 May 2023). Available at www.cso.ie.

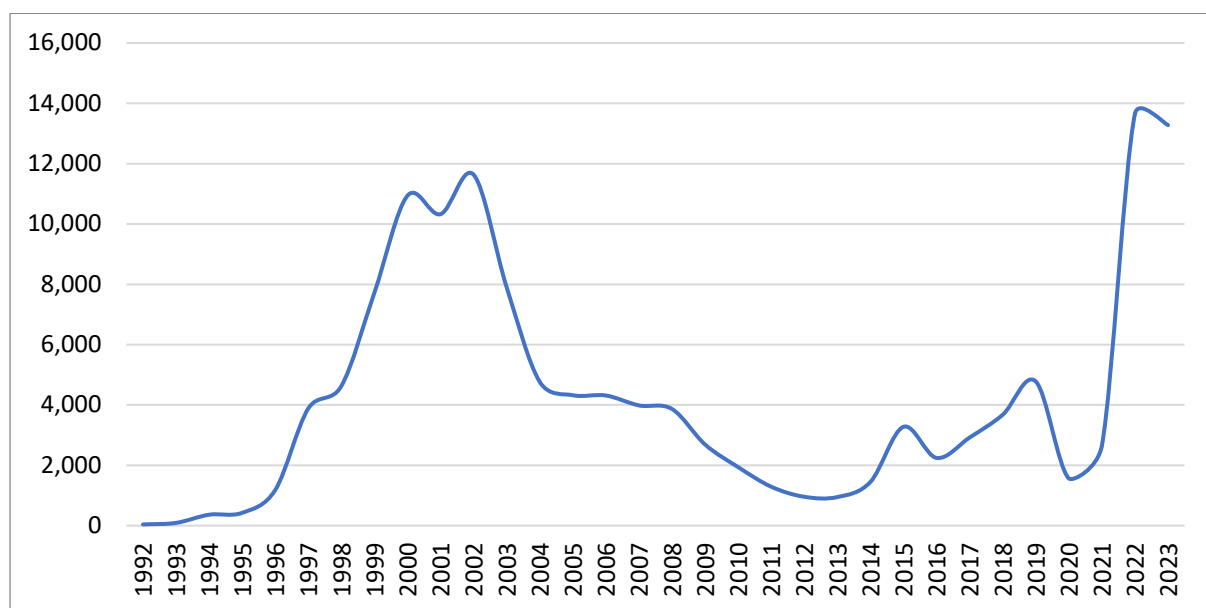
¹² Compared to 2019, immigration flows were estimated to have increased by about 36 per cent in the year to April 2022 (from around 88,600 to 120,700), and further to 141,600 in the year to April 2023, though they are still lower than the immigration flow recorded before the Great Recession (2007; 151,100).

¹³ 42,000 of the 141,600 people who arrived in the 12 months to April 2023 were Ukrainians; Central Statistics Office (2023) 'Population and Migration Estimates, April 2023' (CSO statistical publication, 25 September 2023).

While EU and UK nationals can come to live and work in Ireland without restriction, non-EU nationals need permission to do so. Prior to 2022, data from these permissions show that migration for work, predominately in high-skilled jobs, and for education reasons were the dominant forms of non-EU adult migration to Ireland¹⁴ and, taken as a whole, the migrant population in Ireland has consistently been shown to have higher education and income levels than the Irish population (McGinnity et al., 2023a). In recent years there has been an increasing amount of non-EU labour migration, aided by recent expansion of sectors eligible for employment permits in the context of labour shortages.¹⁵

Asylum applicants and refugees formed a very small percentage of this population and of overall immigration flows, making up just 2.6 per cent of all valid residence permits at the end of 2022.¹⁶ However, between people fleeing the war in Ukraine and the increase in asylum seekers, the number of people seeking protection in Ireland in 2022 was by far the highest in Irish history.

FIGURE 1.2 ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN IRELAND (1992-2023)



Source: Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, 'Statistics', www.orac.ie/website/orac/oracwebsite.nsf/page/orac-stats-en; IPO, 'Statistics' www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/statistics.

Note: This does not include more than 100,000 Ukrainians who arrived between February 2022 and December 2023.¹⁷

¹⁴ See Eurostat (2023). 'All valid permits by reason, length of validity and citizenship on 31 December of each year'. These do not include EU citizens, however, who do not require residence permits.

¹⁵ See Murphy, K. and Sheridan, A. (2023). *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2022: Ireland* and Murphy, K. and Sheridan, A. (2022). *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2021: Ireland*.

¹⁶ EU citizens do not need residence permits, so these statistics relate only to non-EU migrants. The proportion of all migrants is therefore much lower than this.

¹⁷ Department of the Taoiseach (2023). 'Government approves changes to measures for those fleeing war in Ukraine' *Press Release*, 12 December.

The increase in asylum applications and arrival of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine coincided with a time of significant success and challenges for the Irish economy and society. Economically, Ireland has recovered surprisingly well from the COVID-19 pandemic, with strong growth and significant corporation tax receipts.¹⁸ Unemployment was at its lowest rate in over 20 years at 4.4 per cent in Quarter 2, 2023, for example.¹⁹ Significant labour market shortages across many sectors have led the government to widen eligibility for employment permits for non-EU workers to the majority of sectors (see Murphy and Sheridan, 2022; 2023).

However, in spite of a buoyant labour market, Ireland is experiencing serious housing shortages and affordability challenges, as well as issues relating to inflation and increases in the cost-of-living. It is also experiencing significant challenges with provision of public services, with HIQA (who monitor quality in the health service) saying that the health service is under ‘unprecedented strain’, in part due to a growing and ageing population.²⁰ Ireland’s population was recorded as being 5.1 million in the 2022 Census, the first time it rose above 5 million since the Irish population was decimated by the famine in the 1800s.²¹ At the same time, over 13,100 people were homeless in October 2023 (i.e. using emergency accommodation), according to the Peter McVerry Trust.²² In addition, with large increases in rental prices and housing prices, in particular in urban areas, Ireland has seen large increases in the number of young adults (aged 25-34) living with their parents (Disch and Slaymaker, 2023). Standardised average rents for new tenancies have been steadily increasing since 2014, and almost doubled between 2014 and Q1 2023, from €800 to €1,540 nationally and from €1,100 to €2,100 in Dublin.²³ After a crash in property prices following the 2008 crisis, prices nationally increased by 129.5 per cent from their lowest point in 2013, and are now higher than they were at the peak of the property boom in April 2007.²⁴

Concerns raised about immigration and asylum seekers often make reference to impacts on labour markets, cost of welfare, impacts on housing demand, and the idea of migrants being housed or prioritised over Irish citizens (Kumar and Donoghue, 2023). Box 1 therefore outlines the entitlements of different groups of migrants, to provide context to these debates.

¹⁸ IFAC (2023). *Fiscal Assessment Report: June 2023*.

¹⁹ CSO (2023). ‘Labour Force Survey Quarter 2, 2023’ (CSO statistical publication, 24 August 2023). Available at www.gov.ie.

²⁰ HIQA (2022). *Overview Report: Monitoring Programme Against the National Standards in Emergency Departments in 2022*.

²¹ CSO (2023). ‘Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results’ (CSO Statistical publication).

²² Peter McVerry Trust (n.d.). ‘Homelessness in Ireland’. Available at www.homelessnessinireland.ie.

²³ Residential Tenancies Board (2021). ‘The RTB Rent Index Q3 2021’; Residential Tenancies Board (2023). ‘Rent Index Q1 2023’.

²⁴ CSO (2023). ‘Residential Property Price Index January 2023’ (CSO statistical publication).

BOX 2 RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE SEEKING PROTECTION

There are many different categories of migration, with different processes, permits and entitlements linked to each (see McGinnity et al., 2023a). As these have been some of the main concerns relating to refugees in past surveys (Kumar and Donoghue, 2023) and are often the subject of confusion, this Box outlines the entitlements of international protection applicants, international protection beneficiaries (also known as ‘spontaneous’ refugees), resettled refugees, and beneficiaries of temporary protection.

International protection (asylum) applicants

International protection applicants’ (IPAs) entitlements are regulated by the EU’s Reception Conditions Directive, in which Ireland participates. This outlines minimum reception conditions, and includes housing, food, clothing, education for minors and access to the labour market. In Ireland, IPAs are housed largely in institutional settings which are identified through open tenders for private sector provision (although there are plans to change this)²⁵ with meals provided. IPAs are entitled to access the labour market after six months (provided they have not been issued with a negative decision before then), can receive Medical Cards, and receive a small stipend that is significantly lower than social welfare allowances. Many of these institutional settings are in rural areas, and can sometimes be quite isolated. They are not entitled to mainstream social welfare payments,²⁶ although they can apply for supplementary payments for exceptional needs.²⁷ If they refuse institutional accommodation, they do not receive any state assistance.

Ireland has recently been expanding the rights available to IPAs, granting them the right to access the labour market in 2017 and shortening the waiting period for this in 2021. They have also made steps to ensure that IPAs can access bank accounts and driving licences in 2021, as well as broadening their access to education grants (see Murphy and Sheridan, 2022).

Beneficiaries of international protection (spontaneous refugees)

Beneficiaries of international protection (who have gone through the international protection process in Ireland and been granted international protection) are entitled to the same rights as Irish citizens.²⁸ Theoretically, they lose their entitlement to International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) accommodation when they receive their status and must find housing using mainstream supports such as local authority housing, Housing Assistance Payments (HAP), homeless HAP, and supplementary needs payments.²⁹ However, due to difficulty for this group with finding

²⁵ See Government of Ireland (2021). ‘A White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a New International Protection Support Service’. See Murphy, K. and A. Sheridan (2023). *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2022: Ireland* for an outline of delays and implementation.

²⁶ Department of Social Protection (2023). ‘Operational Guidelines: For Deciding Officers and Designated Persons on the determination of Habitual Residence’.

²⁷ Irish Refugee Council (n.d.). ‘Do people seeking protection receive social welfare?’ (FAQs).

²⁸ This is subject to the Habitual Residence Condition, but this will only be an issue if a person has not lived continuously in Ireland since refugee status was granted: Department of Social Protection (2023). ‘Operational Guidelines: For Deciding Officers and Designated Persons on the determination of Habitual Residence’.

²⁹ DCEDIY (9 March 2023). ‘Response to parliamentary question 12133/23’. Available at www.oireachtas.ie.

housing, many continue in IPAS accommodation for much longer, and 5,650 were still in IPAS accommodation in August 2023.³⁰ The government of Ireland largely has a policy of mainstreaming in relation to this group, supporting beneficiaries with mainstream supports such as healthcare, social welfare payments, and mainstream employment and education supports. However, they also fund NGOs to provide supplementary supports and have recently provided national-level funding for NGOs to support beneficiaries to move out of IPAS accommodation.

Resettled refugees

Resettled refugees (who are identified by UNHCR, usually in countries neighbouring conflicts, and brought to Ireland through Irish government programmes) are entitled to more targeted supports than those who arrive independently and go through the international protection procedure. In addition to the mainstream supports listed above, they receive an orientation programme, assistance in sourcing private accommodation, access to the labour market, a language programme, a series of integration measures organised with local host communities, accompaniment to appointments and support for 12 months at local level.³¹

Beneficiaries of temporary protection (Ukrainian refugees)

The Temporary Protection Directive grants access to the labour market, housing, social welfare, medical care, education for minors, and opportunities for families to reunite. It also requires countries to reduce entry requirement formalities to a minimum. Ireland's response has involved significant mobilisation of resources, accommodation, funding and regulatory change to ensure that these minimum standards are met.³² Many Ukrainian refugees are residing in accommodation provided directly by the government (including hotels, converted buildings and tented accommodation),³³ and others are in the private rental market (where they may be entitled to rent supplement) or staying with family and friends. A hosting programme was launched, which pays people who host Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection €800 per month.

While Ireland has historically had very positive attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, and anti-immigrant political parties in particular have been notably absent from the Irish political space, there is a fear that the recent increase in migration, coming at a time of perceived strains on services, is leading to increasingly hostile attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. Recent incidents have supported this idea, such as protests relating to a number of accommodation centres (in particular for asylum seekers),³⁴ riots in Dublin city

³⁰ DCEDIY (2023). 'Response to parliamentary questions 42538/23'. Available at www.oireachtas.ie.

³¹ Arnold, S., E. Quinn, E. Gusciute and L. Kinlen (2021). 'Cultivating problems for the future: Integration supports for resettled and spontaneous refugees in Ireland', *Migration Studies* 9(2), 236-259.

³² See Murphy, K. and A. Sheridan (2023). *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2022: Ireland*.

³³ European Migration Network (2022). *Arrangements for accommodation and housing for beneficiaries of temporary protection*.

³⁴ See Keena, C. (2022). 'East Wall residents protest against new refugee accommodation' (*Irish Times*, 20 November); Deegan, G. (2023). 'Some asylum seekers decide to leave Clare after blockade at former hotel' (*Irish Times*, 16 May); Slater, S. and A. Lucey (2023). 'Protests at Rosslare Europort and in Killarney over international protection centres' (*Irish Times*, 18 November).

centre following the stabbing of young children that caused up to €20 million of damage,³⁵ and arson attacks on hotels that were planned (or simply rumoured) to accommodate asylum seekers.³⁶

As these incidents may not be reflective of the overall attitudinal climate, it is increasingly urgent for policymakers to better understand Irish attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, and whether these have changed over time, as well as how they differ towards different groups, and what factors drive them.

1.3 DATA SOURCES AND METHODS USED

To explore the three key research questions described above, this study analyses the highest quality representative survey data on attitudes to immigration and immigrant groups (see Table 1.1). A full description of the attitudinal indicators used throughout the report and the survey questions they relate to is given in Appendix II. This section provides a brief overview of the data sources and statistical methods used: individual chapters discuss further details of methods and measurement.

To analyse the first question, whether attitudes have changed over time, in particular in recent years, the study draws primarily on the Eurobarometer study, which has fielded identical questions on the topic for 20 years. Details of the survey methods, sample size and response rates are outline in Appendix I. Comparing responses of identical questions in a repeated survey over time means we can be sure that any change in responses is due to changes in attitudes, not to question wording or sampling differences. This survey also permits comparison of Irish sentiment with that of other EU countries.³⁷ The over time analysis of sentiment and salience of immigration is supplemented by a time series of questions on the perceived Impact of immigration from the European Social Survey. This analysis is presented in Chapter 2.

The survey on people in Ireland's attitudes towards diversity ('Equality Attitudes Survey'), fielded in March-April 2023, is the evidence base for our in-depth consideration of question 2 – namely whether attitudes to immigration and immigrants differ depending on the migrant group. First we examine attitudes to immigration from within the EU, from Ukraine, and from outside EU/Ukraine, and

³⁵ Hilliard, M. (2023). 'Dublin riots: Escalating cost of unrest could "run to €20m"' (*Irish Times*, 24 November).

³⁶ Lally, C. and J. Fallon (2023). 'Galway hotel fire: Gardaí believe blaze at premises due to house 70 asylum seekers started deliberately' (*Irish Times*, 17 December); Lally, C. and J. Horgan-Jones (2024). 'Fire at Dublin building intended as homeless accommodation confirmed as arson' (*Irish Times*, 1 January).

³⁷ In particular, we compare trends in Ireland to trends across the EU27, defined as including: France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland, The UK, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania.

how these attitudes are related to attitudes to helping Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers, presenting descriptive statistics and results of factor analysis. Then we consider the question in a different way, by examining levels of comfort with a selection of groups: a person from Eastern Europe; a person from another EU country; a person who is Indian; a person who is a Ukrainian refugee; and a person who is an asylum seeker (see Table 1.1). These are to illustrate levels of comfort with key migrant groups in Ireland in different domains of people's lives (as a neighbour, in their child's class, in a love relationship with their child). Cluster analysis is used to investigate the relationship between levels of comfort with these different groups. This analysis is presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 then uses these data from the Equality Attitudes Survey to conduct analysis of the drivers of sentiment towards immigration and levels of comfort with different groups. Sentiment towards immigration is measured as a combined index of attitudes to: immigration from other EU Member States, immigration of people from Ukraine, and immigration of people from outside the EU/Ukraine, derived from the factor analysis reported in Chapter 3. Levels of comfort with different groups is a combined measure of comfort with people in the different life domains (as a neighbour, in their child's class, in a love relationship with their child), estimated separately for EU/Ukrainian refugees/Indians and asylum seekers. Using multivariate regression analysis, we investigate how socio-demographic characteristics such as age or education, civic behaviour, concerns about national and global challenges, and respondents' views of life in the past and confidence in the future are related to their attitudes towards immigration and comfort with different groups. These factors have been found to be associated with sentiment to immigration in previous literature (see below). This analysis is presented in Chapter 4. Further details on how individual explanatory factors are measured is provided in Chapter 4.

For understanding population attitudes (the 'attitudinal climate'), the use of high-quality representative survey data with carefully worded questions has very clear advantages over opinion polls or small qualitative studies of specific populations. However, there are some concerns that survey data of this type may struggle to accurately measure responses to sensitive questions – either because respondents may give what they believe as 'socially desirable' responses, masking their true opinions, or because respondents may have not considered the implications of the question posed. So in Chapter 5 we supplement the analysis in previous chapters by drawing on a survey experiment, fielded in August 2022. Survey experiments combine the population representativeness of surveys with the experimental control of an experiment (Steiner et al., 2016). This survey experiment was primarily focused on attitudes to disability, but some questions were asked on support for refugees and asylum seekers (Timmons et al., 2023a). This experiment uses innovative experimental methods to investigate whether support for these

groups might be overstated due to both social desirability bias and the wording of questions (in particular highlighting the costs of certain policies), and the implications of this (see Table 1.1 and Appendix I). The experimental data are analysed using regression analysis – binary logistic regression for the questions specifying different costs of policy support, and ordered logistic regression, for the vignettes on the acceptability of protesting against the housing of groups locally (see Table 1.1. for question wording). See Chapter 5 for further details of measurement and how the models were specified.

TABLE 1.1 SECONDARY SURVEY DATA USED IN THE REPORT

Theme	Name of dataset, sample, year, and survey method	Indicators/Measures
Trends over time in attitudes to immigration (Chapter 2)	Eurobarometer; representative samples of Ireland and the EU27; multiple years (2004 to 2023);	Feeling positive/negative about: (a) ‘...Immigration of people from other EU Member States’; (b) ‘...Immigration of people from outside the EU’. Agree/disagree that: (a) ‘...immigrants contribute a lot to our country’; (b) ‘...(our country) should help refugees’. Salience of immigration to ‘Ireland’ and to respondents ‘personally’: (a) two most important issues facing Ireland; (b) two most important issues you personally are facing.
	European Social Survey; biennial survey (2002-2022) representative sample of Ireland	Perceived impact of immigration on Ireland: (a) Immigration ‘bad/good for economy’; (b) Ireland’s cultural life is generally undermined/enriched (c) Ireland made a worse or a better place to live.
Current attitudes towards different groups, types of immigration, and drivers of immigration attitudes (Chapters 3 and 4)	Survey on attitudes towards equality 2023 (‘Equality Attitudes Survey’); representative sample of Ireland conducted in 2023.	Feeling positive/negative about immigration from: (a) other EU Member State’; (b) from the Ukraine (c) people from outside the EU or Ukraine. Helping: Agree/disagree that: (a) ‘...Ireland should help Ukrainian refugees’; (b) ‘...Ireland should help asylum seekers’. How comfortable people feel about having different migrant groups (a) living next door to you; (b) in a love relationship with one of your children; (c) in the same class as your child.
Survey experiment on attitudes to different groups and depth of policy support (Chapter 5)	NDA Survey Experiment on Attitudes (August 2022) Participants recruited from an online panel to be representative.	Policy support for refugees, three groups (1) support with no condition (2) specifying pressure on services (3) specifying a tax increase to fund. Vignette experiment on acceptability of protesting 100 people being housed locally - three groups - (A) Ukrainian refugees (B) Asylum Seekers (C) Factory Workers.

Note: Full details on the datasets in use can be found in data appendix at the end of the report. Eurobarometer: samples of Ireland (average n=1,011 per wave) and the EU27 (average n=26,274 per wave); European social survey (average n=2,279 per wave); Equality Attitudes Survey (n=3,008). NDA Survey Experiment on Attitudes; 2,000 participants were recruited from a leading polling company to be nationally representative of the adult population in Ireland.

To support and interpret this analysis, we conducted an extensive literature review of international and Irish literature (Section 1.4) which we draw on throughout the report to inform the analysis and to interpret current findings for Ireland.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.4.1 Theoretical approaches to understanding attitudes to immigrants

Literature on attitudes to migration has historically been grounded in three theoretical traditions: social identity theory, group competition theory, and contact theory. Social identity theory is the foundation of much of the literature in this area. This theory posits that the basis of group identity is distinction between an in-group and an out-group. The theory states that individuals build positive social identities by associating positive characteristics with their own group and negative characteristics with out-groups. This leads to the suggestion that the more distinct an out-group is, the more likely inter-group bias will occur (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1978; Hewstone et al., 2002).

While social identity theory identifies the basis of social groups, group conflict theory aims to explain how and why conflict happens between different social groups (Blumer, 1958). Blumer posits that prejudice towards out-groups derive from four key elements: (1) a feeling of group superiority; (2) an us-versus-them conceptualisation, which paints the out-group as fundamentally different; (3) a perception that the in-group have a legitimate right and claim to certain privileges and advantages; and (4) a fear that the out-group may threaten the social position or certain privileges and resources 'belonging' to the in-group (Blumer, 1958). Based on this theory, group conflict may be particularly salient for migrants because the idea of resources belonging to the in-group and the in-group having a legitimate right and claim to certain privileges and advantages is corroborated by reality, as citizens and non-citizens have different rights and privileges (see Box 1).

Two types of threat are often distinguished under group threat theory: material and symbolic threat. Material (or realistic) threat relates to tangible items, such as jobs, housing, and welfare payments, with the idea being that 'out-groups' threaten access to resources of the 'in-group' (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Symbolic threat relates to values, norms, and beliefs – the perception that immigrants have differing belief systems and moral values that pose a threat to the values and symbols of the majority group, regarding for example the role of women in society, law and order or religious values. There is evidence, however, that the relative importance of these threats differs across countries and contexts (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), as well as socio-demographic groups (Dustmann and Preston, 2007). It is important to note that this threat can be either real or imagined but both perceived and real threats have the potential to affect attitudes (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010), and it seems to be sociotropic concerns (i.e.

concerns about the country as a whole, either economic or cultural, rather than concerns about one's individual situation) that are most influential, as opposed to individual threats (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014).

While visibility of out-groups (in the case of this research, migrant groups) has often been found to be a crucial element of threat perception, which would indicate that increasing diversity and presence of out-groups would increase hostility, another important theory works in the opposite direction. Contact theory states that contact between groups decreases prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Crucially, however, the kind of contact matters, and certain conditions are required to ensure that contact reduces prejudice, namely: equality within the contact situation, cooperation rather than competition, and support by institutional authorities (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; Hewstone and Swart, 2011). It is important to note that more diverse neighbourhoods do not necessarily lead to more contact between groups, which can make testing the theory more complicated (Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022; Green et al., 2016). We discuss some key findings from a significant body of literature testing both contact and group threat theories below.

A final theory that impacts attitudes is deservingness theory, which posits that people favour migrants who display a greater level of deservingness (Newman et al., 2015, as cited in Hager and Veit, 2019). Van Oorschot (2000; 2006) puts forward five criteria used to assess deservingness, including responsibility for their own situation, the scale of their need, the closeness of their group identity, the group's perceived attitudes (e.g. gratitude) and how much they contribute. This provides the theoretical grounding for different attitudes towards different groups, which we explore in the next section.

1.4.2 Do attitudes differ towards different groups?

Previous literature has shown that not all immigrants are perceived the same. Literature has found associations between attitudes to immigration/immigrants and the characteristics of immigrants themselves, particularly their region of origin, their ethnicity, their religion, and their motive(s) for migration (to work, to study, to join family, to seek protection). This means that surveys that ask about 'immigrants' as a group have weaknesses because attitudes depend largely on which questions are asked and which immigrants people think of, with public perception of the main migrant groups often very different from the actual largest immigrant groups (see Bjånesøy, 2019; Crawley et al., 2019; Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2017; Byrne, 2014). In addition, attitudes towards immigrants (in particular those already in the country) and attitudes towards immigration (i.e. more people entering the country) and immigration policies seem to be quite distinct, although there are linkages between them (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010).

Attitudes towards immigrants in general and asylum seekers and refugees appear to be quite distinct and influenced by different factors (Bansak et al., 2016; Abdelaaty and Steele, 2022; Crawley et al., 2019; Meidert and Rapp, 2019). In general, while research sometimes groups them, attitudes towards asylum seekers tends to be more negative than attitudes towards refugees (Crawley et al., 2019).

Significant research has shown that attitudes differ dependent on the ethnic, national, or cultural background of the immigrant (see Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Previous evidence of hierarchies in Ireland includes consistent findings that EU immigration is viewed more favourably than non-EU immigration (McGinnity et al., 2018; 2023) and ethnic hierarchies in attitudes. This usually means that groups that are perceived as more culturally and ethnically different are perceived more negatively, with White immigration viewed more positively and Muslims and Roma particularly poorly perceived (McGinnity et al., 2018; SCI, 2018). While overall attitudes to immigration are more positive than the EU average in Ireland, attitudes to Muslims are among the lowest (McGinnity et al., 2018). The bias against Muslims has also been found in other contexts (Hager and Veit, 2019; Bansak et al., 2016; Kawalerowicz, 2021; Creighton et al., 2022a). Interestingly, Creighton et al. (2022a) found that while social desirability bias impacted professed discrimination against other ethnic groups in Ireland, this was not the case with Muslims, indicating that discrimination against Muslims was seen as more socially acceptable.

International literature has found mixed evidence based on ethnicity or nationality – instead, what seems to matter is the out-group categorisation, which can be based on different characteristics in different countries (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; Ford, 2011; Creighton et al., 2022a). Some authors argue that in new immigration countries, like Ireland, concerns about cultural identity or the erosion of language are less prominent, and racial and religious boundaries are more salient (Bail, 2008). However, McGinnity et al. (2018), using ESS data for 2014, find that biological racism³⁸ is low in Ireland, though higher than the average for ten West European countries.³⁹

One approach to understanding how the population categorises out-groups is to use social distance scales. Social distance scales measure willingness to have social contact with members from a specified group of ‘others’, where a smaller social distance is believed to indicate greater sympathy and empathy towards a group

³⁸ As measured by two items in the European Social Survey (2014): the belief that some races or ethnic groups are born more intelligent than others or that some races or ethnic groups are more hard working than others.

³⁹ The countries included were Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal Spain, Sweden and the UK, all of whom were in the EU at the time of fieldwork.

(Bogardus, 1933). Previous research using social distance scales revealed clear evidence of ethnic hierarchies in Ireland (MacGreil, 2011). Irish Travellers are at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy, with long-standing and high levels of antipathy towards this group (MacGreil, 2011; DCEDIY, 2023). While an overall reduction in social distance scores to 46 groups is recorded by MacGreil between 1998-2007, there is a clear hierarchy, with certain national and ethnic groups – in particular Europeans – being perceived as being much closer than those of Black ethnicity, Nigerians, Pakistanis, Arabs and Israelis (*ibid.*, Table 4.2).⁴⁰

There is also international evidence of preferences within a group such as asylum seekers. Bansak et al. (2016) in a major study with 18,000 respondents over 15 European countries found that there is a general consensus across respondents about which asylum seekers are preferred. They found that asylum seekers with higher employability, more consistent asylum testimonies and severe vulnerabilities were preferred. In addition, they found that stories of political persecution were seen to be much more deserving than stories of economic hardship, which has been replicated in other studies (Hager and Veit, 2019; Meidert and Rapp, 2019). They also found a strong preference for non-Muslim asylum seekers, and a preference for females over males. Skill level and the perceived ability to contribute economically seems to be particularly significant for attitudes towards people migrating for mainly economic reasons (Hager and Veit, 2019). Bansak et al.'s (2016) analysis of the respondents' characteristics indicated a general consensus about this, regardless of individual circumstances.

Ethnic hierarchies in preferences around migrants likely interacts with attitudes towards specific groups, with asylum seekers, for example, much more likely to come from ethnic minorities than some other migrant groups.⁴¹

1.4.3 What factors affect attitudes?

A significant body of literature has emerged analysing the factors that correlate with attitudes towards immigrants. One relatively consistent finding is that attitudes seem not to relate to self-interest (i.e. a perception that migrants will threaten individual's status or circumstances) (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Instead, it seems to be sociotropic concerns (i.e. worry about cultural and economic impact on the nation or in-group) that influence attitudes (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). This means, for example, that an individual may be wary about immigration not because of a fear that immigration will cause them to lose their

⁴⁰ These are mean scores combining kinship, friendship, neighbour, co-worker, deny citizenship, admit as visitor, debar from country.

⁴¹ See Eurostat (2023) 'Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data'.

job or lower their wages, but out of a fear that immigration will have negative impacts on the country or in-group as a whole.

We look at factors that have emerged as important from the literature below, breaking this down into country-level factors, regional or local level factors, and individual factors.

1.4.3.1 *Country-level factors*

Size of the immigrant flow/change in flow

One argument that has been assessed in research is that the size of the immigrant population matters: the more immigrants come to a country and settle, the more resistant the host population becomes (see Schneider, 2008; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; Newman et al., 2012). Previous research has found that negative attitudes rise as immigration increases (Coenders and Scheepers, 1998; Bjånesøy, 2019; Kawalerowicz, 2021). However, an increase in negative attitudes may be more closely related to a sharp increase in the flow of migrants, rather than the size of the actual flow (Coenders and Scheepers, 1998; Semyonov et al., 2006; Mueleman et al., 2009). Semyonov et al. (2006) explained this through the theory that alarmist fears arise in the early period of immigration, but that over time these perceptions become more realistic and the sentiments towards outsiders, although negative, level off and become more stable. Mueleman et al. (2009) call this a ‘dynamic ethnic conflict theory’, which emphasises change in numbers of immigrants rather than absolute numbers as important for threat perceptions.

In Ireland, previous research on the topic has found a more complex story: during a time of rapidly increasing immigration in the early 2000s, attitudes to immigrants in Ireland were among the most liberal in Europe (Turner, 2010). McGinnity and Kingston (2017), examining the period 2002-2012, find that higher numbers of immigrants were associated with more positive attitudes, even in a period of rapid increase in immigration following the EU expansion in 2004. While overall attitudes became more negative in the recession period, after controlling for economic conditions, more immigrants were associated with more positive attitudes (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017). The authors suggest that increasing numbers of immigrants may have increased social contact between the immigrant and native populations; in addition, these positive attitudes may have been because immigration in this period was dominated by White European labour migrants (see also Turner and Cross, 2015), as well as due to the interaction with economic and social conditions. We return to these points below.

Some research has looked at specific types of flow, such as flows of asylum seekers. Gorodzeisky (2022) found that an exposure to actual high inflows of asylum seekers

is associated with exclusionary attitudes towards asylum seekers, but so is potential exposure to such an inflow (e.g. countries neighbouring those with a high inflow).

Several studies have also tried to assess the relative importance of cultural versus economic threat. It seems from these that cultural threat is significantly more influential on attitudes to immigration than economic threat (Iversflaten, 2005; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014), although this appears to vary from country to country (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014).

Economic conditions

Evidence is also mixed about the impact of economic conditions on attitudes (Mitchell, 2021). Several authors have noted that immigration (in particular flows) seems to create an increased sense of threat during periods of economic downturn (Bjånesøy, 2019) or depressed economic conditions (Gorodzeisky, 2022). Gorodzeisky (2022) finds that this interacts with the neighbourhood diversity, with most negative attitudes experienced when there are relatively large out-groups and depressed economic conditions. Kawalerowicz et al. (2023) found that when native unemployment is low, attitudes towards admitting immigrants were not influenced by the perceived levels of immigration. However, when native unemployment was rising, high immigration flows were perceived as a threat. On the other hand, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) in their extensive review of the evidence on immigration attitudes found that evidence of objective material conditions impacting attitudes towards immigration seems to be mixed. This does not mean that economic conditions do not matter, they just seem to interact with a variety of factors in determining attitudes.

In Ireland, McGinnity and Kingston (2017) show that attitudes to immigration are very sensitive to the economic cycle and unemployment rates, but are not influenced by immigration flows. Not surprisingly, the unemployment rate has a stronger association with perceptions of economic threat of immigration than with cultural threat (ibid.). Findings of this impact in Ireland have also been found in Denny and O'Grada (2013). The strong link in Ireland may have been due to the scale of economic downturn: Hatton (2016) found that countries with more severe experiences of recession, like Ireland, had more marked shifts in opinion during the downturn, while many others had minimal changes. Isaksen (2019) also points towards Ireland as a striking example of changes in attitudes towards immigration coinciding strongly with economic crisis. Laurence et al. (2023) also find a strong effect of the recession and austerity period in Ireland on a range of social attitudes in Ireland, with significant decreases in satisfaction with democracy, political trust, media trust, trust in other people, and optimism about the future, many of which are linked to attitudes towards immigration. Similar to attitudes towards

immigrants, overall attitudes in Ireland also recovered as the economy recovered (McGinnity et al., 2018;). Creighton et al. (2022b) add nuance to this overall finding by analysing the impact of the economic crisis and recovery on the importance placed on migrant attributes (e.g. skills and education). They found that views became more moderate with recovery, but that attributes that would link to the sociotropic effect of migrants on the economy (i.e. the perception of their ability to contribute) remained more important than before.

Social conditions/quality of life/housing

Some literature has looked at the role of the welfare state in influencing attitudes towards immigrants. While it appears to be a prominent issue in Ireland, we found very little literature on the role of the housing market or housing market competition in attitudes towards immigrants. However, Hooijer (2021) has shown that competition for social welfare with inelastic supply (such as social housing) can impact attitudes towards migrants. Based on Dutch panel dataset that tracks attitudes over a decade and using mandatory refugee dispersal as an exogenous variable for social housing competition, she found that lower-middle income individuals become less supportive of immigrants' social rights when they are more exposed to social housing competition. She found that it does not reduce support among the rich (who are not reliant on social housing) or the very poor (who are not affected by competition because of allocation rules). She also found that it increased support for the populist right among this income category.

The nature of the welfare state in general also appears to have a strong mediating effect on attitudes towards immigrants, with Crepaz and Damron (2009) finding that the more comprehensive a welfare state a country has, the more tolerant those born in the country are of immigrants and the more positive their perception of the contribution of immigrants. On the other hand, Rapp (2017) found that this was dependent on the degree of ethnic diversity within a country, with welfare having very little impact when considered with ethnic composition. It should be noted that much of this research is based on attitudes towards granting rights to migrants, however, rather than attitudes towards immigrants or immigration per se.

Dustmann and Preston (2007) found that in Britain, welfare concerns were stronger drivers of attitudes than labour market concerns, in particular towards groups with a high welfare dependence (which, for example, asylum seekers and refugees may be perceived to have, particularly because in Ireland until recently asylum seekers were prohibited from working). However, this differed for manual and non-manual workers, with these concerns particularly strong among non-manual workers, with racial and cultural factors more important for manual workers (similarly for high versus low educated). This topic has not been investigated in Ireland.

Recent research from Ireland found strong positive effects of political efficacy (or individual's feeling that their voice counts) and optimism about the future on attitudes towards migrants (McGinnity et al., 2023b), indicating that perceptions of social conditions, confidence and belief in politics overall are a key factor in attitudes towards migrants.

Social trust has also been found to be a significant driver of attitudes towards immigrants (Mitchell, 2021; Gusciute, 2020), with environments of social distrust potentially causing group-based identities to become more salient and to make out-groups feel more threatening (Mitchell, 2021). This may explain why attitudes toward immigrants changed so strongly with the 2008 recession in Ireland, as this period also caused huge decreases in satisfaction with democracy, political trust, media trust, trust in other people and optimism, sometimes halving in the space of a year (Laurence et al., 2023).

Social contact

What factors can modify attitudes? In keeping with group contact theory, extensive research shows that positive social contact with immigrants (and members of ethnic out-groups more generally) can reduce prejudice, feelings of threat, and anxiety towards immigrants, not least by undermining the stereotypes people hold about immigrants (Allport, 1954; Hewstone and Swart, 2011; McGinnity et al., 2023b; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

However the quality and type of contact matters. Where there is negative inter-group contact, increased contact can cause attitudes to deteriorate (Laurence and Bentley, 2018). For example, contact with transitory populations (e.g. in countries that are treated as 'transit' countries) seems to lead to more negative attitudes (Gessler et al., 2022; Gorodzeisky, 2022). On the other hand, deliberate contact seems to lead to more positive attitudes (Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022). One of the reasons that presence does not necessarily lead to more positive attitudes is that presence does not necessarily lead to contact (Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022; Green et al., 2016).

One interesting conclusion that Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) drew from their review of literature on attitudes towards immigration is that personal liking for immigrants seems to be more responsive to contact than policy preferences. Meidert and Rapp (2019) also found that this interacts with perceptions of deservingness discussed above, as in their survey those with previous contact with refugees led to more positive attitudes towards refugees but only for war and political refugees.

In Ireland, McGinnity et al. (2018), investigating ‘casual social contact’ found positive social contact with those of a different race/ethnic group was associated with more favourable attitudes to the impact of immigration, regardless of the frequency of contact.⁴² Negative social contact was linked to more negative attitudes to the effects of immigration, and was more negative as contact became more frequent. McGinnity et al. (2023) find closer contact (having friends and family who are immigrants) is strongly associated with more positive attitudes to immigrants.⁴³

Media context and public debate

At a very basic level the media has a role in providing information and the extent and frequency with which it provides information can influence perceptions of the issue and the scale of inflows (for example Bjånesøy, 2019; Hopkins, 2010; 2011; Mitchell, 2021). Elite rhetoric also plays an important role in how attitudes change over time (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). A significant literature has developed analysing the role of salience, intensity and media framing of immigration, and the impact of these on attitudes towards immigrants (See Eberl et al., 2018; Vestergaard, 2020; Lecheler et al., 2015). Increased salience and visibility can increase out-group hostility, even controlling for real-world developments or media tone (Eberl et al., 2018). The framing of media articles can also impact attitudes and policy support, in particular exposure to economic, security or cultural threat frames (Eberl et al., 2018; Vestergaard 2020), in line with group threat theory. While less research has been done on social media (Eberl et al., 2018), some literature has also found that exposure to negative online discourses impacts attitudes (Hsueh et al., 2015), as does how social media is used and who is in people’s social media network (Saifuddin et al., 2021).⁴⁴

There have been very few, if any, studies on the effects of media consumption or media framing on attitudes to immigrants in Ireland (see Eberl et al., 2018). Negative coverage of immigration has largely been absent in Irish traditional media historically (Kumar with Donoghue, 2023), potentially as a result of the lack of a successful far-right anti-immigrant party in politics (O’Malley, 2008). International media coverage may also play a role in attitudes towards immigration in Ireland, further complicating the issue. Fahey et al. (2019) found that attitudes to Muslim

⁴² ‘How often do you have any contact with people who are of a different race or ethnic group from most Irish people when you are out and about? This could be on public transport, in the street, in shops or in the neighbourhood? (Any contact should be included, whether verbal or non-verbal)’.

⁴³ Because these are cross-sectional data, we cannot infer from these associations that they are causal effects. For example, people with more positive immigration attitudes may be more likely to form friendships with immigrants, rather than friendship with immigration causing attitudes to improve. In all likelihood, such associations are bi-directional, with effects operating in both directions.

⁴⁴ The following report tracks and monitors hate speech online in Ireland, though does not link these to directly expressed attitudes: <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2018/11/HateTrack-Tracking-and-Monitoring-Racist-Hate-Speech-Online.pdf>.

immigration to Ireland became more negative in Ireland following the international terrorist attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris, which occurred during the fieldwork period for the survey they used (European Social Survey, special module on attitudes to immigrants and immigration, 2014-2015). Attitudes to White immigration in Ireland did not change following the incident.

Examining the role of media and social media in attitudes towards immigrants and immigration is beyond the scope of this report, but in Chapter 6 we reflect on its importance and as a potential avenue for further research.

1.4.3.2 *Local-level factors*

As well as the broader social and economic context at national level, immigrants and non-migrants' experience may also be shaped by the situation where they live. Significant research has been conducted to understand how attitudes are influenced by social contexts at various spatial units, even down to neighbourhood level (Schmidt et al., 2023; Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022). We examine the literature on this more in-depth in Laurence et al. (forthcoming), but briefly outline the findings from the literature here.

A significant amount of literature has attempted to assess the impacts of neighbourhood or local-level diversity on attitudes, with mixed results (Steele and Abdelaaty, 2019; Abdelaaty and Steele, 2022; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2005; Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2017). From this literature, it seems that the impact of diversity depends on multiple factors, including the type of immigrants (Hood and Morris, 1998; Ha, 2010; Hopkins et al., 2014; Enos, 2014), residential segregation (with increased segregation leading to more negative attitudes: Kawalerowicz, 2021; Laurence et al., 2019), and the measure of diversity used (Steele and Abdelaaty, 2019).

In addition, multiple studies have observed the importance of political salience and media attention in this dynamic (Bjånesøy, 2019; Hopkins, 2010; 2011; Mitchell, 2021). Hopkins (2010; 2011) found that when immigration is nationally salient, living in a community with a growing immigrant population was associated with more restrictionist views, while at other times, there was no relationship. One insight into this seemingly contradictory area of research is that of Laurence and Bentley (2018), who found that living in more diverse communities increases instances of both positive and negative contact, leading to the polarisation of attitudes. A crucial caveat to this research (and one that undermines research that is based on objective measures of diversity) is that what may matter is not the actual number of migrants living in an area, but the *perceived* number of migrants (Crawley et al., 2019).

Research has also found that rather than simply the stock of migrants in the area, change in neighbourhood composition seems to impact local-level attitudes (Kawalerowicz, 2021; Bjånesøy, 2019; Mitchell, 2021; Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022), similarly to national-level findings. It seems that quick or recent increases in migrants in a neighbourhood lead to more negative attitudes (Bjånesoy, 2019; Kawalerowicz, 2021; Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022).

Mitchell (2021) concluded that what seems to affect attitudes is the perceived threat of a shift in inter-group dynamics. On how this interacts with contact theory, Kawalerowicz (2021) theorises that the prejudice-reducing mechanisms of interpersonal contact cannot keep up with threat responses when there is rapid growth.

A large sub-section of this literature looks at the impact of new asylum seeker accommodation centres on local attitudes, which has shown mixed results (Deiss-Helbig and Remer, 2022; Lubbers et al., 2006; Schmidt et al., 2023).

There has been no quantitative work on the relationship between local level conditions and attitudes to immigration/immigrants in Ireland. Previous research has found low residential segregation of migrants overall in Ireland (based on the 2016 Census), but some clustering of those with poor self-rated English-language skill in specific areas (Fahey et al., 2019b).⁴⁵ However, Ireland's policies relating to geographic dispersal of asylum seekers can lead to high concentration in some areas and potentially mean that there is minimal contact with local communities. See Laurence et al. (forthcoming) for analysis of local-level factors associated with attitudes to immigration.

1.4.3.3 *Individual-level factors*

Significant research has investigated how individual-level characteristics influence attitudes to migrants. Due to the findings mentioned above of the dominance of sociotropic rather than individual concerns in this literature, the intersection between individual characteristics and the wider economic and societal context is crucial to understanding attitudes (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2023b).

⁴⁵ Poor English language proficiency is measured as those who state they speak English not very well or not at all (1.8 per cent of the total population in Census 2016). This group scores more highly on the indicators of segregation and isolation used in this study than groups based on country of birth (EU and non-EU migrants).

Education

The most consistent finding from this literature is that higher educated people have more positive attitudes towards migrants and migration of all kinds (Dražanová et al., 2022; Anderson and Ferguson, 2018; Hager and Veit, 2019; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; McKay et al., 2012; Meidert and Rapp, 2019; Mitchell, 2021; Schmidt et al., 2023; Lubbers et al., 2006; Dustmann and Preston, 2007; McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2018; 2023b; Fahey et al., 2019).

One interpretation is that as a result of education, the higher educated are more tolerant of diversity (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). An alternative view is that the more educated are more financially secure and less vulnerable to labour market competition, so feel less threatened by immigration (Billiet et al., 2014). The impact of education appears to interact with the type of migrant considered, with differences across education groups largest for the most ethnically different groups (Dustmann and Preston, 2007).

Another interpretation is that rather than learning tolerance, those with higher education simply learn the attitudes that are ‘socially desirable’, and mask any negative sentiment they hold. This is supported by a recent list experiment in Ireland, that when attitudes were measured directly, education had a strong positive impact on attitudes, but when they were measured anonymously (through the list experiment), the education effect was much reduced (Creighton et al., 2022a). This echoes the findings of international studies using this method (Kuppens and Spears, 2014). We discuss the topic of social desirability bias and measures to address it further below.

Socio-economic characteristics

On the other hand, evidence relating to socio-economic characteristics or employment status is mixed for both migration in general and for asylum seekers (Meidert and Rapp, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2023; Gorodzeisky, 2021; Lubbers et al., 2006; Abdelaaty and Steele, 2022; Dustmann and Preston, 2007; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Dražanová et al., 2022). In Ireland, results are also mixed but tend towards more negative attitudes among those who are unemployed (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2023b); though unemployment has no effect in other studies (McGinnity et al., 2018; Fahey et al., 2019). Research in Ireland has also looked at the impact of financial strain on attitudes, and consistently found those who felt under financial strain had more negative attitudes (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2018; Fahey et al., 2019). Fewer studies have considered the association between attitudes and occupational position in Ireland, but McGinnity et al., 2023b find lower-skilled workers hold more negative attitudes, even after controls for educational qualifications.

Job insecurity has been linked to greater opposition towards ethnic minorities (Billiet et al., 2014) while employment with greater security and less exposure to competition is associated with pro-immigration attitudes (Ortega and Polavieja, 2012). Similar findings can be observed in Ireland; Gusciute et al. (2021), analysing the period 2008-2016, finds that workers in occupations and sectors with greater job security (measured as job growth) are more likely to be supportive of further immigration; while job losses in a sector or occupation, particularly in the short-term, are more likely to lead to anti-immigration sentiment.

Age has similarly shown mixed results internationally (Dražanová et al., 2022). In Ireland, older people are more positive about the impact of immigration on Ireland (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017) but hold less positive attitudes to immigrants themselves, particularly Muslims (Fahey et al., 2019). Other studies in Ireland find no differences between different age groups (McGinnity et al., 2018; 2023). Generally, having a migration background tends to correlate with more positive attitudes (Abdelaaty and Steele, 2022). However, this has not been tested in Ireland. There are also mixed results on gender internationally (Dražanová et al., 2022; Anderson and Ferguson, 2018) and in Ireland some studies find that women have more negative attitudes (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2018); others find no gender differences after other controls (Fahey et al., 2019; McGinnity et al., 2023).

Ideologies

Generally, ideological correlates show stronger effects than demographic characteristics (Anderson and Ferguson, 2018; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). For example, international literature has found that people who identify closer to the left of the political spectrum tend to show more positive attitudes (e.g. Anderson and Ferguson, 2018; Meidert and Rapp, 2019; Mitchell, 2021). However, interestingly this was not found to be the case in Ireland to date, with left-right orientation showing no impact on attitudes (McGinnity et al., 2018; Kingston and McGinnity, 2017). This distinction between Ireland and other countries has also been found with respect to other social attitudes, (Fahey et al., 2005) and is typically attributed to the lack of a left-right divide in Irish politics. However, some recent evidence indicates that this may be changing, with Müller and Regan (2021) finding that left-right positions increasingly structure voter choice. This has the potential to strengthen the association between left-right alignment and attitudes to immigration in Ireland.

Summary of previous literature

It is clear from this review of the literature that attitudes towards immigrants are influenced by a multi-level web of factors that interact with each other. Individual factors, local-level factors and national factors, as well as the political and media

environment mediate how immigrants and immigration is perceived. These appear to interact in complex ways with the characteristics of the migrant groups considered.

1.5 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

This report is structured around the research questions that we attempt to answer. We first address the question of whether attitudes in Ireland have changed over time and particularly in recent years, as well as whether immigration has become more salient (Chapter 2). We then turn to investigating where attitudes towards immigration currently stand in 2023 in Ireland, whether there are differences in people's attitudes towards different types of migrants and migration, and how people's attitudes to different types of migration and migrant groups relate to one another (Chapter 3). Next, we explore what social, economic, demographic, attitudinal and behavioural characteristics of individuals are associated with their attitudes towards immigration in general and comfort with different migrant groups (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 then explores people's attitudes towards the acceptability of protesting international protection arrivals, how the policy implications of supporting refugees can affect people's support, and the role of social desirability bias and survey mode in shaping the responses people give to questions on immigration. Lastly, we conclude by discussing the key findings of the study, its limitations, and the potential policy implications derived from the findings.

CHAPTER 2

Change over time in attitudes towards immigration in Ireland

This chapter examines trends over time in attitudes towards immigration in Ireland as well as an EU comparison where relevant. In doing so, it can help understand whether attitudes towards immigration, or concern about immigration, has noticeably shifted in Irish society recent years. The chapter explores trends in attitudes towards different dimensions of immigration to form a more detailed picture of where attitudes stand now in Ireland, where they stand in an historical perspective, and where they stand relative to attitudes in Europe. The sample in each case is designed to be representative of all respondents over 15 in a country (or countries).⁴⁶

2.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS EU AND NON-EU IMMIGRATION

Figure 2.1 shows trends in how positive people feel about immigration from the EU and immigration from outside the EU, from 2014 to the present, using the Eurobarometer survey (see Appendix II for survey and question details).⁴⁷ The bars around the trend lines in all Figures represent the 95 per cent confidence intervals surrounding the estimates of people's attitudes. Confidence intervals give a range of values above and below the trend line to express how certain we can be in the estimates of people's attitudes. The actual level of people's attitudes is posited to lie somewhere between the upper and lower endpoints of the confidence intervals.

In Ireland, attitudes towards EU immigration and non-EU immigration have both become more positive since 2014, although there has been a slight decline more recently. The proportion of people reporting being positive about either form of immigration was at least 15 percentage points higher by the end of 2023 than in 2014. However in recent years (comparing 2020 with 2023), there has been some decline in Irish attitudes towards immigration.

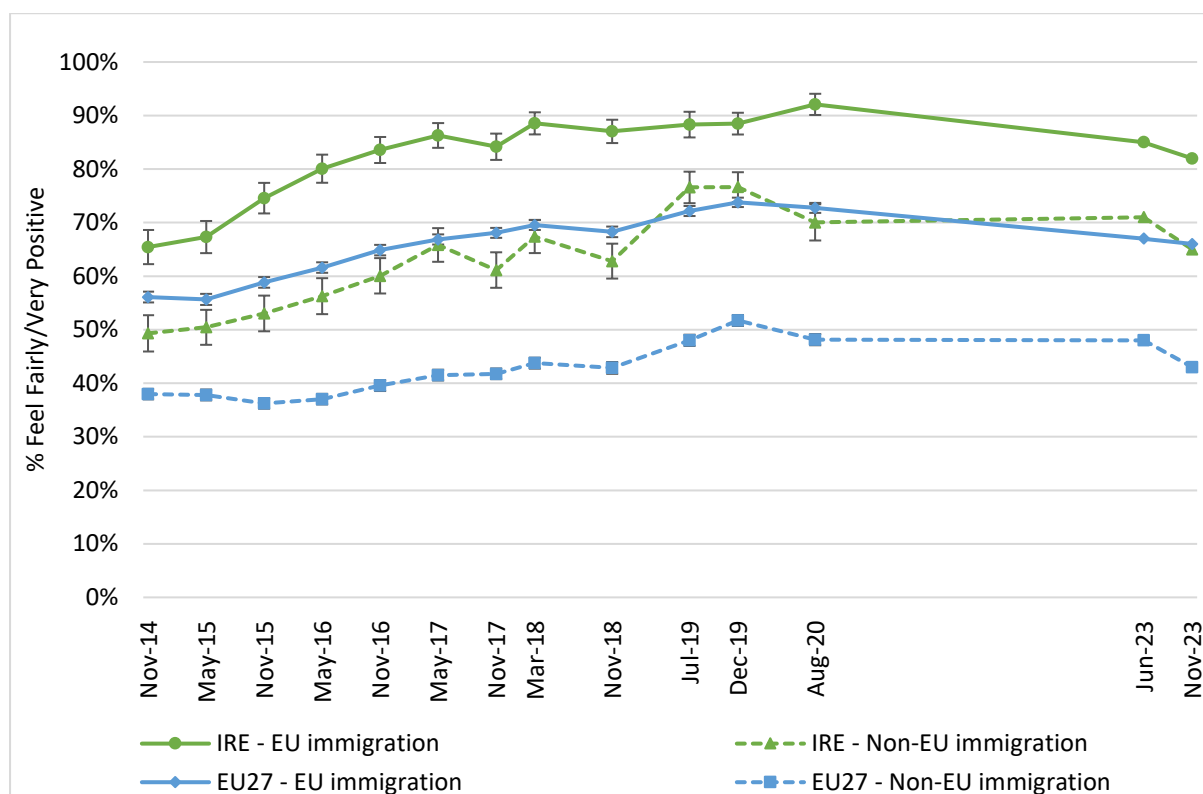
For EU immigration, positive feelings decreased by 7 percentage points over a three-year period, from a high of 92 per cent in August 2020 to 85 per cent in June 2023. Positivity then decreased by a further 3 percentage points, to 82 per cent, by November 2023. For immigration from non-EU countries, attitudes declined over

⁴⁶ Sensitivity analysis suggests that foreign nationals in Ireland are very slightly more positive about immigration and the salience of immigration is slightly lower for them than for Irish nationals, but the proportion of non-Irish does not vary very much over the time period. Foreign nationals cannot be identified for the final two time-points so, to keep the sample consistent, the full sample is used throughout the chapter.

⁴⁷ The specific questions were: 'Please say whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you?' (a) '...Immigration of people from other EU Member States'; (b) '...Immigration of people from outside the EU'.

the eight-month period between 2019 and 2020, but then remained stable over the three-year period between August 2020 and June 2023, with between 70 and 71 per cent of people holding positive views (although attitudes may have fluctuated within this three-year period given estimates are based on only two time-points). However, since then, positivity towards non-EU immigration has decreased, declining by 6 percentage points over the five months between June and November 2023. Declines in attitudes around this magnitude over a similar five- to six-month period have been seen in previous years in Ireland, such as between May 2017 and November 2017, before attitudes improved again. Similarly, attitudes towards non-EU immigration declined by 6 percentage points from December 2019 to August 2020, before stabilising. So the recent trend may be a temporary fluctuation.

FIGURE 2.1 TRENDS IN POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS EU AND NON-EU IMMIGRATION; IRELAND AND THE EU27 AVERAGE (2014-2023)



Source: Eurobarometer 2014-2023.

Notes: Weights adjust for countries' population size. Bars around estimates show 95 per cent confidence intervals. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data for August 2020 (EB 93.1) were collected via an online questionnaire (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing – CAWI) in Ireland, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg and the UK. All other data-points are collected via face-to-face interviewing. As the microdata are not yet available, 2023 estimates are based on statistics from the Eurobarometer report and do not include confidence intervals. There were no surveys fielded between August 2020 and June 2023 which posed these questions. From 2014-2020, the EU27 sample contains UK and does not contain Croatia. In 2023, the EU27 sample contains Croatia but not the UK. Testing showed this is unlikely to significantly shift the EU27 average scores.

Taking these recent declines in positivity into account, by November 2023, positivity towards non-EU immigration was at its lowest level since 2018, while positivity towards EU immigration was at its lowest level since June 2016.

Figure 2.1 also demonstrates that people in Ireland are generally more positive towards immigration from other EU Member States than from outside the EU.

Figure 2.1 also puts Irish attitudes in the context of average attitudes across the EU27.⁴⁸ Firstly, in November 2023, people in Ireland are more positive towards EU immigration (16 percentage points higher) and non-EU immigration (22 percentage points higher) than people across the EU27. Secondly, while people across the EU27 are also more positive about EU immigration compared to non-EU immigration, this gap is larger across the EU27 than it is in Ireland; across the entire period (2014-2023) the difference in positivity between EU and non-EU immigration in Ireland is 19 percentage points, while it is 24 percentage points across the EU27. Thirdly, while attitudes towards immigration have also improved over the past nine years across the EU27, this improvement has been faster in Ireland, even accounting for the recent declines in positivity. Lastly, Figure 2.1 also shows recent dips in the 2020 to 2023 period in positivity towards EU and non-EU immigration across the EU27 as well, suggesting the dips observed in Ireland are not necessarily unique to the Irish case. This similarity is particularly pronounced in the 2023 period. The 6 percentage-point decline in positivity towards non-EU immigration in Ireland between June and November 2023 is mirrored by an identical 6 percentage-point decline across the EU27 countries. Similarly, while Ireland saw a 3-percentage decline in positivity towards EU immigration over the same period, the EU27 average declined by 1 percentage point.

2.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS HELPING REFUGEES AND PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION OF IMMIGRATION

Figure 2.2 examines trends in attitudes towards helping refugees and people's views on whether 'immigrants contribute a lot to their country', in both Ireland and across the EU27 as a whole.⁴⁹ This provides insights into people's views on a particular type of immigrant group – refugees – as well as an overall sense of whether people think immigration is good for their country. The data on views on

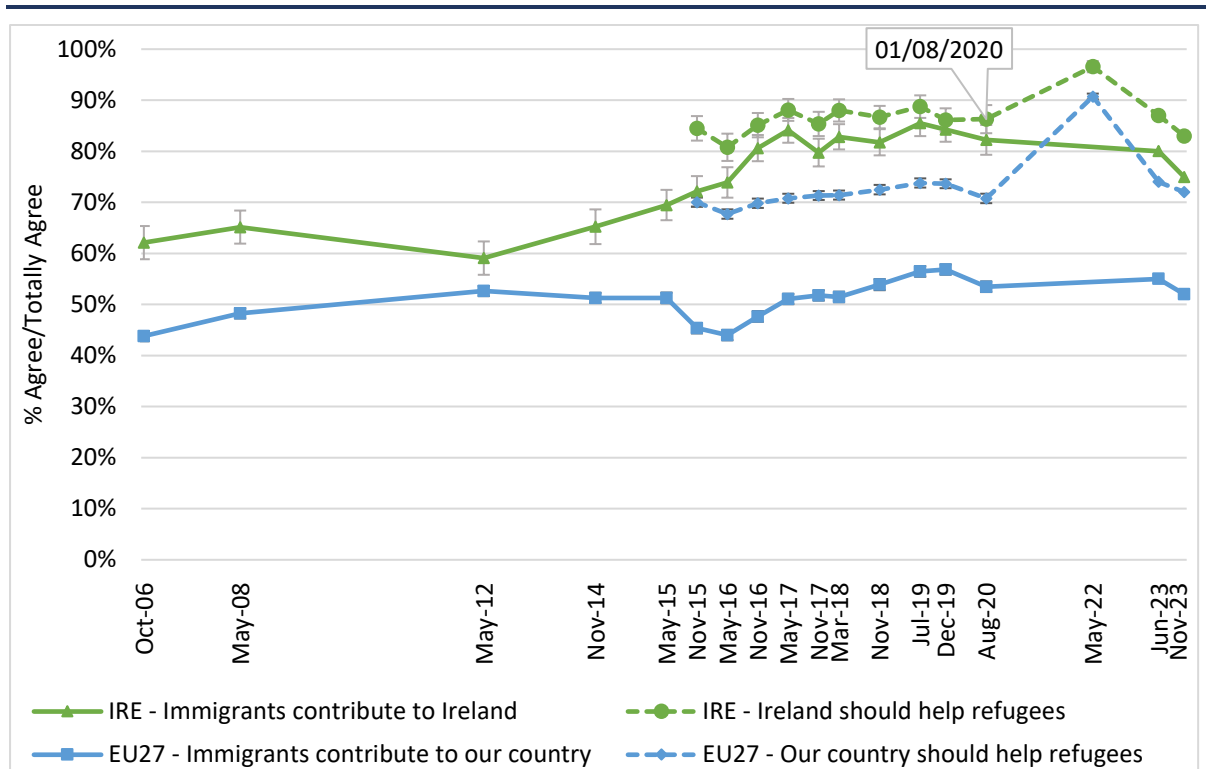
⁴⁸ From 2014-2020, the EU27 sample contains the UK and does not contain Croatia. As the 2023 Eurobarometer microdata are not yet available for analysis, we rely on the statistics released prior to the microdata. These use a definition of the EU27 in 2023 as containing Croatia but excluding the UK (where prior definitions included the UK). Where data are available in 2023 for both countries (using a different measure of immigration attitudes), it is noted that 45 per cent of people in Croatia 'agree immigrants contribute a lot' to their country while 74 per cent of people in the UK 'agree'. This compares to an EU27 average of 55 per cent of people 'agreeing' 'immigrants contribute a lot' to their country. Given the UK has more positive attitudes towards immigration than the EU27 average, and Croatia has less positive attitudes, then this change in 2023 may result in a somewhat lower average level of immigration attitudes in 2023 relative to previous years. However, when we analysed trends in EU attitudes over the entire period but excluded the UK, the change in trends is negligible from those reported. The change in 2023 is therefore unlikely to substantively shift the interpretation of the findings.

⁴⁹ The specific questions were: 'For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you totally agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or totally disagree...' (a) 'Immigrants contribute positively to (OUR COUNTRY)'; (b) '(OUR COUNTRY) should help refugees' (where a respondent's country was inserted).

whether immigrants contribute to their country reach back to 2006, providing a wider historical context for understanding current attitudes.

In Ireland, between 2006 and 2012, around 60 to 65 per cent of people agreed that ‘immigrants contribute a lot to Ireland’ (solid green line). Attitudes were somewhat more positive just at the start of the recession, in 2008 compared to 2006, but had dipped again by 2012 as the recession continued. From 2012, attitudes steadily improved up to 2016, with the proportion of people agreeing ‘immigrants contribute a lot to Ireland’ being 20 percentage points higher. From 2017 onwards, attitudes remained generally stable, with just over 80 per cent of people agreeing immigrants contribute a lot to Ireland. However, between June and November 2023, there has been a significant decline in attitudes towards the contribution of immigrants, with the proportion of people agreeing that immigrants contribute a lot to Ireland declining by 5 percentage points, to 75 per cent. Attitudes towards immigrants’ contribution to Ireland are therefore now at their lowest point since 2016.

FIGURE 2.2 TRENDS IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES (2015-2023) AND WHETHER IMMIGRATION CONTRIBUTES A LOT TO ONE’S COUNTRY (2006-2023); IRELAND AND THE EU27 AVERAGE



Source: Eurobarometer 2006-2023.

Notes: Weights adjust for countries' population size. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data for August 2020 (EB 93.1) were collected via an online questionnaire (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing – CAWI) in Ireland, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg and the UK. In May 2022 (EB 97.3), face-to-face interviewing was supplemented by CAWI interviewing in Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden to boost sample size (see EB 97.3 technical specification for rates). All other data-points are collected via face-to-face interviewing.

Attitudes across the EU27 as a whole have remained lower and more stable than in Ireland (with 44-57 per cent of people agreeing immigrants contribute a lot to their country between 2006 and 2020). In fact, while attitudes were improving in Ireland, attitudes across the EU27 dipped in 2015, before recovering again in 2017. Between 2020 and June 2023, attitudes remained generally stable across the EU27. However, between June and November 2023, average attitudes also declined across the EU27, although this decline was somewhat smaller than in Ireland, with the proportion of people saying that immigrants contribute a lot to their country declining by 3 percentage points compared to a 5 percentage-point decline in Ireland.

Previous literature suggests people may draw a distinction between the benefits of immigration in general and their views on refugees in particular. In Ireland, since 2015, attitudes towards whether ‘Ireland should help refugees’ (dashed green line) have remained high, with between 80 and 90 per cent of people agreeing they should help, with a significant bump in support in 2022. This bump in support, which was no longer present in the 2023 surveys, may indicate a temporary increase in support for refugees that is now waning. This may be a result of the war in Ukraine and resultant solidarity, and subsequent compassion fatigue (see Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024).⁵⁰ Subsequently, by June 2023, support for helping refugees returned to its pre-Ukraine war levels. However, between June and November 2023, support for helping refugees continued to decline by a further 4 percentage points, to 83 per cent of people agreeing that Ireland should help refugees, although this remains within the 80-90 per cent range of support evident since 2015.

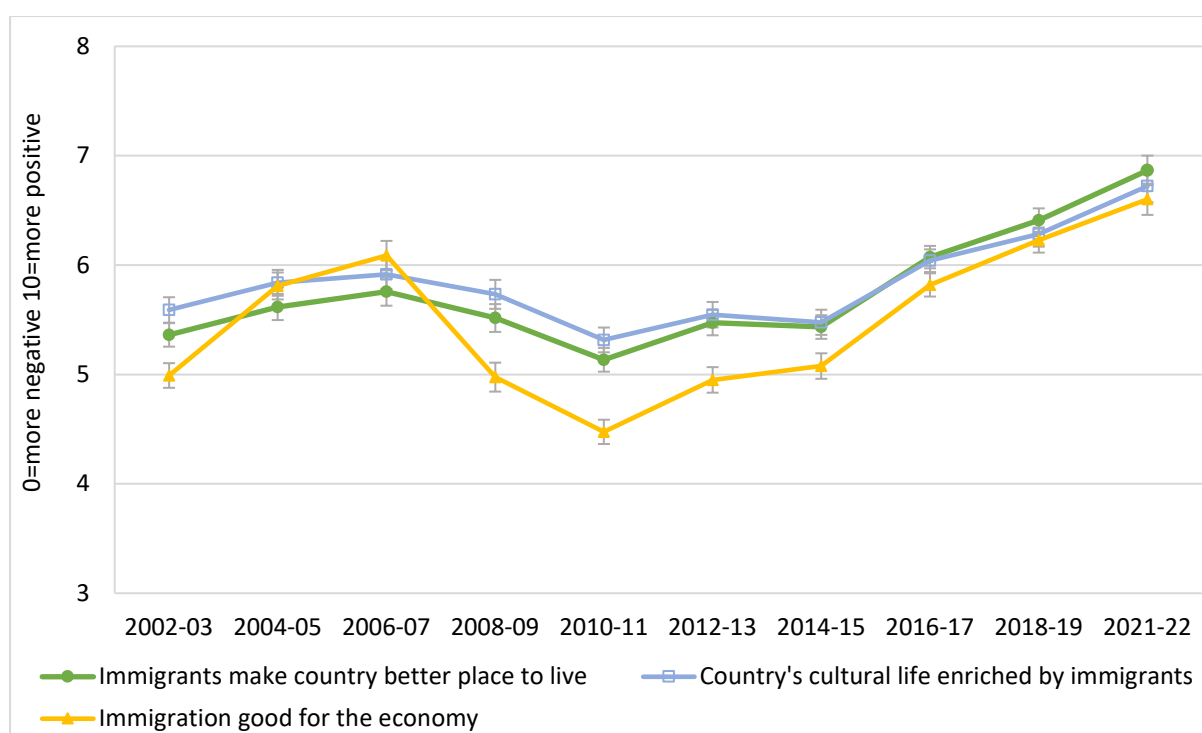
Across the EU27 as a whole (dashed blue line), support for helping refugees remained similarly stable between 2015 and 2020, although support is lower over the whole period than in Ireland. In 2022, EU27 support saw a similar bump and then dip into 2023, while also witnessing a further (albeit smaller) decrease in support for helping refugees between June and November 2023 (of 2 percentage points) than was seen in Ireland (a decline of 4 percentage points). However, despite this decline, EU27 attitudes towards refugees are still higher than at any point between 2015 and 2020.

⁵⁰ In addition, the 2022 survey contained many questions on the Ukraine war (e.g. how just the war is), potentially priming respondents to be more sympathetic to Ukrainian refugees. Furthermore, the question was not asked in this wave with questions on people’s feelings towards other aspects of immigration, as it normally is in other waves. This may again shape people’s responses.

2.3 ATTITUDES TOWARDS WHETHER IMMIGRATION IMPROVES COUNTRY, CULTURAL LIFE, THE ECONOMY

As discussed in Chapter 1, research suggests that one of the key drivers of people's general attitudes towards immigration is what impact they feel immigration has on their society; for example, whether they feel their society's culture/identity or economic situation are threatened by immigration.⁵¹ Trends in these attitudes in Ireland can be explored using the European Social Survey. A limitation of these data is that the latest time-point is 2021-2022. However, the survey was conducted biennially from 2002 onwards, which provides a broader historical perspective of how attitudes towards immigration in Ireland have changed over time.

FIGURE 2.3 TRENDS IN ATTITUDES ON HOW PEOPLE FEEL IMMIGRANTS IMPACT IRELAND (2002-2022)



Source: European Social Survey 2002-2022.

Notes: Weighted to be representative. All Irish data in each round were collected via face-to-face interviewing. Round 10 (2021 to 2022) of data were collected: 11/2021 to 12/2022.

Figure 2.3 shows people's views on whether they think 'immigrants make the country a better place to live', their 'country's cultural life is enriched by immigrants', and whether 'immigration is good for the economy' in Ireland. Several key take-aways emerge. Recent attitudes on how immigration impacts society

⁵¹ Specific questions were: (a) 'Would you say it is generally bad or good for Ireland's economy that people come to live here from other countries?' (0 = 'Bad for the economy' to 10 = 'Good for the economy'); (b) 'Would you say that Ireland's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?' (0 = 'Cultural life undermined' to 10 = 'Cultural life enriched'); (c) 'Is Ireland made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?' (0 = 'Worse place to live' to 10 = 'Better place to live').

were more positive in 2021-2022 than at any point over the last two decades. In line with the attitudes explored above, these views have also been steadily improving since 2012-2013. However, there have also been periods in the past where attitudes towards immigration have declined. Around the onset of the 2008 recession, attitudes started to become more negative and continued to worsen into 2010-2011, before improving again as the economy began to improve. Interestingly, the largest decline occurred in people's views that immigration was good for the economy, while their views of immigration's impact on making their country a better place to live or their country's cultural life remained somewhat more stable. This suggests a potentially strong link between the economy and people's views on immigration in Ireland, as had been found in previous research in Ireland using European Social Survey data (McGinnity and Kingston, 2017; McGinnity et al., 2018; Creighton et al., 2022b; see also Chapter 1).

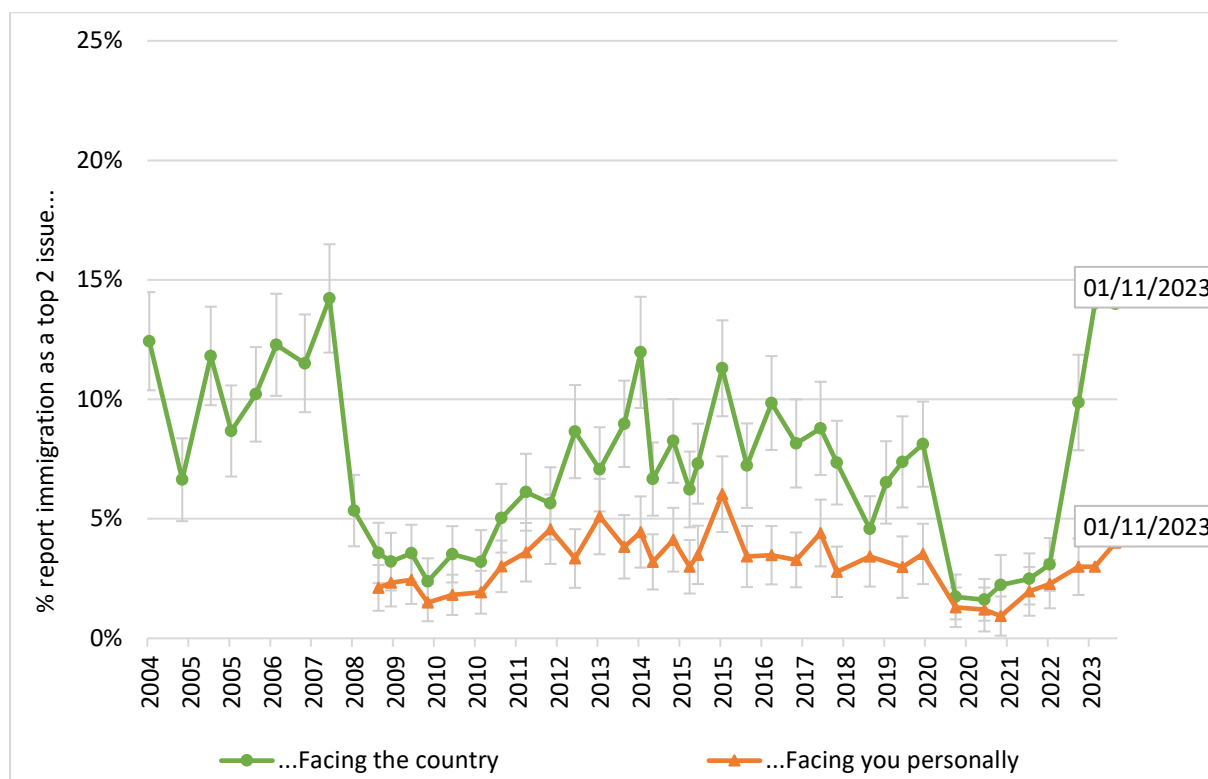
2.4 SALIENCE OF IMMIGRATION: IMMIGRATION AS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING THE COUNTRY AND PEOPLE PERSONALLY

The attitudes towards immigration explored above provide insights into what the general public think and feel about immigration, its impacts on their society, and how supportive they are of it. However, another dimension of public opinion on immigration is the degree to which individuals feel immigration is an important policy and political issue in their lives and country; that is, the salience of immigration, relative to other political issues (Dennison, 2019). Salience has potential impacts on attitudes, in particular combined with other factors, as discussed in Section 1.4.

To examine trends in the salience of immigration we use two survey questions from the Eurobarometer. Firstly, people were asked: 'What do you think are the two most important issues facing Ireland at the moment?' They were given a list of issues, such as health, housing, the economy, cost-of-living, pensions, etc. (see Appendix I for full details).⁵² One option on the list was immigration. This question can explore how salient people feel the issue of immigration is for their society as a whole. Secondly, people were asked: '...and personally, what are the two most important issues you are facing at the moment?' They were given the same list of issues to choose from, one of which was again immigration. This question can explore how salient people feel the issue of immigration is to their everyday lives. Importantly, people can only choose two options from the list of issues. Therefore, these questions do not measure whether immigration is important to someone at all but whether it is one of the most important issues, relative to other issues.

⁵² The full list of options is crime, the economic situation, public transport, rising prices/inflation, taxation, unemployment, terrorism, defence/foreign affairs, housing, immigration, the healthcare system, the education system, pensions, environmental protection, other and don't know. There were two significant changes to the offered list: from September 2006 public transport was replaced by energy-related issues, and from May 2012 defence/foreign affairs was replaced by public debt (Hatton, 2021).

FIGURE 2.4 TRENDS IN THE PROPORTION IN IRELAND WHO REPORT IMMIGRATION AS ONE OF THE TOP TWO ISSUES FACING: (1) THEIR COUNTRY; AND (2) THEM PERSONALLY (2004-2023)



Source: Eurobarometer 2004-2023.

Notes: Weighted to be representative. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data for August 2020 (EB 93.1), March 2021 (EB 94.3), and July 2021 (EB 95.3) were collected via an online questionnaire (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing – CAWI) in Ireland.

Figure 2.4 shows trends in the proportion of people in Ireland who chose immigration as one of the top two issues ‘facing Ireland’ and ‘facing them personally’. Looking first at issues facing people personally, since 2008, immigration has remained very low on the list of people’s most important issues, with never more than 6 per cent of people including it in their top two issues. Since 2021, there has been a steady increase in the proportion reporting immigration as one of the top two most important issues – from 1 per cent in July 2021 to 4 per cent in November 2023. However, this increase has simply returned Ireland to close to its pre-pandemic level, and it remains quite low. In November 2023, compared to the proportion of people stating immigration is one of the two most important issues for them personally, 63 per cent said inflation/rising prices/cost-of-living was one of the two most important issues facing them personally, 23 per cent said health, and 17 per cent said the financial situation of their household.

Turning to the most important issues people believe are facing Ireland, a different pattern emerges. In particular, there does appear to be a recent, significant shift in how salient people feel the issue of immigration is for society as a whole. Between

July 2022 and June 2023, there was a substantial increase in the proportion stating immigration is one of the top two issues facing Ireland, rising from 3 per cent to 14 per cent, and this stabilised at 14 per cent between June 2023 and November 2023. Part of this appears to be a return to pre-pandemic levels of immigration salience, which had dropped precipitously around the onset of the pandemic, from 8 per cent in December 2019 to 1 per cent in August 2020. However, by June 2023, the proportion choosing immigration as one of the most important issues facing Ireland (14 per cent) had exceeded this pre-pandemic level (8 per cent). The only other time the level was this high was November 2007, just before the recession. In November 2023, compared to those reporting immigration as one of the top two most important issues facing Ireland, 56 per cent said housing, 55 per cent said inflation/rising prices/cost-of-living, and 23 per cent said health. This makes immigration, at 14 per cent, the fourth most common issue reported as the most important issues facing Ireland.⁵³

Levels of immigration salience in Ireland were similar to levels in the EU as a whole in June 2023 (with 14 per cent of people in the EU reporting immigration being one of the top two issues facing their country). However, by November 2023, salience was lower in Ireland than in the EU27. The highest recorded level over the past 20 years across the EU27 was 36 per cent in November 2015 at the peak of high refugee inflows driven by the war in Syria.⁵⁴

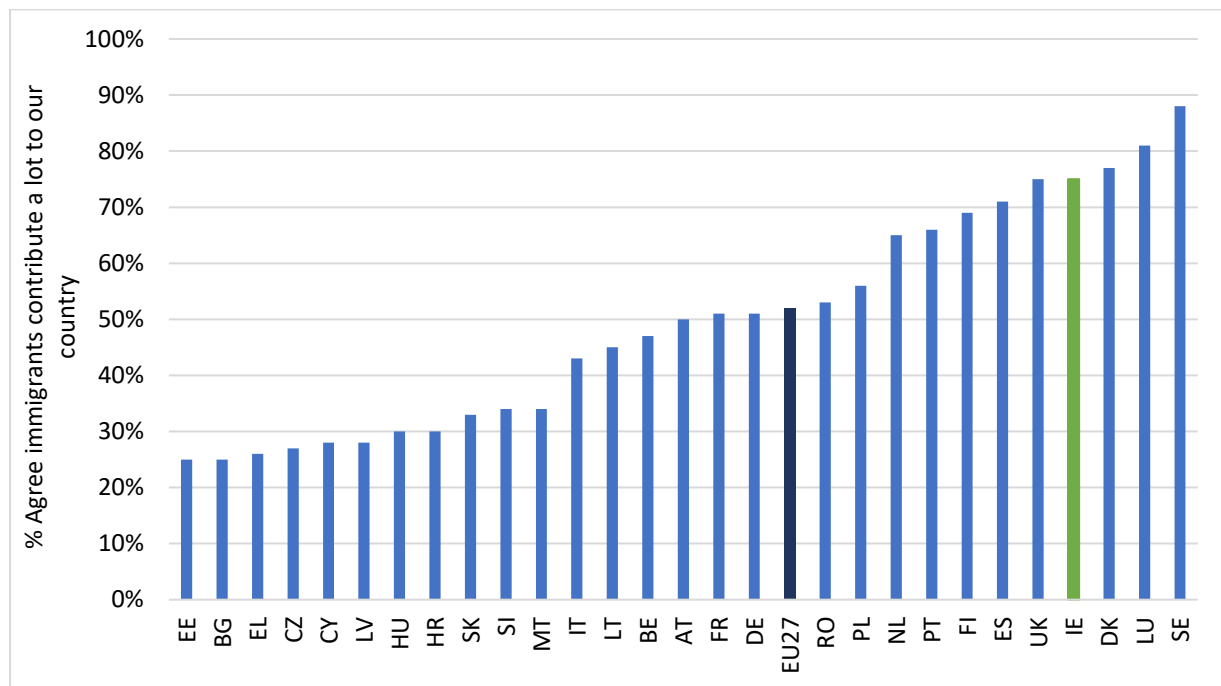
2.5 COMPARISON OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION ACROSS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Greater insight into what Ireland's attitudes towards immigration mean substantively can be found by comparing them to other countries. Figure 2.5 puts Ireland's attitudes towards immigration in a comparative perspective with other European countries, showing the proportion of people who agree that immigrants contribute a lot to 'our country'. In November 2023, Ireland had some of the most positive views of immigration across Europe. The proportion of people with positive views in Ireland was also 23 percentage points higher than the average level across the EU27.

⁵³ The survey also asks respondents in Ireland about salience of immigration for the EU. In 2015, almost half of respondents in Ireland said immigration was one of the top two issues facing the EU. This proportion fell considerably up to 2018, to just under 30 per cent and fell further during the pandemic, though by 2023, around one-third of respondents in Ireland said immigration was one of the top two issues facing the EU. This means that a greater proportion of respondents in Ireland believe immigration is one of the top two issues facing the EU (25 per cent in November 2023) than one of the top two issues facing Ireland (14 per cent in November 2023).

⁵⁴ In 2015, 1.32 million asylum applications were lodged in the EU, representing an increase of 110 per cent on 2014 (Arnold et al., 2018). The flow of displaced persons to Ireland in this period was much lower than in many EU Member States (*ibid.*).

FIGURE 2.5 COMPARISON ACROSS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES OF PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON WHETHER IMMIGRATION CONTRIBUTES A LOT TO THEIR COUNTRY (NOVEMBER 2023)



Source: Eurobarometer, 2023.

Notes: Weights adjust for countries' population size.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored how attitudes towards immigration have changed over time in Ireland. Two key take-aways emerge from this analysis. Firstly, in recent years, attitudes towards various aspects of immigration and immigration policy have remained positive in Ireland, in both a historical and cross-national European context. Indeed, people in Ireland have been more positive about immigration across the entire study period, compared to average immigration attitudes across the EU27 as a whole. Ireland also saw larger improvements in attitudes towards immigration in recent years than across the EU27, widening this gap. By November 2023, Ireland had some of the most positive attitudes towards immigration across all European countries. People in Ireland, as across the EU27, feel more positive about EU immigration than non-EU immigration. However, this difference in attitudes is smaller in Ireland than across the EU27 as a whole.

The second key take-away, however, is that there is evidence that Irish attitudes towards immigration have seen recent declines, especially in the latter half of 2023. Between June and November 2023, positivity towards EU, and especially non-EU, immigration, support for helping refugees, and a belief that immigrants contribute to Ireland have become more negative. On one hand, this marks a negative change from the improving and stable/high attitudes towards immigration observed over the past ten years or so. However, on the other hand,

these declines are relatively small and there have also been similarly sized declines over short periods in the past ten-year period, before attitudes improved again. It is therefore too early to say whether this downward trend will continue, whether it will reverse, or whether it will plateau. In addition, the declines in Ireland in the latter half of 2023 are also mirrored by similar declines across the EU27, suggesting the recent downturn in attitudes is not solely an Irish phenomenon.

While Irish attitudes towards immigration have seen some small declines in 2023, there have been more marked changes in how salient the issue of immigration has become. In line with international literature which has found that attitudes towards immigration are based on sociotropic concerns (i.e. relating to the country as a whole) rather than personal concerns (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), immigration remains very low on the list of the most important issues facing people 'personally' in Ireland. However, over the past year, there has been a sharp rise in the proportion of people who say immigration is one of the top two most important issues facing 'Ireland', from 3 per cent in June 2022 to 14 per cent in June 2023. This salience remained relatively high and stable into November 2023, holding at 14 per cent. This suggests immigration is becoming increasingly salient to people as a national issue in Ireland. This is also one aspect of people's immigration attitudes where Ireland is now more similar to the EU27 as a whole, although it still remains lower following a spike in EU27 salience between June and November 2023.

Previous literature has found links between salience and worsening attitudes, particularly when combined with other factors such as neighbourhood diversity or economic hardship (Hopkins 2010; 2011; Paul and Fitzgerald, 2021). While the scale of increase in salience does not seem to directly translate into a similar scale of negative attitudes, the decrease in attitudes in 2023 may indicate that salience (among other factors) is affecting attitudes (although we have not conducted a causal analysis to assess this relationship).

This chapter showed that there have been periods where immigration attitudes have worsened in Ireland in the past. These trends appeared to suggest that attitudes towards immigration in Ireland are closely linked to the economy. Immigration attitudes dipped around the onset of the 2008/09 recession, and worsened as Ireland's economic problems continued, before recovering again around the time the economy began to improve. In addition, it was people's feelings towards how immigrants impact the economy that saw the largest declines and recovery over this period. This is in contrast with the mixed results about economic factors affecting immigration attitudes internationally (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). However, this might be explained by the nature, depth and persistence of the 2008 recession in Ireland. Recent research (Laurence et al., 2023) also indicates that the 2008 recession led to a significant decrease in

a wide range of social and political attitudes in Ireland, with satisfaction with democracy, political trust, media trust, trust in other people and optimism all seeing large decreases, sometimes halving in the space of a year. This was likely not only due to economic conditions but also controversies about the Government's response to these conditions (for example the bailout of banks, austerity measures and public service cuts). This potentially adds nuance to the link between economic conditions and attitudes towards immigrants that has previously been found in Ireland, as many of these social attitudes are strongly linked with attitudes towards immigrants (Mitchell, 2021; Gusciute, 2020; McGinnity et al., 2023b).

CHAPTER 3

Do attitudes towards different immigrant groups differ?

This chapter will explore people's current attitudes towards immigration in Ireland. As discussed in Chapter 1, previous research has shown that people can hold different attitudes towards different aspects of immigration or towards different groups, which looking at overall attitudes to immigration or immigrants can hide. Previous literature has shown that attitudes towards immigrants themselves and immigration policy can be quite distinct, as can attitudes towards different groups of migrants (see Section 1.4.2).

These questions are crucial to understanding potential challenges for social cohesion and policy. For example, if overall attitudes towards immigration are positive because those asked about immigration think only of labour migrants, this could hide negative attitudes towards asylum seekers or refugees that could have serious consequences for integration or acceptance of these groups. It is therefore important for policy and research to understand how attitudes may differ between groups.

This chapter gives a broad overview of Irish attitudes across these different aspects of immigration and different immigrant groups. As well as trying to understand attitudes towards different aspects of immigration, it aims to understand how these attitudes relate to one another. For example, do people feel the same way about immigration in general as they do about supporting refugees, or do they differentiate between the two? Through this, we will begin to answer the research questions: do people's comfort levels towards Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers differ? And are attitudes towards asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees linked to wider attitudes towards immigration in Ireland, or do negative attitudes towards people seeking protection form a distinct cluster?

The chapter will be divided into two sections. Section 3.1 will assess general attitudes towards immigration and protection in Ireland. This includes: (a) how positive or negative people feel about immigration in general, and whether they feel differently about immigration from different countries; and (b) their views on helping people seeking protection, and whether their attitudes differ between asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees. Section 3.2 will then analyse people's comfort levels with different types of migrants in their everyday lives.

Data for this chapter are drawn from the 2023 Equality Attitudes Survey, so relate to Ireland only. This is a survey fielded in Spring 2023 which sought to elicit views

on a whole range of socially salient groups from a large representative sample of respondents in Ireland (DCEDIY, 2023).⁵⁵ The results reflect those of the entire sample, including respondents born outside Ireland. See Appendix I for more details about this survey.

3.1 ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION AND HELPING PEOPLE SEEKING PROTECTION

In this section, we look at both general attitudes towards immigration and attitudes towards helping people seeking protection.

To capture people's general attitudes towards immigration (Section 3.1.1) we draw on three survey questions measuring people's positive/negative feelings towards immigration from different countries. Respondents were asked how positive or negative they feel about: (a) immigration of people from other EU Member States; (b) immigration of people from the Ukraine; and (c) immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine.⁵⁶

To capture people's attitudes towards those seeking protection (Section 3.1.1) we draw on two measures: how far they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: (a) Ireland should help Ukrainian refugees; and (b) Ireland should help asylum seekers.⁵⁷

To better understand whether these attitudes are distinct or if they are largely part of the same attitude, we then conduct a factor analysis to understand the relationship between people's attitudes to immigration and their attitudes towards people seeking protection (Section 3.1.2).

3.1.1 Levels of positivity about immigration and support for helping people seeking international protection

Looking first at people's positive feelings towards immigration, Figure 3.1 shows the proportion of people who responded feeling (fairly/very) positive about immigration from different countries. People are, on average, most positive about

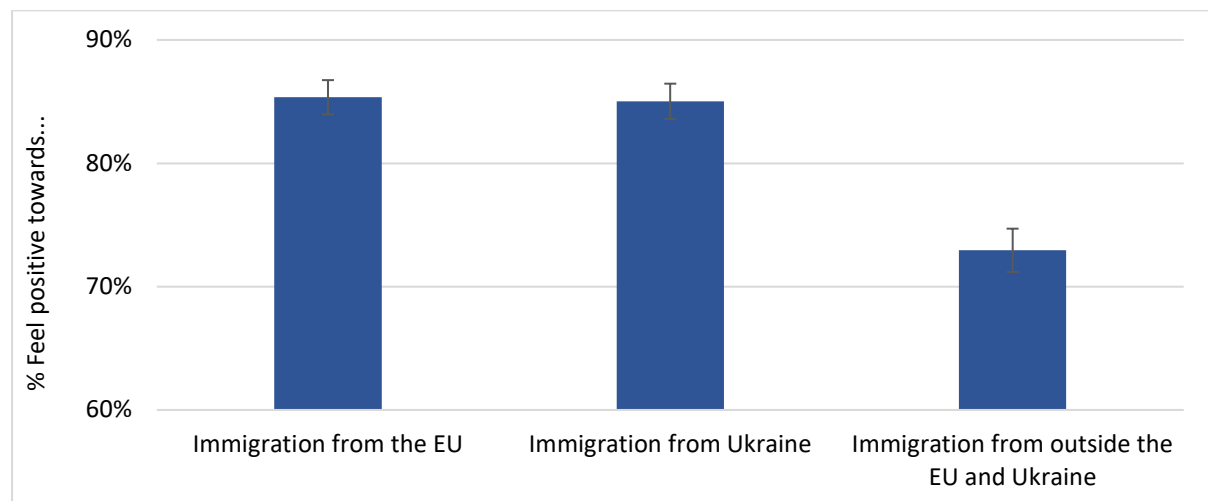
⁵⁵ The main social distance questions included 46 groups in total, with the primary focus on grounds covered by Equality legislation in Ireland.

⁵⁶ The specific questions were: 'For each of the following, please tell me if you are very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative? So how positive or negative are you ...?' (a) 'About immigration of people from other EU Member States', (b) 'About immigration of people from the Ukraine', and (c) 'About immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine'.

⁵⁷ The specific questions were: 'For each of the following statements, please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or disagree strongly?' (a) 'Ireland should help Ukrainian refugees', and (b) 'Ireland should help asylum seekers'.

immigration from the EU and from Ukraine, with 85 per cent responding positively to these forms of immigration. However, they are somewhat less positive about immigration from outside the EU or Ukraine (73 per cent).

FIGURE 3.1 ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION FROM THE EU, UKRAINE, AND FROM OUTSIDE THE EU OR UKRAINE (2023)

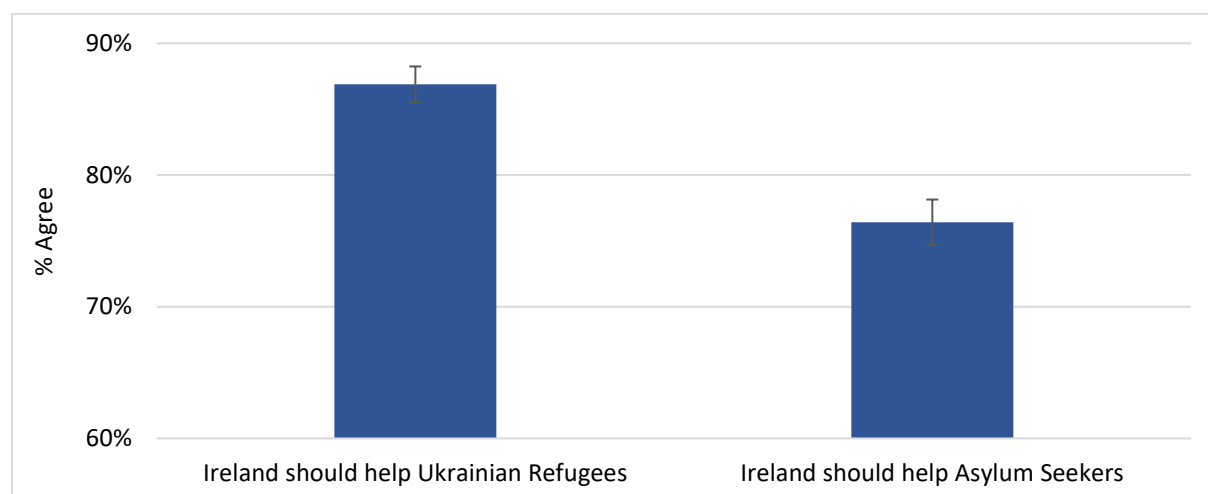


Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Note: N=3,008.

Figure 3.2 next looks at people's support for helping those seeking protection. More than three-quarters of people in Ireland agree or strongly agree that Ireland should help both Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers. However, more people are supportive of helping Ukrainian refugees (87 per cent) compared to helping asylum seekers (76 per cent).

FIGURE 3.2 ATTITUDES TOWARDS HELPING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS (2023)



Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023, weighted.

Note: N=3,008.

3.1.2 Relationship between positivity towards immigration and support for helping people seeking international protection

It may be the case that people do not discern between different types of immigration. Instead, when they feel positive (or negative) towards immigration in general they may also feel it is important to help (or not) those seeking international protection. To examine this possibility, factor analysis is undertaken of our five measures of people's attitudes towards immigration (Table 3.1). Factor analysis is a statistical method which can test whether people's positivity towards immigration and support for protection seekers capture a single, underlying attitude towards all forms of immigration. Factor loadings above 0.4 *within* the same factor (e.g. Factor 1, Factor 2) suggest the attitudes are closely related to one another.

Table 3.1 demonstrates that individuals hold two distinct sets of attitudes. The first (Factor 1) is that people have an underlying feeling of positivity/negativity towards immigration in general, where if someone is positive about one form of immigration (e.g. EU migration) then they are generally positive about all other forms of immigration (e.g. Ukrainian, or from outside the EU). Table 3.1 also shows that people have a separate, underlying feeling that one should/should not support all groups seeking international protection (Factor 2), where if someone is supportive of helping Ukrainian refugees, they are generally more supportive of helping asylum seekers as well. Therefore, individuals discern between their attitudes towards immigration in general and their support for protection seekers.

TABLE 3.1 INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION AND HELPING THOSE SEEKING INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

	Factor 1	Factor 2
	Factor Loadings	
Positivity towards EU immigration	0.76	0.03
Positivity towards non-EU/non-Ukraine immigration	0.64	0.08
Positivity towards Ukraine immigration	0.65	0.24
Ireland should help Ukrainian Refugees	0.08	0.73
Ireland should help Asylum Seekers	0.1	0.63

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Notes: Factor analysis with *Promax* rotation. N=3,008.

While people do discern between immigration in general and whether Ireland should help migrants seeking protection, the two sets of attitudes are related. Table 3.2 shows how people's positivity towards immigration is related to their support for helping those seeking protection. Being supportive of helping those seeking protection is strongly linked to positive attitudes towards immigration in general: among those who 'agree' Ireland should help people seeking protection,

91 per cent are ‘positive’ about immigration in general and only 6 per cent are ‘negative’. However, not being in favour of helping protection seekers is less strongly linked to people’s general immigration attitudes: among those who ‘disagree’ Ireland should help protection seekers, although 62 per cent also feel ‘negative’ about immigration in general, 28 per cent still have ‘positive’ feelings towards immigration. Similarly, nearly 60 per cent of those who are ‘not sure’ if Ireland should help protection seekers are still ‘positive’ about immigration in general. This demonstrates how people can still be positive about immigration in general while being averse to, or unsure about, helping people seeking protection.

TABLE 3.2 CROSS-TABULATION OF AVERAGE POSITIVITY TOWARDS IMMIGRATION AND AVERAGE AGREEMENT INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION SEEKERS SHOULD BE HELPED

		Average support for helping Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers		
		Disagree	Not sure	Agree
Average feelings towards EU, Ukrainian, and non-EU/non-Ukrainian immigration	Negative	62.4	25.4	6.2
	Not sure	10	11.9	2.8
	Positive	27.6	62.7	91
	Total N	188	233	2,587

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Note: Weighted percentages, N unweighted. Positivity towards immigration measures were coded (1=very negative; 2=fairly negative; 3=not sure; 4=fairly positive; 5=very positive). Help for protection seekers measures were coded (1=disagree strongly; 2=disagree; 3=neither/not sure; 4=agree; 5=agree strongly). For the ‘average positivity towards immigration’ measure, average scores of below 3 were coded as negative. Average scores of 3 were coded as not sure; average scores above 3 were coded as positive. For the ‘agreement that protection seekers should be helped’ measure, average scores of below 3 were coded as disagree. Average scores of 3 were coded as not sure; average scores above 3 were coded as agree.

3.2 COMFORT WITH DIFFERENT MIGRANT GROUPS

In line with international literature that suggests that people can have quite distinct attitudes to immigration and towards migrants themselves, we now turn to analysing people’s comfort with migrants, and different groups of migrants.

How comfortable people feel having migrants in different domains of their everyday life is closely related to the concept of ‘social distance’, which measures one’s willingness to have social contact with members from a specified group of ‘others’, where a smaller social distance is believed to indicate greater sympathy and empathy towards a group (Bogardus, 1933). As people can feel different levels of ‘social distance’ towards different groups, breaking this analysis down into different groups is important.

To measure this dimension of immigration attitudes we draw on questions in the Equality Attitudes Survey which asks respondents to report, on a scale of 1 (‘very uncomfortable’) to 10 (‘very comfortable’), how comfortable they are with 46 different social groups (DCEDIY, 2023). A number of these groups were migrants,

with various categories specified. We selected five migrant groups, exploring how comfortable people are with a person who is: 'from Eastern Europe'; 'another EU country'; 'Indian'; 'a Ukrainian Refugee'; and 'an asylum seeker'. These groups were selected from various nationality groups because they represent key migrant groups in Ireland, and represent migrant groups that are European (from Eastern Europe, another EU country); non-EU but predominantly labour migrants (Indian) and people seeking protection (Ukrainian refugee and asylum seeker). No further definitions of the groups were given in the survey, meaning that individuals could interpret the category as they wished.

As there is no question asking specifically about non-EU migrants, we use 'Indian' as a proxy for non-EU labour migrants, with Indians receiving more work permits than any other nationality over the last five years.⁵⁸

Respondents were asked to report on how comfortable they were with having a member of these groups in three intimate domains of their lives: (a) 'living next door/in the nearest house to where you live';⁵⁹ (b) 'if one of your children was in/is in a relationship' with a member of that group;⁶⁰ and (c) if *(a child from that group)* were in the same class as your child'.⁶¹ Where respondents did not have any children, they were asked to imagine that they did.

Importantly, this social distance component of people's attitudes towards immigrants is only weakly to moderately related to people's positivity towards immigration in general (with correlations between $r=.29$ for comfort with Europeans and $r=.39$ for comfort with Ukrainian refugees).⁶² It is also weakly to moderately correlated with whether people 'agree' Ireland should help those

⁵⁸ See EMN Ireland Annual Reports on Migration and Asylum: Ireland 2018-2022: <https://emn.ie/annual-policy-reports-on-migration-and-asylum/>. We compare mean social distance across all three domains for Indians (9.07) with other non-EU groups. For Brazilians the value is the same as for Indians (9.07); for Moroccans it is slightly lower (8.88) and Nigerians lower still (8.83). We prefer to use Indians as this national group is numerous and not associated with protection seeking in Ireland, but this does suggest there may be some ethnic and religious prejudice playing a role in social distance. The survey did not ask about people from the UK or the US.

⁵⁹ The specific question was: 'The next question is about how uncomfortable or comfortable you would feel if any of the following people were living next door to you/in the nearest house to where you live. For each type of person I read out, please tell me how comfortable on a scale from 1 to 10 where '1' is 'very uncomfortable' and '10' is 'very comfortable?' So out of 10, how comfortable would you be if a ... was living next door/in the nearest house to where you live? Please score 1 to 10 for each.'

⁶⁰ The specific question was: 'This time please tell me, how uncomfortable or comfortable you would feel if one of your children was in a love relationship with a person from one of the following groups. Using the same scale of '1' means that you would feel 'very uncomfortable' and '10' that you would feel 'very comfortable'. So out of 10, how comfortable would you be if one of your children was in/are in a relationship with ...? (Prompt if required – if respondent does not have children, ask them to imagine or assume they have children).'

⁶¹ The specific question was: 'And this time, using the same 1 to 10 scale, can you indicate how comfortable you would feel if the following children were in the same class as your child? (Prompt if required – if respondent does not have children, ask them to assume/imagine that they have school-aged children to answer this question)'.⁶²

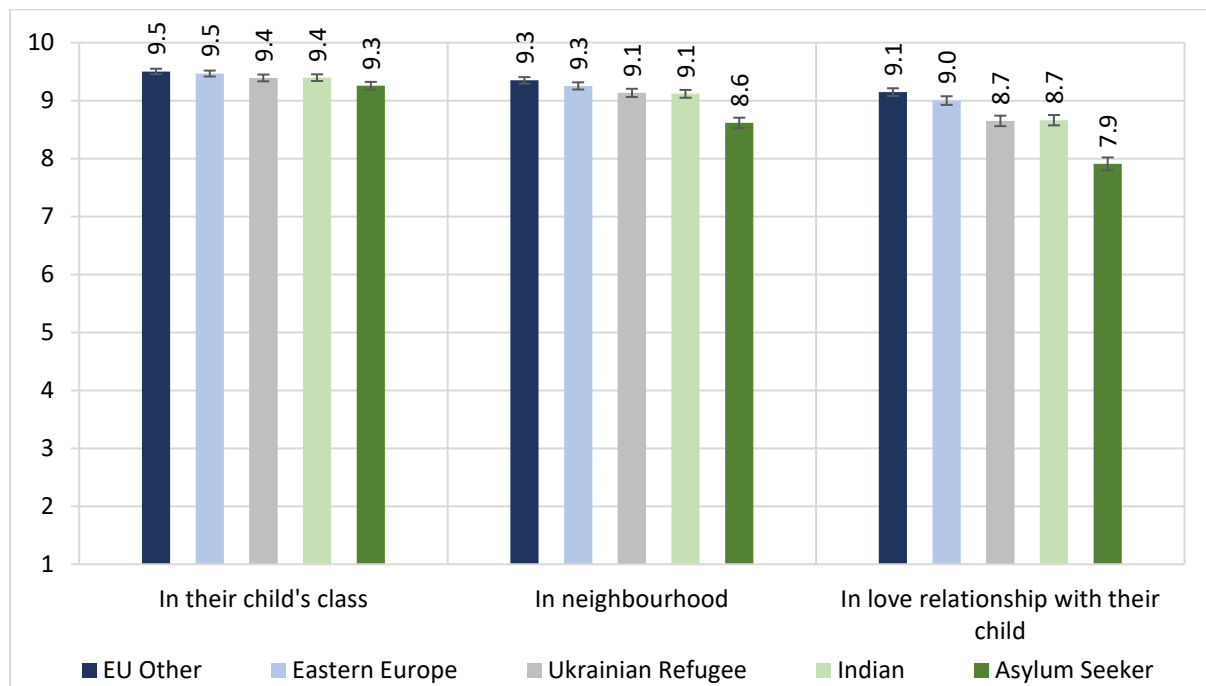
⁶² R refers to the correlation coefficient which quantifies the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables. Correlations can range from -1 (indicating a linear negative relationship) to 1 (indicating a perfectly positive linear relationship), while a correlation of 0 indicates no relationship.

seeking protection (with correlations between $r=.27$ and $r=.29$ for comfort with Europeans/Indians, although somewhat stronger correlations for comfort with Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers of $r=.43$). This raises two key points. Firstly, that people's comfort levels with migrant groups are related to their attitudes towards immigration in general but also, given the weak to moderate correlation, that comfort with migrants forms another distinct dimension of how people feel about immigration. Secondly, it suggests people's comfort towards migrants seeking protection are more closely linked to their attitudes towards immigration in general than their comfort towards EU or economic migrants. These findings are in line with findings from the literature that attitudes towards immigrants themselves (i.e. people who are already in the country) and attitudes towards immigration in general/further immigration have a complex relationship and can be quite different (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010).

In this section we first look at how comfortable people are with different groups of migrants across different domains of their everyday lives (Section 3.2.1) and then look at the relationship between attitudes towards these different groups, to try to understand if people who feel comfortable with one group tend to feel comfortable with others, or if there are different types of attitudes towards different groups (Section 3.2.2)

3.2.1 Comfort with different migrant groups

Figure 3.3 shows the mean level of comfort people in Ireland feel towards having a member of each migrant group in their child's class, in their neighbourhood and in a love relationship with their child. Several key take-aways emerge from these findings. The first thing to note is that, on the whole, people in Ireland are largely very comfortable with migrant groups in different domains of their lives, with the lowest score being a comfort level of around 8 points on the 10-point scale.

FIGURE 3.3 AVERAGE COMFORT TOWARDS DIFFERENT MIGRANT GROUPS ACROSS DOMAINS (2023)

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Notes: Weighted averages. 'EU Other' refers to the category in the survey 'A person from another European country' (asked in conjunction with 'A person from Eastern Europe').

The second key take-away is that there is a clear hierarchy in people's comfort with different migrant groups across each life domain. People are most comfortable with people from the EU, and largely feel the same about Eastern Europeans (although they are slightly more comfortable with the former). They feel less comfort towards Ukrainian refugees and Indians (although people tend to share similar attitudes towards both groups). Asylum seekers are the group of migrants that people in Ireland are least comfortable with across all domains, though even for this group, comfort levels are still relatively high (see Figure 3.3).⁶³

The third take-away from Figure 3.3 is that how comfortable people are differs depending on the domain being considered. People feel most comfortable with having migrants as a classmate in their child's school and express little difference in comfort between types of migrant in this domain (with only a 0.2-point difference between European children and asylum seeker children). People are marginally less comfortable with having migrants as their next-door-neighbour and there is little difference (0.2 points) in their comfort with having Europeans, Ukrainian refugees, or Indians as a neighbour. They are, however, noticeably less comfortable with having asylum seekers as a neighbour. People are least

⁶³ In the overall survey, attitudes to asylum seekers are also considerably more positive than attitudes to Irish Travellers, Roma, a person with alcohol or drug addiction issues, or a person with a criminal record (see DCEDIY, 2023, Tables 1,3 and 5).

comfortable with their child being in a love relationship with a migrant. It is also in this domain that people's hierarchy of preferences is most distinct. People remain very comfortable with their child dating a European (at 9 points or above). They are less comfortable with their child dating a Ukrainian refugee or Indian (8.7 points) but are comparatively much less comfortable with their child dating an asylum seeker (7.9 points). These findings are what we would expect both from the previous development of the social distance scale (Bogardus, 1933), as well as previous findings in Ireland (MacGreil, 2011).⁶⁴

3.2.2 Relationship between comfort levels with different groups

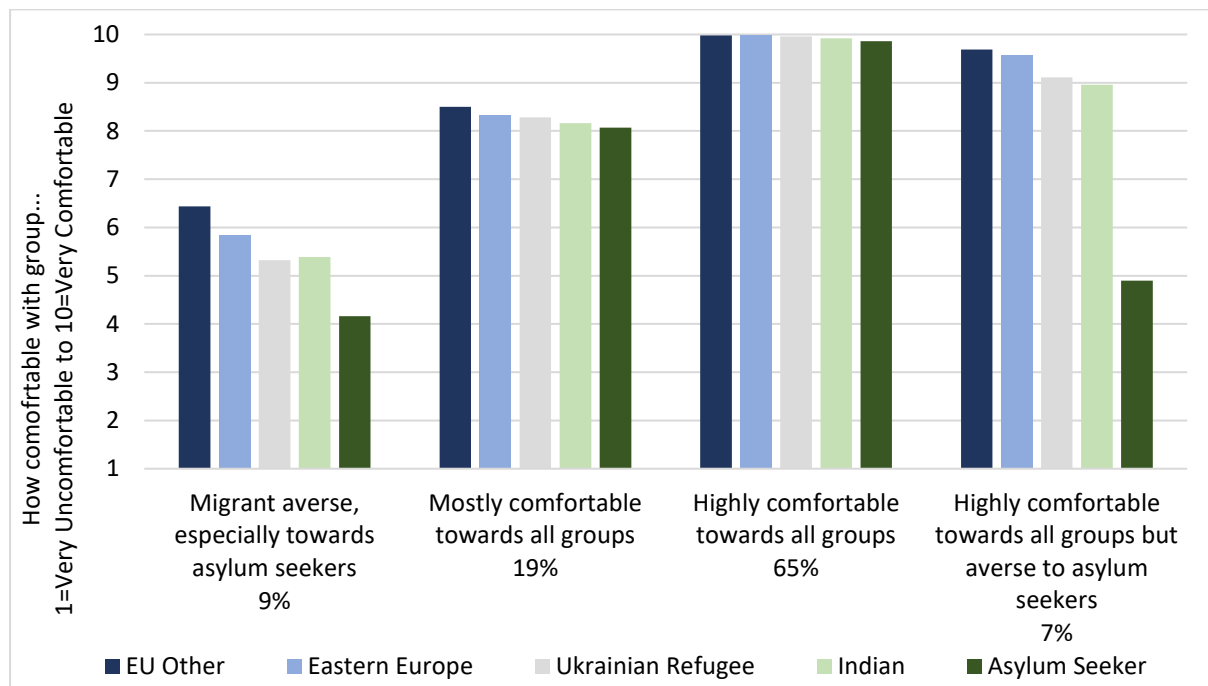
We next explore whether people who feel comfortable or not with one group of migrants tend to feel comfortable or not with all migrant groups, or whether some people might feel comfortable with some groups but uncomfortable with others. To answer this question, we can apply a technique known as cluster analysis. This method statistically sorts people in our sample into groups (or 'clusters') based on the similarity of their attitudes. We apply this to look at people's comfort with migrant neighbours.⁶⁵

Figure 3.4 shows the results of this analysis, which returned four groups of people in Ireland with distinct patterns of comfort towards each migrant group.⁶⁶ The figure shows the mean level of comfort towards having different migrants as a neighbour for each group of people. The largest group of people in Ireland is the 'highly comfortable towards all migrants' group, who make up 65 per cent of people. This group is essentially 'very comfortable' with any type of migrant. The second largest group are those who are 'mostly comfortable towards all migrants' (with comfort levels between 8.1 and 8.5 for each type of migrant), who make up 19 per cent of people in Ireland. The third group of people are those who are largely uncomfortable with migrants. They are somewhat less comfortable with Ukrainian refugees and Indians compared to European migrants, but they are especially uncomfortable with asylum seekers (an average comfort level of 4.2). This 'migrant averse' group compose 9 per cent of people in Ireland.

⁶⁴ We test mean social distance across all three domains with other non-EU groups to compare to the mean social distance with Indians (9.07) and Asylum Seekers (8.61). For Brazilians the value is the same as for Indians (9.07); for Moroccans it is slightly lower (8.88) and Nigerians lower still (8.83). We prefer to use Indians as this national group is numerous and not associated with protection seeking in Ireland.

⁶⁵ This is done because the questions on having a migrant in a child's class or in a love relationship with one's child relies on imagining the scenario if a respondent does not have a child. The question on having a migrant as a neighbour is one every respondent can answer based on their current situation. However, the types of groups that emerge are highly similar across different domains.

⁶⁶ An iterative approach was taken to determining the optimal number of groups from 1 to 10. The added theoretical explanatory value and 'elbow method' (Kodinariya and Makwana 2013) were applied to determine the optimal number of groups was four.

FIGURE 3.4 CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF PEOPLE'S COMFORT TOWARDS DIFFERENT MIGRANT GROUPS IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD (2023)

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Notes: Weighted k-means cluster analysis. 'EU Other' refers to the category in the survey 'A person from another European country' (asked in conjunction with 'A person from Eastern Europe').

For the most part, we therefore find that if people are comfortable (or not) with one type of migrant they feel equally comfortable (or not) with all types of migrant. However, there is a small but significant minority of people who are generally highly comfortable with European migrants, Indians, and Ukrainian refugee neighbours (with average comfort scores between 9 points and 9.7 points) but are uncomfortable with asylum seekers (an average score of 5 points). This group who are only averse to asylum seekers comprises 7 per cent of people in Ireland.

3.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined where Irish attitudes currently stand towards different aspects of immigration, and how these attitudes towards immigration relate to one another. As also observed in Chapter 2, people in Ireland generally have very positive attitudes towards immigration. More than 73 per cent of people feel positive about immigration (regardless of its region of origin), over three-quarters of people agree Ireland should help migrants seeking protection (either Ukrainian refugees or asylum seekers), and Irish people are also generally highly comfortable with having migrants in various aspects of their everyday lives, regardless of what type of migrant they are.

In spite of this general positivity towards immigration, people in Ireland express more or less positive attitudes towards different types of migrants and immigration. In line with social identity theory (which states that more distinct out-groups will suffer from more out-group bias; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1978; Hewstone et al., 2002), and previous research in Ireland, this research found that Irish people are more positive about immigration from other EU Member States and Ukraine than they are about immigration from outside the EU/Ukraine. They are more supportive of helping Ukrainian refugees than they are of asylum seekers in general, which may relate to their perceived deservingness (Bansak et al., 2016) as well as social identity theory and ethnic hierarchies. They also tend to be more comfortable with having European migrants in their everyday lives, somewhat less comfortable with Ukrainian refugees and Indians, and least comfortable with asylum seekers, in line with international findings that attitudes towards asylum seekers tend to be worse than attitudes towards refugees (Crawley et al., 2019).

Importantly, people in Ireland also do not simply have a single underlying attitude towards all aspects of immigration and all types of migrants. Instead, they make important distinctions in their attitudes towards different dimensions of immigration.

In line with the international literature that finds that attitudes towards immigrants and attitudes towards refugees/asylum seekers are distinct (Bansak et al., 2016; Abdelaaty and Steele, 2022; Crawley et al., 2019; Meidert and Rapp, 2019), we found that people in Ireland also have distinct sets of attitudes towards, on one hand, immigration to Ireland in general, and on the other, support for refugees/asylum seekers. We found that people have two underlying attitudes: one relating to how positively they feel about immigration in general (including immigration from EU, Ukraine, and other source countries), and a second relating to whether they think Ireland should help people seeking protection or not (Ukrainian refugees or asylum seekers). In both cases, while people feel differently about immigration from different regions, or between Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers, generally how someone feels about one group tends to track with how they feel about other groups.

Despite holding two distinct sets of attitudes (towards immigration in general and helping those seeking protection), these attitudes are related in important ways. In particular, people who are supportive of helping protection migrants are extremely likely to be positive about immigration in general. Yet just because someone is not supportive of helping protection migrants, or is unsure about it, does not mean they will be negative about immigration in general. In other words, a good portion of people who are averse to, or unsure about, helping refugees are still positive about immigration in general.

When it comes to people's feelings about migrants in their everyday lives, people who feel more or less comfortable with one type of migrant generally feel more or less comfortable with all types of migrants. However, there is also a minority of people (around 7 per cent) who make important distinctions between different types of migrant. This group is highly comfortable with Europeans, Indians, and Ukrainian refugees but noticeably uncomfortable with asylum seekers.

While there may be perceptions from incidences of local resistance to the opening of accommodation centres to house asylum seekers or from the Dublin riot in November 2023 that negative sentiment is widespread in Ireland, this survey of a representative sample of people shows that such incidences of protest likely represent the attitudes of a small minority of people. The next chapter considers the factors associated with these attitudes to immigration and different groups.

CHAPTER 4

What are the drivers of attitudes towards immigrants and immigration?

This chapter explores what factors in people's lives are associated with their attitudes towards immigration, using data from DCEDIY's Equality Attitudes Survey (see Appendix I for further details). Factors analysed are broken down into:

- (1) Socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, education, employment status, housing tenure type, and other economic indicators; and
- (2) Attitudinal and behavioural factors, such as their views on life in the past and confidence in the future, their civic behaviours, their concerns about national and global challenges, and their views on life in the past and confidence in the future (see Chapter 4 Appendix for full descriptive statistics of the sample).

Following the general structure of Chapter 3, we first analyse factors associated with people's attitudes towards immigration in general (Section 4.1) and then examine factors associated with people's level of comfort with different types of migrants, including people from the EU, Indians, Ukrainian refugees, and asylum seekers (Section 4.2). Multivariate regression modelling will be applied to examine the relative importance of each factor for people's attitudes after accounting for the role of other factors.

This section therefore helps us to answer the third research question: what are the main drivers of attitudes towards the arrival of asylum seekers, Ukrainian refugees, and immigrants in general? Are negative attitudes driven by material threats, such as housing or cost-of-living, or by fears of broader cultural change and stereotypes about minority groups?

4.1 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PEOPLE'S OVERALL ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION

Tables 4.1a and 4.1b⁶⁷ first look at the factors associated with people's positivity about immigration in general. Table 4.1a shows the relationships for socio-demographic factors, while Table 4.1b shows the relationships for attitudinal and behavioural factors.

The indicator of overall attitudes towards immigration takes the mean score of the answers to three questions on how people feel about 'immigration of people from

⁶⁷ Note these are one regression analysis split into two tables.

other EU Member States', 'immigration of people from the Ukraine', and 'immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine'. Factor analysis demonstrates these questions capture a single underlying attitude of people's positivity towards immigration in general, where higher scores equate to greater positivity.⁶⁸

4.1.1 Socio-demographic factors

Model 1, Table 4.1a, first explores the association between people's socio-demographic characteristics and their immigration attitudes. It should be noted that the relatively low adjusted R-squared in Model 1 indicates that socio-demographic factors have limited predictive power regarding the combined index of attitudes to immigration. In line with the literature on this topic (see Section 1.4.3.3), the strongest predictor of immigration attitudes is people's educational qualifications, with those with higher qualifications being more positive towards immigration. People who feel they are able to make ends meet more easily are also more positive, while 'students' and those 'not working due to long-term sickness or disability' are more positive than those in employment.⁶⁹ People living in private rented accommodation are more positive than those who own their homes (in Models 1-3). Those born in Ireland are less positive about immigration than those born abroad. In addition, people who have children but whose child/children are all aged over 18 are less positive about immigration, compared to people with no children.

In terms of the regional spread of attitudes, people living in Dublin, the West of Ireland and those in the South-East have the most positive attitudes, while those in the Mid-West and Midlands have the least positive attitudes. In line with previously mixed findings, there is no association between people's age and their attitudes towards immigration.

⁶⁸ Each question has a factor loading above .74, the index has an Eigen value of 1.8 and Alpha score of 0.84. The resulting scale ranges from -2.96 to 0.94.

⁶⁹ Financial strain is measured by the question 'Concerning your household's total monthly or weekly income, with which degree of ease or difficulty is the household able to make ends meet? Would that be...?' Respondents are coded as reporting they can make ends meet 'more easily' if they respond fairly easily/easily/very easily. The reference category is with some difficulty/with difficulty/with great difficulty.

TABLE 4.1A FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION – SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Variable set	Model 1 Socio-demographics	Model 2 + civicness; past/future; Ireland/World problems	Model 3 + comfort: EU people; Indians	Model 4 + comfort: protection migrants	Model 5 + comfort: ethnic in-group; out-group
<i>Gender</i>					
Baseline - male	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Female	0.020	0.014	-0.015	-0.022	-0.010
Other	-0.015	-0.043	-0.022	-0.108	-0.230
<i>Education</i>					
Baseline - Aged 16 to 19	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
20-24	0.029	0.130	0.171	0.178 ⁺	0.175 ⁺
25-34	0.008	0.013	0.054	0.092	0.086
35-44	-0.024	-0.035	0.030	0.080	0.081
45-54	0.110	0.019	0.056	0.071	0.079
55-64	0.113	0.068	0.119	0.111	0.114
65+	0.080	0.029	0.100	0.060	0.079
<i>Economic indicators</i>					
Baseline - In work	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Unemployed/ seeking work	-0.133	-0.021	-0.014	0.011	-0.016
Looking after family	0.051	0.045	-0.003	-0.013	0.003
Retired	0.052	-0.002	0.005	0.023	0.031
LLTI/Student/ Other	0.246***	0.227***	0.246***	0.220***	0.208***
<i>Working Class</i>					
Baseline - Working Class	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Middle class	-0.001	-0.027	0.029	0.035	0.029
Don't know	0.074	0.057	0.082	0.036	0.015
<i>Owns home</i>					
Baseline - Owns home	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Social housing	-0.008	0.042	0.019	-0.014	-0.033
Rent privately	0.155**	0.166**	0.123*	0.076	0.081
Other living	0.065	0.055	0.069	0.061	0.082

Contd.

TABLE 4.1A CONTD.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Variable set	Socio-demographics	+ civiness; past/future; Ireland/World problems	+ comfort: EU people; Indians	+ comfort: protection migrants	+ comfort: ethnic in-group; out-group
<i>Children</i>					
Baseline - no children	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Only children 18+	-0.137*	-0.160**	-0.144**	-0.121*	-0.117*
Has children under 18	-0.069	-0.054	-0.058	-0.049	-0.040
<i>Ethnicity and country of birth</i>					
Baseline - White Irish	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Other White	0.092	0.179*	0.150 ⁺	0.141 ⁺	0.120
Black/Asian	0.042	0.030	0.104	0.132	0.090
Other groups/No answer	0.090	0.090	0.122	0.093	0.084
Born in Ireland	-0.158*	-0.149*	-0.145*	-0.145*	-0.131*
<i>Region of residence</i>					
Baseline - Border region	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
West	0.175*	0.169*	0.178*	0.193**	0.186**
Mid-West	-0.048	-0.031	-0.022	-0.012	-0.002
South-East	0.158 ⁺	0.175*	0.176*	0.183*	0.181**
South-West	-0.006	0.019	0.045	0.078	0.083
Dublin	0.160*	0.157*	0.184**	0.171**	0.157**
Mid-East	0.046	0.025	0.055	0.040	0.022
Midlands	-0.046	0.031	0.073	0.054	0.048
<i>Survey method</i>					
CAPI survey (cf. CATI survey)	0.010	-0.016	-0.075*	-0.105**	-0.074*
Constant	-0.804***	-0.735**	-2.554***	-2.333***	-1.514***
Observations	2,767	2,767	2,767	2,767	2,767
Adjusted R-squared	0.095	0.229	0.298	0.356	0.383

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023. Excludes cases missing on key variables.

Note: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, + p<.10; Ordinary Least Squared regression models with robust standard errors. Models 2-5 also control for civic behaviours, beliefs about important issues facing Ireland/the world, attitudes towards past and future, and comfort levels with specific groups. See Table 4.1B.

4.1.2 Attitudinal and behavioural factors associated with immigration attitudes

Considering attitudinal and behavioural factors, the strongest predictors of attitudes that emerge from Model 2 (Table 4.1b) are people's confidence in their future, and their perception of the most important issues facing the country.⁷⁰ Civic engagement (measured here as volunteering and voting) also emerged as significantly associated with immigration attitudes.⁷¹

Table 4.1b shows that people who felt their quality of life was better in the past have more negative attitudes about immigration. However, more important is how confident people are in the future, with those with greater confidence having more positive attitudes towards immigration. Model 2 (Table 4.1b) shows that people who are more civically engaged (who volunteered and who voted in the past 12 months) have more positive attitudes towards immigration.

Model 2 reveals that what someone feels is the most important issue facing Ireland or the world is also associated with their immigration attitudes. They allow us to examine how, for example, feeling the 'cost-of-living' or 'pressure on services' is the most important issue facing Ireland is related to people's attitudes towards immigration, to explore how people's broader concerns about their society may be linked to their attitudes towards immigration.

⁷⁰ Perceptions of the most important issues facing Ireland was 'Which one of the following do you consider to be the single most serious problem facing Ireland?' (see Chapter 4 Appendix for full response list). Confidence in the future is measured in response to the question 'you have confidence in the future' and life better in the past was measured as 'Overall, regarding your quality of life, it was better in the past'. Both items had response in a five-item scale from 'agree strongly' to 'disagree strongly' (see Chapter 4 Appendix for response distribution). Interestingly, responses regarding the past and the future were only weakly (negatively) correlated with each other ($r=-0.2$), suggesting that these questions are measuring different phenomena.

⁷¹ Respondents were asked 'which of these statements apply to you?' These included 'I voted in the last general election' and 'I have volunteered in the last 12 months' (with yes/no/not sure) as response categories.

TABLE 4.1B FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION – ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Variable set	Socio-demographics	+ civiness; past/future; Ireland/World problems	+ comfort: EU people; Indians	+ comfort: protection migrants	+ comfort: ethnic in-group; out-group
Civic Behaviours					
<i>Civic behaviours</i>					
Baseline - did not vote		ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Yes, voted		0.122*	0.120*	0.116*	0.117*
Not sure		0.096	0.096	0.053	0.076
Baseline - did not volunteer		ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Yes, volunteered		0.076*	0.061 ⁺	0.061 ⁺	0.058 ⁺
Not sure		0.173	0.020	-0.015	0.002
Important issues facing the world/Ireland					
World's problems: racism/discrimination		ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Environment		0.113	0.112	0.074	0.043
War conflict chaos		-0.052	-0.052	-0.070	-0.094
Poverty hunger drinking-water		0.044	0.028	0.008	-0.024
Spread of infectious diseases		-0.180	-0.080	-0.020	-0.012
Economic cost-of- living		-0.102	-0.053	-0.050	-0.063
Nuclear weapons		-0.020	-0.026	-0.045	-0.082
The increasing global population		-0.216	-0.126	-0.172	-0.178
Other/None/Not sure		-0.400*	-0.367*	-0.373**	-0.352**
Ireland's problems: racism/discrimination		ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Climate change		-0.119	-0.103	-0.072	-0.093
Poverty		-0.161	-0.137	-0.112	-0.104
Access to housing/ access to healthcare		-0.261***	-0.234**	-0.216**	-0.222**
Economic cost-of- living		-0.307***	-0.263**	-0.240**	-0.235**
Immigration		-0.873***	-0.661***	-0.528***	-0.467***
The increasing population		-0.786***	-0.650***	-0.548***	-0.489***
Other/None/Not sure		-0.585***	-0.509**	-0.412**	-0.410**
Attitudes towards past and future					
Quality of life better in the past		-0.050***	-0.031*	-0.019	-0.014
Has confidence in the future		0.182***	0.169***	0.148***	0.142***

Contd.

TABLE 4.1B CONTD.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Variable set	Socio-demographics	+ civiness; past/future; Ireland/World problems	+ comfort: EU people; Indians	+ comfort: protection migrants	+ comfort: ethnic in-group; out-group
<i>Comfort levels with social groups</i>					
Mean comfort: Europeans			0.127***	-0.039	0.093*
Mean comfort: Indians			0.069**	-0.034	-0.034
Mean comfort: Ukrainian refugees				0.149***	0.152***
Mean comfort: Asylum seekers				0.113***	0.088***
Mean comfort: Whites and Christians					-0.259***
Mean comfort: Blacks, Hindus, and Muslims					0.065*
Constant	-0.804***	-0.735**	-2.554***	-2.333***	-1.514***
Observations	2,767	2,767	2,767	2,767	2,767
Adjusted R-squared	0.095	0.229	0.298	0.356	0.383

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023. Excludes cases missing on key variables.

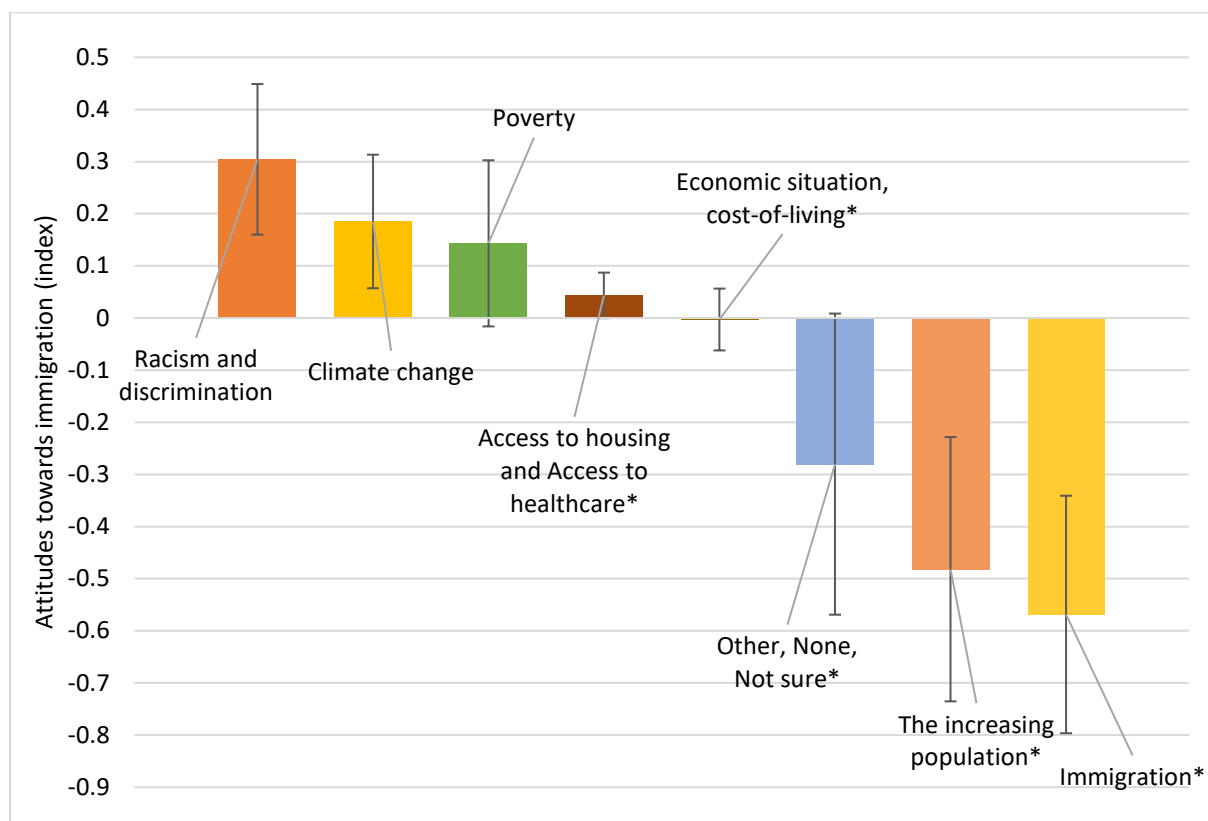
Note: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, + p<.10; Ordinary Least Squared regression models with robust standard errors. Models 1-5 also control for socio-demographic characteristics. See Table 4.1a.

Figure 4.1 shows predicted levels of positivity towards immigration by the most important issue someone feels is facing Ireland (based on Model 2, Table 4.1). It should be noted that in the DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, only one option could be chosen (unlike the Eurobarometer, which allows two options). Those who believe 'poverty' (3.8 per cent of the sample – see chapter appendix for full descriptive statistics), 'climate change' (4.1 per cent), and especially 'racism and discrimination' (2.9 per cent) are the most important issues facing Ireland tend to have the most positive attitudes towards immigration. Unsurprisingly, people who said 'immigration' was the most important issue have the most negative attitudes. Those who said 'the increasing population' is the most important issue also have similarly negative attitudes. However, these groups only make up 3.8 and 2.5 per cent of people in Ireland respectively. By comparison, people who feel that 'the economic situation and cost-of-living' (31 per cent of people) and 'access to housing and access to healthcare' (50 per cent of people) are the most important issues facing Ireland tend to have more middling immigration attitudes (although they still report significantly more negative attitudes compared to those who believe 'racism and discrimination' is the most important).

Turning next to people's views on issues facing the world (see Table 4.1b), we find that what issues people think are the most important facing the world are more

weakly associated with their immigration attitudes than their worries about the problems facing Ireland. People who worry that ‘poverty, hunger, drinking-water’ (16.2 per cent – see chapter appendix for descriptive statistics) and ‘environmental issues’ (25 per cent) are the most important issues have the most positive attitudes towards immigration. Those worried about ‘nuclear weapons’ (4.5 per cent of the sample) and ‘racism and discrimination’ (4.5 per cent) report somewhat less positive attitudes (but this is not significantly different from those most worried about ‘environmental issues’). The most negative attitudes are found among those who believe the ‘increasing global population’ and ‘spread of infectious diseases’ are the most important issues facing the world. Again, however, these individuals only make up a small proportion of people in Ireland, at 3.3 and 1.6 per cent respectively (see chapter appendix). Those most worried about ‘the economic situation and cost-of-living’ (26 per cent of the sample) hold more middling attitudes towards immigration.

FIGURE 4.1 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ‘MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING IRELAND’ AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION



Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Notes: * signifies immigration attitudes are significantly different ($p < .05$ level) from the attitudes of respondents who said ‘racism and discrimination’ are the most important issue facing Ireland. Predicted attitudes scores based on Model 2, Table 4.1b.

Finally, Models 3, 4 and 5 (Table 4.1b) test how far people’s level of comfort towards having different migrant, ethnic and religious groups in their everyday

lives are associated with their overall attitudes towards immigration.⁷² People who feel more comfortable with migrant groups usually associated with economic migration (people from the EU and India) hold more positive attitudes towards immigration (Model 3, Table 4.1b). People more comfortable with people seeking protection also have more positive attitudes towards immigration in general (Model 4, Table 4.1b). We also see that after including comfort towards people seeking protection, the association between people's comfort with Indians and people from the EU is no longer statistically significant (comparing Model 3 and Model 4, Table 4.1b). This suggests people's comfort towards people seeking protection is a stronger driver of general attitudes towards immigration than their comfort with more economic migrant groups.⁷³

Potentially, one reason why lower comfort with different migrant groups (e.g. asylum seekers) is associated with more negative attitudes towards immigration may have less to do with the migration status of these groups and more to do with people's feelings towards their ethnicity or religion. Previous research has found that both race and religion can play a role in attitudes (see Chapter 1). Therefore, it may be their feelings towards the assumed ethnicity or religion (rather than the migration status) of asylum seekers, which explain why comfort levels with asylum seekers is linked to more negative attitudes towards immigration.

Model 5 (Table 4.1b) introduces two measures which capture people's comfort with the dominant ethnic and religious in-group in Ireland (their comfort with White people and Christians) and people's comfort with ethnic and religious out-groups in Ireland (Black people, Hindus and Muslims).⁷⁴ People who feel more comfortable with ethnic/religious out-groups have more positive attitudes towards immigration. However, just as important is that those who feel more comfortable with the ethnic/religious in-group are less positive towards immigration.⁷⁵ In other words, both greater comfort with the ethnic/religious in-

⁷² Comfort levels towards a migrant group is calculated as a person's average level of comfort towards having a member of that migrant group as 'a neighbour', 'in their child's classroom' or 'in a love relationship with their child'. See Section 3.2 for further discussion.

⁷³ People's comfort towards all four groups are highly correlated, and the rendering of economic migrant comfort to non-significance may be a consequence of multicollinearity. However, the variance inflation factors for each variable does not exceed 5.

⁷⁴ Respondents were asked how comfortable they felt (neighbour, child's love relationship, child's classmate) towards someone who is 'White'. They were also asked about their comfort towards someone/families who are 'Christian - Catholic', 'Christian - Church of Ireland', and 'Christian - Other'. Their scores towards all these groups were averaged to measure respondents' average comfort towards White people and Christians. Respondents were also asked about their comfort levels towards someone/a family who is 'Black', someone/a family who is 'Hindu' and someone/a family who is 'Muslim'. Their scores towards these groups were averaged to measure respondents' average comfort towards Black, Hindu and Muslim people.

⁷⁵ With 77 per cent of the survey sample being White/Irish born individuals, White/Irish comfort and Black/Hindu/Muslim comfort broadly corresponds to these individuals' in-group and out-group. However, we also tested whether the same findings apply among the non-White/non-Irish sample. We see a similar pattern whereby more comfort with Whites/Christians is also associated with immigration attitudes. However, their comfort towards Blacks/Hindus/Muslims has no association with immigration attitudes.

groups and greater discomfort with ethnic/religious out-groups matter for wider immigration attitudes. In addition, accounting for people's feelings towards the ethnic/religious in- and out-groups explains part of the reason why those who are uncomfortable with asylum seekers are less positive about immigration.⁷⁶

4.2 FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PEOPLE'S LEVEL OF COMFORT WITH DIFFERENT MIGRANT GROUPS

We next turn to examining the factors associated with people's level of comfort with different migrant groups (Tables 4.2a and 4.2b). We look at attitudes towards four groups: EU migrants, Indians (as a proxy for non-EU migrants generally associated with economic migration), Ukrainian refugees, and asylum seekers. While EU migrants and Indians are generally associated with economic migration, Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers capture protection-related migration.

Table 4.2a shows the relationships for socio-demographic factors. Table 4.2b shows the relationships attitudinal and behavioural factors, as above. Comfort levels towards a migrant group is calculated as a person's average level of comfort towards having a member of that migrant group as 'a neighbour', 'in their child's classroom' or 'in a love relationship with their child'.

The first thing to note is that, for the most part, the factors associated with people's comfort towards one group are generally associated with their comfort towards all groups. However, how strongly a factor is associated with people's comfort towards different migrant groups can differ quite substantially.

4.2.1 Socio-demographic factors

Looking first at people's socio-demographic characteristics (Table 4.2a), we find that, similar to general immigration attitudes, people with higher qualifications largely report being more comfortable with different migrant groups. However, this relationship is strongest for people's comfort towards asylum seekers and weakest (and not statistically significant) for comfort with EU nationals.⁷⁷

To illustrate this point, Figure 4.2 shows people's predicted levels of comfort towards each migrant group by their level of education (based on Models 1-4). Firstly, it shows that people's education is a stronger predictor of their comfort towards asylum seekers than it is for their comfort towards Europeans. In fact,

⁷⁶ Adding these measures of comfort with religious/ethnic groups in Model 5 reduces the negative association between comfort with asylum seekers and positivity towards immigration shown in Model 4 (see Table 4.1b).

⁷⁷ Equality of coefficients tests were conducted which demonstrated significant differences in the associations between education and different migrant groups.

people generally feel equally comfortable towards Europeans regardless of their education (there is little difference in comfort between the more and less educated). For asylum seekers, however, there is nearly a 1-point difference in comfort between the most and least educated. Education has a similar, medium-strength association with comfort towards Ukrainian refugees and Indians.

TABLE 4.2A FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS FOUR KEY MIGRANT GROUPS – SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Comfort towards migrant groups	EU	Ukrainian refugees	Indians	Asylum seekers
<i>Gender</i>				
Baseline – Male	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Female	0.153**	0.165**	0.167**	0.236**
Other	-0.201	0.073	0.107	0.500
<i>Age</i>				
Baseline – Aged 16 to 19	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
20-24	-0.221	-0.160	-0.134	-0.305
25-34	-0.261	-0.321	-0.125	-0.420 ⁺
35-44	-0.359*	-0.491*	-0.256	-0.591*
45-54	-0.227	-0.222	-0.110	-0.326
55-64	-0.278	-0.226	-0.225	-0.282
65+	-0.304	-0.201	-0.442 ⁺	-0.287
<i>Highest Educational Qualification</i>				
Baseline – Primary education	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Secondary	0.138	0.371 ⁺	0.405*	0.351
Post-Secondary	0.177	0.441*	0.467*	0.548*
Tertiary	0.271	0.528**	0.633**	0.668**
<i>Economic and housing indicators</i>				
Baseline – In work	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Unemployed/seeking work	-0.036	-0.152	0.035	-0.023
Looking after family	0.196*	0.256*	0.322**	0.345**
Retired	-0.087	-0.026	0.051	-0.193
Long-term sick/Student/Other	-0.081	0.041	-0.120	-0.038
Making ends meet financially more easily	0.081***	0.090**	0.065*	0.042
Baseline – Working Class	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Middle class	-0.280***	-0.241***	-0.268***	-0.394***
Don't know	-0.139	0.036	-0.096	-0.002
Baseline – Owns home	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Social housing	0.043	0.222 ⁺	0.183	0.238 ⁺
Rent privately	0.190*	0.350***	0.204*	0.429***
Other living	-0.106	-0.166	-0.055	0.023

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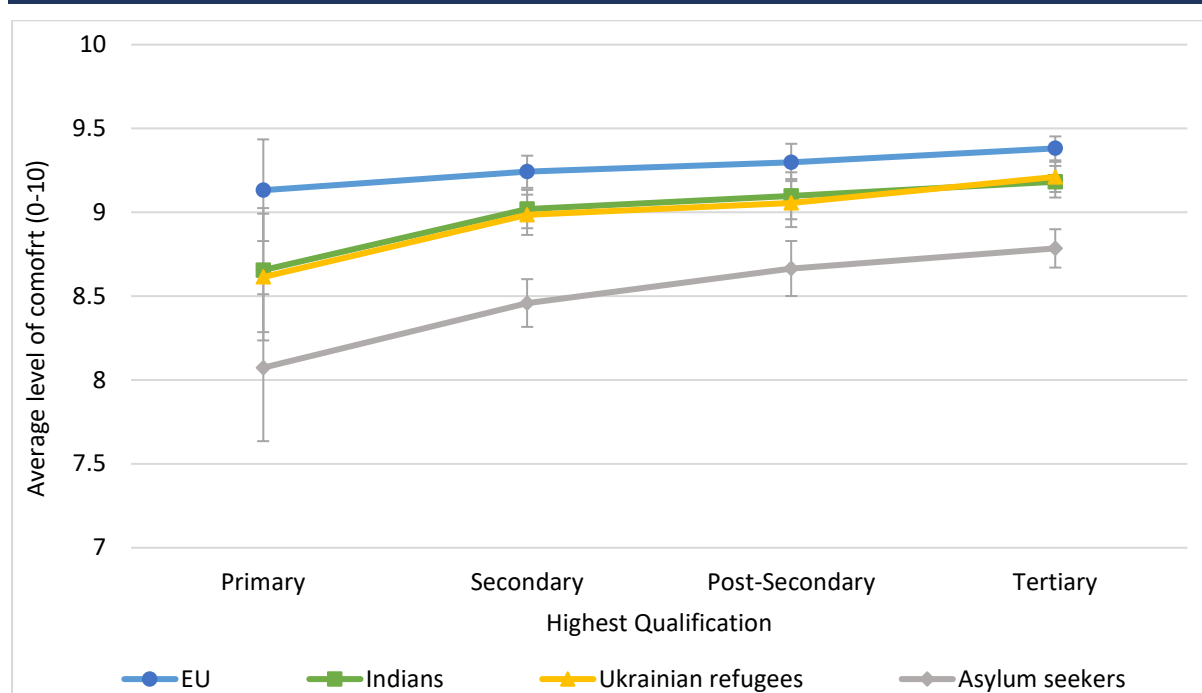
TABLE 4.2A CONTD.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Comfort towards migrant groups	EU	Ukrainian refugees	Indians	Asylum seekers
<i>Children</i>				
Baseline – no children	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Only children 18+	-0.065	-0.154	-0.120	-0.177
Has children under 18	0.050	-0.020	-0.080	-0.040
<i>Ethnicity and country of birth</i>				
Baseline – White Irish	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Other White	0.129	0.098	0.118	0.199
Black/Asian	-0.444*	-0.398*	-0.134	-0.507*
Other groups/No answer	-0.144	-0.121	-0.137	0.107
Born in Ireland	-0.056	-0.075	0.022	0.036
<i>Region</i>				
Baseline – Border region	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
West	0.022	-0.028	-0.119	-0.235
Mid-West	0.013	-0.026	-0.063	-0.081
South-East	0.034	0.077	-0.011	-0.133
South-West	-0.080	-0.207	-0.167	-0.336 ⁺
Dublin	-0.084	-0.022	-0.185 ⁺	-0.168
Mid-East	-0.112	-0.031	-0.172	-0.150
Midlands	-0.221	-0.125	-0.326 ⁺	-0.286
<i>Survey mode</i>				
CAPI survey (cf. CATI survey)	0.275***	0.332***	0.328***	0.526***
Constant	9.277***	8.663***	9.130***	8.603***
Observations	2,831	2,831	2,831	2,831

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023. Excludes cases missing on key variables.

Note: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, + p<.10; Generalised linear models with robust standard errors. Models 1-4 also control for civic behaviours, beliefs about important issues facing Ireland/the world, and attitudes towards past and future. See Table 4.2b.

Secondly, Figure 4.2 shows that the largest differences in comfort towards different migrant groups is among those with a primary qualification or less. As education increases, people's comfort levels towards different migrant groups become more similar. Although even among the tertiary educated, there remains significant differences in people's comfort towards different groups.

FIGURE 4.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALIFICATION AND LEVEL OF COMFORT WITH MIGRANT GROUPS

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Notes: Predicted attitudes scores based on Models 1-4, Table 4.2.

Table 4.2a also demonstrates that, again, similar to general immigration attitudes, people living in a privately rented home are more comfortable with all migrant groups compared to homeowners. This difference is particularly large for people's comfort towards Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers.⁷⁸ However, unlike for general immigration attitudes, living in social housing is also linked with people's comfort levels: people in social housing are slightly more comfortable with Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers compared to those who own their own home (although this relationship is only significant at the $p < .1$ level).

Feeling financially secure is also associated with people's comfort towards migrants, as observed for general immigration attitudes. Those who feel they are able to make ends meet more easily feel more comfortable with EU nationals, Indians, and Ukrainian refugees. However, feelings of financial security are not significantly associated with feelings towards asylum seekers, where comfort levels are equally low among those who can and cannot make ends meet easily.

Table 4.2a reveals that some factors that have no association with people's general attitudes towards immigration *are* linked with people's comfort towards migrant

⁷⁸ Equality of coefficients tests show this difference is statistically significant.

groups. Women express greater comfort towards all migrant groups than men.⁷⁹ Older people are generally less comfortable with all migrant groups. However, the age group with the lowest levels of comfort towards EU nationals, Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers are not the oldest but those aged 35-44 (only this group report significantly less comfort than those aged 16-19). Contrary to this, it is the oldest age group (aged 65+) who report the least comfort towards Indians (significant only at a $p < .1$ level).

People who self-report as being middle class report lower comfort levels than people who self-report as being working class, with particularly lower comfort towards asylum seekers.⁸⁰ Compared to White Irish people, Black/Asian people report lower comfort levels with Europeans, Ukrainian refugees, and asylum seekers (but no difference in comfort levels towards Indians). In addition, people whose primary economic status is 'looking after the home and family' report more comfort towards all migrant groups than those in employment, in contrast to people's general immigration attitudes where it was 'students' and those 'not working due long-term sickness or disability' who had more positive attitudes compared to the employed.

Unlike people's general attitudes towards immigration, neither being born in Ireland nor having children are associated with people's comfort towards migrant groups. There is also less regional variation in people's comfort levels with migrants. On the whole, people in the Border region have the highest levels of comfort, although the difference with other regions is rarely statistically significant.

4.2.2 Attitudinal and behavioural factors

Table 4.2b shows the analysis of attitudinal and behavioural factors associated with comfort levels towards different migrant groups. Similar to attitudes to immigration in general, the strongest predictors of comfort levels were what people believe to be the most significant issue facing Ireland, and their attitudes towards the past and the future. In contrast to general immigration attitudes, whether people are civically engaged or not (volunteering or voting in the past 12 months) is not associated with their comfort towards migrant groups.

As with general immigration attitudes, those who feel 'racism and discrimination' (2.9 per cent of the sample), 'climate change' (4.2 per cent) and 'poverty' (3.7 per cent) are the most important issues facing Ireland report the highest levels of comfort with migrant groups (and levels which are not significantly different from

⁷⁹ While this association is strongest for asylum seekers there is no statistically significant difference in the strength of the associations across groups.

⁸⁰ Equality of coefficients tests show this difference is statistically significant.

one another). However, unlike for general immigration attitudes, those who view ‘access to housing/healthcare’ as the most important issue (49.8 per cent) have similarly higher levels of comfort towards all migrant groups (although holding this view is associated with somewhat less comfort towards asylum seekers).⁸¹

People who view ‘the economic situation, cost-of-living’ as the most important issue (31.5 per cent of the sample) have more mixed attitudes towards migrant groups. They have significantly less comfort with Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers, compared to those who believe things like ‘racism and discrimination’ or ‘climate change’ are the most important issues (at a $p < .05$ level). They have somewhat less comfort with Indians ($p < .1$ level) but do not report significantly less comfort with Europeans. However, as with people’s general attitudes towards immigration, people who say ‘the increasing population’ (2.8 per cent) or especially ‘immigration’ (3.7 per cent) are the most important issues facing Ireland feel substantially less comfortable with migrant groups, particularly asylum seekers.⁸²

⁸¹ Those who feel ‘access to housing/healthcare’ (compared to ‘racism and discrimination’) is the most important issue report significantly less comfort towards asylum seekers (at a $p < .1$ level).

⁸² Equality of coefficients tests show the negative associations between feeling ‘immigration’ or ‘the increasing global population’ (compared to ‘poverty, hunger, and drinking-water’) are the most important issues and one’s comfort with asylum seekers are significantly stronger than they are for their comfort with Europeans, Indians, or Ukrainian refugees.

TABLE 4.2B FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS FOUR KEY MIGRANT GROUPS – ATTITUDINAL AND BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Comfort towards migrant groups	EU	Ukrainian refugees	Indians	Asylum seekers
<i>Civic behaviours</i>				
Baseline - did not vote	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Yes, voted	0.045	0.110	-0.033	-0.061
Not sure	0.085	0.177	-0.162	0.150
Baseline - did not volunteer	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Yes, volunteered	0.056	0.054	0.073	0.072
<i>Important issues facing the world/Ireland</i>				
World's problems: racism/discrimination	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Environment	0.069	0.214	-0.079	0.139
War conflict chaos	0.108	0.237	-0.126	-0.075
Poverty hunger drinking-water	0.148	0.251	-0.001	0.126
Spread of infectious diseases	-0.495*	-0.568*	-0.779*	-1.106**
Economic cost-of-living	-0.133	-0.120	-0.386*	-0.380+
Nuclear weapons	0.108	0.181	-0.041	0.112
The increasing global population	-0.347+	-0.209	-0.492*	-0.272
Other/None/Not sure	-0.106	0.053	-0.151	-0.197
Ireland's problems: racism/discrimination	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Climate change	-0.115	-0.173	-0.061	-0.245
Poverty	-0.153	-0.256	-0.131	-0.225
Access to housing/access to healthcare	-0.120	-0.185	-0.185	-0.267+
Economic cost-of-living	-0.198	-0.330*	-0.265+	-0.326*
Immigration	-0.873***	-1.226***	-1.450***	-2.179***
The increasing population	-0.658**	-0.858**	-0.844**	-1.512***
Other/None/Not sure	-0.338	-0.698*	-0.390	-0.756
<i>Attitudes towards past and future</i>				
Quality of life better in the past	-0.085***	-0.136***	-0.126***	-0.177***
Has confidence in the future	0.062*	0.110***	0.072*	0.194***
Constant	9.277***	8.663***	9.130***	8.603***
Observations	2,831	2,831	2,831	2,831

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023. Excludes cases missing on key variables.

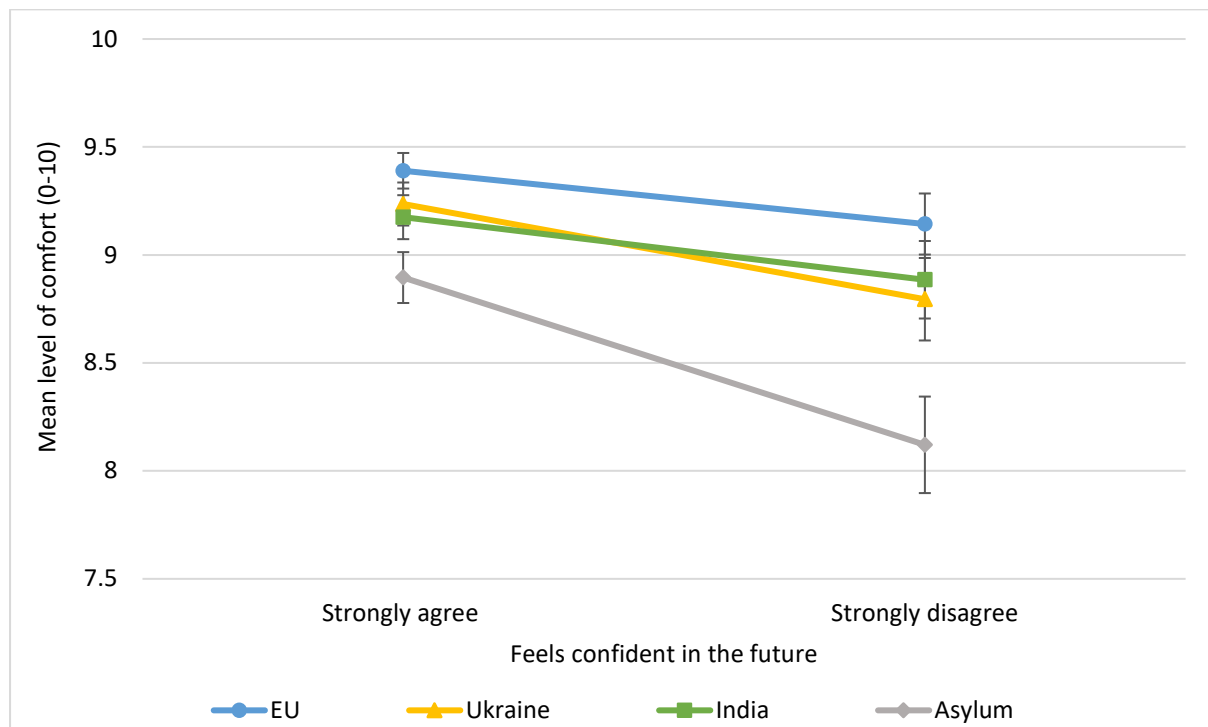
Notes: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, + p<.10; Generalised linear models with robust standard errors. Models 1-4 also control for socio-demographic characteristics. See Table 4.2a.

When it comes to the most important issues people feel are facing the world, on the whole, people who say ‘poverty, hunger, and drinking-water’ is the most important issue (16.2 per cent of people) are the most comfortable with migrants. Those who feel ‘the environment’ (25.2 per cent of the sample), ‘nuclear weapons’ (4.5 per cent), ‘racism and discrimination’ (4.5 per cent), and ‘war, conflict, and chaos’ (16.9 per cent) are the most important issues also have similarly higher comfort levels (which are generally not significantly different from those saying ‘poverty, hunger, and drinking-water’ is the most important). However many of these associations are not statistically significant.

People who feel ‘the economic situation, cost-of-living’ (25.4 per cent of the sample) is the most important issue, however, have significantly lower comfort with migrant groups; in particular, they feel much lower comfort towards asylum seekers.⁸³ Similarly, people who report ‘the increasing global population’ (3.4 per cent) is the most important issue also have significantly less comfort with migrant groups. The lowest levels of comfort with migrant groups are among those who say the ‘spread of infectious diseases’ is the most important issue (1.7 per cent), which is linked to particularly low comfort with asylum seekers.⁸⁴ These findings, especially the salience of views on the ‘spread of infectious diseases’ and ‘the increasing global population’, are similar to their importance for general immigration attitudes.

⁸³ Equality of coefficients tests show the negative association between feeling ‘the economic situation, cost-of-living’ (compared to ‘poverty, hunger, and drinking-water’) is the most important issue is more strongly associated with comfort with asylum seekers than it is with comfort with Europeans.

⁸⁴ Equality of coefficients tests show the negative association between feeling ‘the spread of infectious diseases’ (compared to ‘poverty, hunger, and drinking-water’) is the most important issue is more strongly associated with comfort with asylum seekers than it is with comfort with Europeans and comfort with Ukrainians.

FIGURE 4.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE AND LEVEL OF COMFORT WITH MIGRANT GROUPS

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Notes: Predicted attitudes scores based on Models 1-4, Table 4.2.

Lastly, Table 4.2b shows that people's feelings about the past and future also matter for their comfort towards migrants, as they do for their general attitudes towards immigration. Those who felt their quality of life was better in the past are less comfortable with migrants while people with greater confidence in the future feel more comfortable. However, there are again big differences in how important these factors are for people's comfort with different migrant groups. Figure 4.3 illustrates this point by showing predicted levels of comfort towards each migrant group among those who 'strongly agree' they have confidence in the future and those who 'strongly disagree'. We can see how decreasing confidence in the future is a stronger predictor of discomfort towards Ukrainian refugees, and especially asylum seekers, than it is for predicting discomfort towards EU migrants. A similar pattern emerges for people's belief that life was better in the past.⁸⁵

4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined what factors and characteristics in people's lives are associated with their overall attitudes towards immigration and their comfort with different migrant groups. One important finding was that while some factors predict both attitudes towards immigration in general and comfort levels with

⁸⁵ Equality of coefficients tests show these differences in the associations between 'feeling life was better in the past' or 'confidence in the future' and comfort levels with different migrant groups are statistically significant.

different groups (such as education, the ability to make ends meet, renting privately, confidence in the future, and opinions about the most important issues facing Ireland), others differed (such as gender, age, and civic behaviours). This indicates that while these two attitudes are linked, they are not the same, confirming previous work (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010).

Another key finding is that the factors which predict people's comfort towards one group of migrants will generally predict their comfort towards other migrant groups as well (although there are exceptions). In other words, how people feel towards different migrant groups appears to be linked to the same characteristics. However, comfort levels with asylum seekers (and to a lesser extent, Ukrainian refugees, and Indians) tend to be more sensitive to people's individual characteristics and beliefs than their comfort towards European migrants. We can see this in the results relating to education, which seems to influence attitudes towards asylum seekers much more strongly than attitudes towards EU nationals. A similar trend can be seen in the results around people's sense of confidence in the future, which also affects attitudes towards asylum seekers much more strongly than EU nationals.

In line with previous findings, both internationally and in Ireland, education is one of the strongest predictors of both sets of immigration attitudes, where people with lower qualifications are less positive about immigration in general and are less comfortable with migrants in their everyday lives (particularly with asylum seekers) (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). We also find that feeling life was better in the past and having less confidence in the future are strongly associated with more negative attitudes towards immigration in general and less comfort with migrants (again, particularly with asylum seekers). The importance of confidence that life will be better in the future for positive immigration attitudes has also been shown previously in Ireland and is linked to a greater sense of security and less precarity, that can make people feel less threatened by perceived impacts of immigration on their quality of life (McGinnity et al., 2023b).

Factors associated with people's personal economic position have a more mixed association with their immigration attitudes. On one hand, feeling less able to make ends meet is associated with more negative attitudes towards immigration in general and less comfort towards most migrant groups. The notable exception is asylum seekers, which may indicate that cultural threat plays a greater role than economic threat for this group. However, being unemployed is not associated with people's immigration attitudes or comfort levels, even before controlling for financial stress.⁸⁶ In fact, 'students' and people with 'disabilities' are more positive

⁸⁶ Models tested but not reported above.

about immigration in general than the employed. Furthermore, people in privately rented accommodation are both more positive about immigration in general and more comfortable with migrants compared to homeowners, while people in social housing are also slightly more comfortable with Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers compared to those who own their own home. Thus, there is little evidence that perceived competition for housing at an individual level is associated with reported comfort with people seeking protection, as was found in the Netherlands (Hooijer, 2021).

These findings broadly align with previous research suggesting that attitudes towards immigration appear to be driven less by people's actual economic position and the potential economic impact of immigration or competition for jobs or housing *for themselves personally* (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014); although clearly people's subjective perception of their economic situation (their 'ability to make ends meet') is closely linked to their immigration attitudes. This is an important caveat to the research on individual economic threat, which sometimes finds little effect of individual economic factors or lower attitudes among higher income populations (e.g. Meidert and Rapp, 2019; Abdelaaty and Steele, 2022; Schmidt et al., 2023), and indicates that mixed findings may be a result of an indirect relationship between objective economic situations and subjective perceptions of those situations, with subjective perceptions more consistently influencing attitudes.

At the same time, greater concerns about the economic situation, or pressure on services, in Ireland as a whole are related to somewhat more negative immigration attitudes. People who feel 'the economic situation and cost-of-living' are the most important issues facing either Ireland or the world have less-positive attitudes towards immigration in general, compared to those who feel things like 'the environment', 'climate change', 'poverty' or 'racism and discrimination' are the most important issues. Those worried about the 'economic situation and cost-of-living' are similarly less comfortable with migrants, especially Ukrainian refugees, and asylum seekers. People who feel 'access to housing/access to healthcare' is the most important issue facing Ireland do tend to have somewhat less-positive attitudes towards immigration in general, compared to those who feel things like 'racism and discrimination' or 'climate change' are the most important issue (although this group do not feel significantly less comfort with migrants in their everyday lives, apart from being somewhat less comfortable with asylum seekers).

These findings again broadly align with previous research, which suggests people's sociotropic concerns about the perceived threats of immigration to their society's economy, or pressure on services, are bigger drivers of negative immigration attitudes than their personal situations (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). They also

align with findings that these can drive opinions about policy (e.g. further immigration) without affecting their comfort levels with migrants themselves. Similarly, people who feel the ‘increasing population’ is the biggest challenge facing Ireland, likely linked to fears over its impact on the country’s quality of life, also have some of the most negative attitudes towards immigration (although they compose only a small proportion of people in Ireland).

As expected, people who think ‘immigration’ is the most important issue facing Ireland have much more negative immigration attitudes. However, those who feel the ‘spread of infectious diseases’ is the biggest challenge facing the world also have more negative immigration attitudes (although, again, only a small proportion of people in Ireland hold these views). Previous research has shown that those who exhibit pre-existing sensitivities to disease (i.e. germ aversion) have more exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants, but this is not due to the threat from a disease itself but due to its alignment with other normative beliefs, such as ‘belief in a dangerous world’ or a higher ‘social dominance’ orientation, which are linked with exclusionary attitudes (Green et al., 2010).

Again, in line with previously mixed findings, people’s age is not associated with how positive they are about immigration in general. Where prior research does identify an ‘age effect’, it is most commonly the oldest age groups who have the more negative immigration attitudes, with explanations usually being that older generations of people are less familiar with ethnic diversity and thus more averse to immigration (Schotte and Winkler, 2018; McLaren et al., 2021). However in Ireland, where we do find that age is associated with comfort with migrants (especially before controlling for people’s views on the past/future, or the most important problem facing Ireland/the world), it is primarily the group aged 35-44 who express the lowest comfort, not the oldest. This age group may feel most anxiety around access to things like housing or services, and thus may be least comfortable with immigrants.

Lastly, people’s civic engagement also matters for their immigration attitudes. Those who voted and volunteered in the last 12 months are more positive about immigration in general, although they do not report greater comfort with migrant groups. Civic engagement is believed to foment wider social trust in society and its institutions, as well as provide opportunities for social contact with people different from oneself (such as migrants or ethnic out-groups), which are all linked with more positive immigration attitudes (Lundberg and Abdelzadeh, 2022). Meanwhile both volunteering and voting are linked with a stronger sense of political efficacy and less perceived alienation, which can also foster more positive immigration attitudes (Ziller and Berning, 2021; McGinnity et al., 2023b).

Chapter 4 Appendix

TABLE 4.A DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES USED IN THE MODELS

Variable	Mean/ %	Variable	%	Variable	%
Overall immigration attitudes (index)	0.005	Subjective social class		Volunteered last 12 month	
Mean comfort: Europeans	9.308	Working class	50.2%	No	65.3%
Mean comfort: Indians	9.085	Middle class	44%	Yes	34.5%
Mean comfort: Ukrainian refugees	9.093	Don't know	5.8%	Not sure	0.2%
Mean comfort: asylum seekers	8.641	Tenure		Most serious problem facing the world as a whole?	
Mean in-group comfort (Whites and Christians)	9.454	Owns	67.6%	Economic cost-of-living	25.6%
Mean out-group comfort (Blacks and non-Christians)	9.012	Social housing	12.2%	Environment	25.4%
Gender		Rent privately	16.1%	War conflict chaos	16.9%
Male	49.1%	Other	4.1%	Poverty, hunger, etc.	16.2%
Female	50.6%	Children status		Nuclear weapons	4.5%
Other	0.3%	No children	38.5%	Racism and discrimination	4.5%
Age categories		Only children 18+	29.9%	Increasing global population	3.3%
16-19	4.8%	Has children under 18	31.6%	Spread of infectious diseases	1.6%
20-24	9.7%	Ethnicity		Other/None/Not sure	2%
25-34	15.3%	White Irish	81.4%	Most serious problem facing Ireland?	
35-44	19.5%	Other White	10.3%	Access to housing and Access to healthcare	50.1%
45-54	17.4%	Black/Asian	4.6%	Economic cost-of-living	31.5%
55-64	14.2%	Other groups/No answer	3.7%	Climate change	4.1%
65+	19.1%	Born in Ireland or not		Poverty	3.8%
Highest qualification		No	22.3%	Immigration	3.8%
Primary	5.7%	Yes	77.7%	Racism and discrimination	2.9%
Secondary	33.7%	Region		The increasing population	2.5%
Post-Secondary	18.2%	Border	8%	Other/None/Not sure	1.3%
Tertiary	42.4%	West	9.4%	Life better in the past	
Employment situation		Mid-West	9.4%	Disagree strongly	8.2%
In work	58.9%	South-East	9%	Disagree	29.6%
Unemployed/seeking work	4.5%	South-West	13.3%	Neither/Not sure	17.2%
Looking after family	6.4%	Dublin	30.1%	Agree	26.3%
Retired	18%	Mid-East	14.8%	Agree strongly	18.7%
		Midlands	6%		

Contd.

TABLE 4.A CONTD.

Variable	Mean/ %	Variable	%	Variable	%
LLTI/Student/Other	12.1%	Survey mode		Confidence in the future	
Making ends meet financially		CATI	53.1%	Disagree strongly	5.5%
With great difficulty	5%	CAPI	46.9%	Disagree	14.3%
With difficulty	7.2%	Voted in the last general election		Neither/Not sure	16%
With some difficulty	32.8%	No	31%	Agree	40.8%
Fairly easily	29.2%	Yes	68.3%	Agree strongly	23.4%
Easily	17%	Not sure	0.7%		
Very easily	8.7%				

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023.

Notes: Weighted descriptive statistics; sample with only valid cases on all covariates (n=2,754).

CHAPTER 5

Might support be overstated?

While high-quality representative social surveys with carefully worded questions have much to offer the study of attitudes to immigration and immigrant groups, social surveys may struggle to accurately measure responses to sensitive or controversial topics, for several reasons. One of these is social desirability bias, which refers to the tendency for respondents to over-report socially desirable activities or attitudes and under-report undesirable ones (Krumpal, 2013). Evidence of social desirability bias has been found in research on sexual activities, illegal activities such as tax fraud or drink driving and racist attitudes (*ibid.*). McGinnity et al. (2020) find evidence of socially desirable responding in attitudes to Black immigration in Ireland using the list experiment technique.

Another issue is how questions are worded or framed. Researchers often assume people will be motivated and exert maximum effort in responding to questions, for example questions about support for various policies. In reality, many respondents do not think about the implications and costs of policies in their lives. Evidence from survey experiments therefore show that standard survey items can overestimate support. Explicitly mentioning the potential costs of policies or adding statements to clarify the nature of the cost leads to significant reduction in policy support: a meta-analysis of 36 experimental surveys shows that doing so can reduce support by approximately 10 percentage points (Reynolds et al., 2020). Previous research in Ireland found that explicitly mentioning costs and trade-offs when introducing disability policies tends to reduce support, with the lowest support when the policy is to be funded by a tax increase (Timmons et al., 2023a).

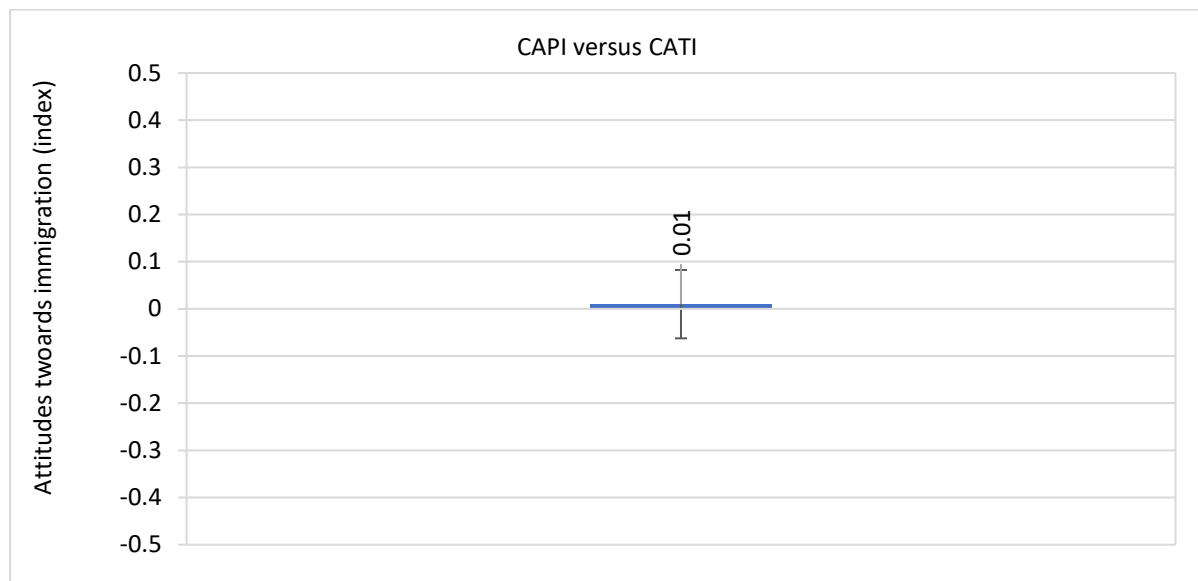
Given the sensitivity of the topics in this report, combined with previous evidence that support for immigration and minority ethnic groups may be overstated, we examine evidence for this in three different ways in this chapter. Firstly, given previous research that people may be less likely to reveal undesirable attitudes when interviewed in person compared to remotely, we investigate whether responses differ depending on whether they were gathered through an in-person interview compared to a telephone interview in the Survey of Equality Attitudes. Secondly, using evidence from a recent online survey experiment, we consider whether respondents have fully considered the implications of their support for Ukrainian Refugees, and whether responses vary if potential pressure on services or a tax increase is mentioned. Thirdly, we analyse evidence from an online vignette experiment on how acceptable it is to set up an online petition to protest against Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers coming to live in the local area.

5.1 DO RESPONSES VARY BY HOW THE SURVEY WAS ADMINISTERED?

Some research has found that social desirability bias in responding to sensitive questions is higher in face-to-face interviews than in telephone interviews, and lower still in internet or other self-administered surveys (Tourangeau and Smith, 1996; Kreuter et al., 2008; Krumpal, 2013; Kralj et al., 2019). For example, reporting of undesirable health behaviours like smoking or high alcohol consumption tended to be higher in web surveys than in face-to-face interviews, though factual information, such as age and height varied much less (Kralj et al., 2019). This may be because respondents are particularly motivated to avoid embarrassment or discomfort in a face-to-face interaction. The Equality Attitudes Survey provides an excellent evidence base to explore this issue as the survey was mixed mode, with half administered using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and half administered using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) (DCEDIY, 2023).

So, do responses differ for in person (CAPI) or Telephone (CATI) interviewing? Of course there may also differences between survey mode sampling frames and different cooperation rates across these different survey modes, leading to slightly different samples (see Fessler et al., 2018; Lipps, 2016). In these data the CATI sample respondents are more likely to have third-level qualifications, more likely to rent privately, and are more ethnically diverse than the CAPI sample. For this reason, the results presented are after weights and socio-demographic controls are added, so socio-demographic differences between the samples will not affect the difference. While we cannot rule out that some unobserved difference between the samples may affect attitudes, we expect most of the remaining difference to be due to social desirability bias.

We investigate this using two of the key outcomes analysed in Chapters 3 and 4: overall attitudes towards immigration (Sections 3.1 and 4.1) and level of comfort with different groups (Sections 3.2 and 4.2). Figure 5.1 presents the difference in the overall index of attitudes to immigration according to whether respondents were surveyed in-person versus on the telephone. This difference is derived from a model that accounts for gender, age, qualifications, employment status, financial difficulties, perceived social class, housing tenancy, presence of children, ethnicity, place of birth and regional differences between the groups. Here we see very little difference in mean responses using CAPI (the reference category) and CATI, and the confidence intervals indicate the difference in means is not statistically significant.

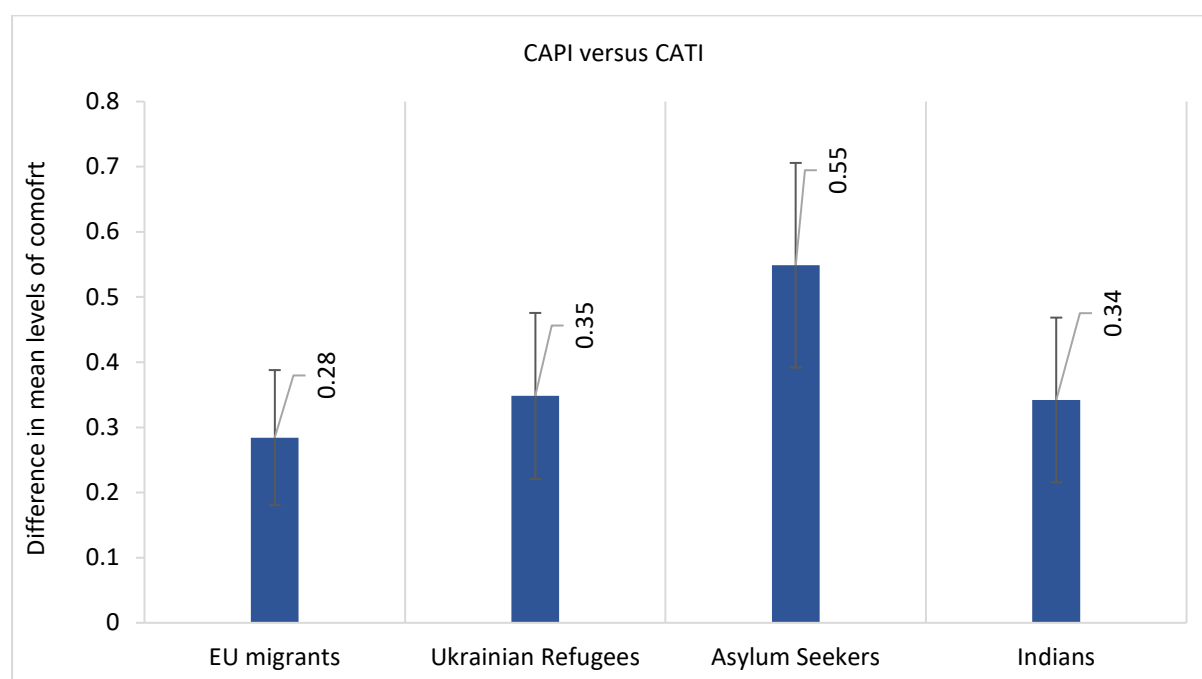
FIGURE 5.1A GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION: SURVEY MODE EFFECTS

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023. Weighted. Based on a model using 1,298 CAPI and 1,469 CATI respondents.

Note: This is a combined index of how positive or negative people feel about 'immigration of people from other EU Member States', 'immigration of people from the Ukraine', and 'immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine', where higher scores indicate greater positivity. Results are derived from an OLS model accounting for a range of socio-demographic characteristics (see text for details).

However, this is not the case when considering social distance to different migrant groups. Figure 5.1b shows that respondents are significantly more positive about all social groups when they are asked the questions in person rather than by telephone. This is particularly true of asylum seekers: Figure 5.2 shows that respondents are almost half a point more positive in person towards asylum seekers, on a scale that runs from 1 to 10 (see Section 3.2). This difference in comfort scores between CAPI and CATI respondents is around the size of the difference in scores between those with a secondary qualification and tertiary qualification (Table 4.2). Further analysis shows that the difference is primarily among those with Leaving Certificate qualifications or lower: responses of those with a university degree essentially do not differ.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Results available from authors on request.

FIGURE 5.1B DIFFERENCE IN COMFORT LEVELS WITH FOUR MIGRANT GROUPS: SURVEY MODE EFFECTS

Source: DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, 2023. Weighted. Based on 1,353 CPI and 1,478 CATI respondents.

Note: These are separate scales running from 1 to 10, where higher scores indicate greater comfort. Results are derived from an OLS model accounting for a range of socio-demographic characteristics (see text for details).

These results suggest that there may be some social desirability bias in in-person responses, especially towards asylum seekers in the Equality Attitudes Survey 2023. Such bias may also be present in the Eurobarometer and European Social Survey reported in Chapter 2 given their predominant use of in-person interviewing.

5.2 HOW ROBUST IS POLICY SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES?

In Chapter 3, based on the DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey 2023, a very high proportion of respondents (87 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed to the statement ‘Ireland should help Ukrainian Refugees’ (see Figure 3.2). However, as mentioned above, respondents do not necessarily think through implications carefully when responding to questions, which means that wording that draws attention to costs or trade-offs can decrease levels of support. The focus of this section is the extent to which people’s support for refugees varies if trade-offs or costs are explicitly mentioned. The evidence used draws on a survey experiment fielded online in August 2022, funded by the National Disability Authority (Timmons et al., 2023a). Survey experiments combine the representativeness of more traditional surveys with the experimental control of an experiment (Steiner et al., 2016). In this survey, 2,000 participants were recruited from a leading polling company to be nationally representative of the adult population in Ireland (see Appendix I for further details). The main focus of the study was disability, and in

this section of the study, participants each saw a number of policy statements on different issues and were asked whether they agreed with each one.⁸⁸ For each policy issue, three different versions were constructed to examine people's support. A total of 1,000 participants were assigned to see one of the three versions, with around 330 seeing each version. This section focuses exclusively on the three versions concerning refugees – the wording of the items is presented in Table 5.1.

TABLE 5.1 POLICY STATEMENTS ON SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

Version 1	Version 2	Version 3
Control: The government should do as much as it can for Ukrainian refugees who have come to Ireland.	Pressure on services: The government should do as much as it can for Ukrainian refugees who have come to Ireland, even if it puts pressure on services.	Tax: The government should do as much as it can for Ukrainian refugees who have come to Ireland, even if it means increasing taxes.

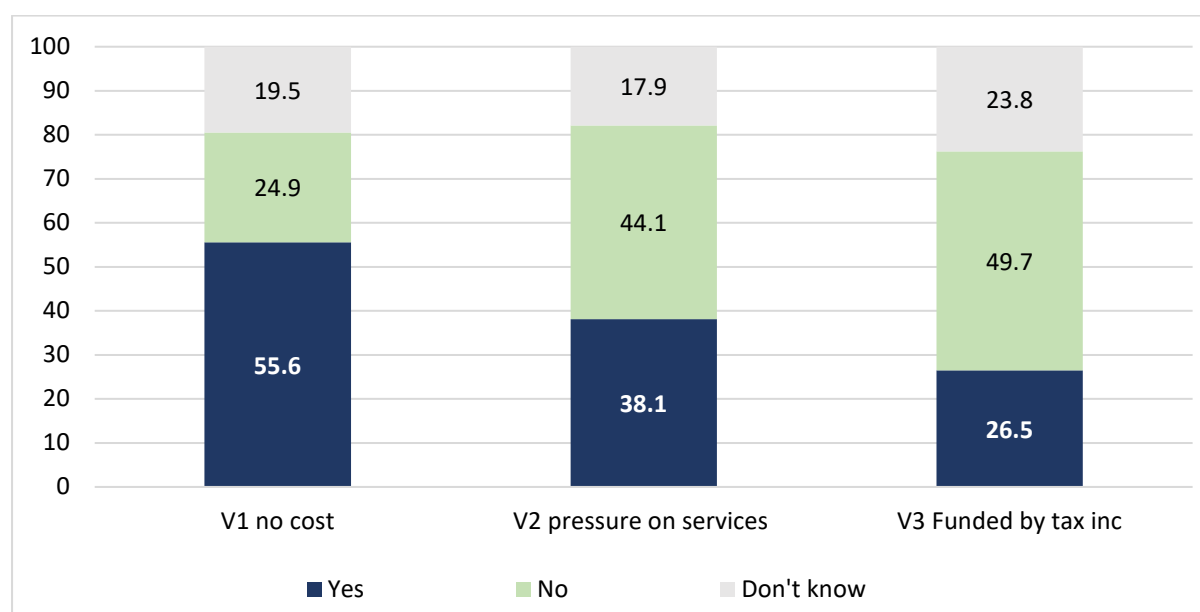
Source: NDA Disability attitudes experiment (Timmons et al., 2023a).

Figure 5.2 shows people's responses to the three versions of the question on support for Ukrainian refugees in this experiment. Support varied across the versions,⁸⁹ with more participants endorsing the policy in the Control version (V1) when no trade-off was made explicit, compared to the other two groups.⁹⁰ Support was higher in the pressure on services version (V2) than in the Tax version (V3). These effects are large: the results imply that 17.5 per cent of people withdraw their endorsement of government support for Ukrainian refugees when pressure on services is mentioned, with 29 per cent withdrawing support if funding by a tax increase is mentioned.

⁸⁸ The four issues were selected from a wider set of eight (four about disability, and four about other issues, including Ukrainian refugees).

⁸⁹ $\chi^2(4)=66.55$, $p < .000$.

⁹⁰ $Z_{\text{Services}} = -4.52$, $ps < .001$. Z_{Tax} .

FIGURE 5.2 SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES: POLICY TRADE-OFFS

Source: NDA Experiment (Timmons et al., 2023a). N of respondents – Version 1=333; Version 2=336; Version 3=328.

Does this experimental effect vary for different groups? Table 5.2 presents logistic regression models predicting support for the three different versions of the policy statement using socio-demographic characteristics expected to be associated with attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees. For each experimental condition, Model A includes gender, age and education; and Model B includes these, while also adding urban/rural residence, employment status, financial strain, nationality (Irish/non-Irish), housing tenure and political orientation (left-right). The models predict ‘yes’ to this question, indicating support, compared to ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’.⁹¹

Table 5.2 shows that men were more supportive of Ukrainian refugees in Version 1 (no cost specified) than women. We find no gender differences in the other conditions (Version 2 and Version 3). The effect of age group (under 40, 40-59, or 60 plus) varied somewhat according to experimental condition. In Version 1 (support for refugees with no cost specified), older people (60+) were much more supportive than other age groups (77 per cent support among 60+ versus less than half in other age groups). This effect is also maintained after controls for current financial situation (difficulty making ends meet) and political orientation (Model B). There are some indications that in Version 3 (specifying a tax increase), it is the middle-aged group – potentially those paying the most tax – who are less supportive (18 per cent of this age group support compared to over 30 per cent in older and younger age groups), though the effect is reduced by the addition of other controls (Model B).

⁹¹ On inspection, respondents who answered ‘don’t know’ were more like the ‘no’ responses, justifying combining the two categories.

TABLE 5.2 LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING PEOPLE'S POLICY SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

	Model A gender, age & education			Model B add other factors		
	No condition	Pressure on services	Tax increase	No condition	Pressure on services	Tax increase
Gender						
Female	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Male	0.546*	0.171	0.317	0.542*	0.218	0.333
Age						
Under 40	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
40-59	-0.013	0.193	-0.597 ⁺	0.174	0.226	-0.460
60+	1.306***	0.506 ⁺	0.216	1.272**	0.611	-0.018
Highest education						
IT degree	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
Third-level degree	0.471*	0.314	0.216	0.165	0.149	0.245
Rural/urban						
Rural				ref.	ref.	ref.
Urban				0.089	-0.413 ⁺	0.013
Economic indicators						
Not employed				ref.	ref.	ref.
Currently employed				-0.409	0.158	-0.546 ⁺
Financial diff: none				ref.	ref.	ref.
Difficult to make ends meet				-0.516 ⁺	-0.525*	-0.464 ⁺
Housing type: Social housing				ref.	ref.	ref.
Live with parents				0.953 ⁺	0.223	0.292
Private renter				1.003 ⁺	0.625	0.364
Homeowner				0.533	0.339	0.278
Nationality						
Non-Irish national				ref.	ref.	ref.
Irish national				-0.057	-0.318	0.276
Political views						
Right wing				ref.	ref.	ref.
Centrist				0.198	0.399	-0.536
Left wing				1.114***	0.993**	0.211
Constant	-0.542*	-0.901***	-1.152***	-1.079	-1.048	-1.028
Observations	332	333	327	332	333	327
r ² _p	0.066	0.011	0.024	0.115	0.057	0.060

Source: Authors' analysis of NDA Disability attitudes experiment (Timmons et al., 2023a).

Note: + p<0.10 * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001. Respondents missing on any covariates were excluded from the analysis.

In Version 1, with no cost specified, those with higher education (a university degree) were also more supportive than those with Leaving Certificate qualifications or lower (61 per cent versus 52 per cent without a degree), although in Model B, after accounting for employment status, financial strain and political

orientation, this effect of education is reduced and no longer statistically significant.

Turning to Model B effects, those living in urban areas are less supportive of Ukrainian refugees than those in rural areas when pressure on services is specified, though not in other versions.⁹² This may reflect greater perceived pressure on services in urban areas. When a tax increase is specified (Version 3), those currently employed are less supportive of refugees than the non-employed (23 per cent of employed supportive versus 32 per cent of non-employed) though not in other versions. Respondents who are under financial strain – finding it difficult to make ends meet – are less supportive of refugees in all three versions – the version with no cost specified, the version with pressure on services mentioned or the version which mentions a tax increase.⁹³ In terms of housing situation, respondents living with parents or renting privately are more supportive of Ukrainian refugees than those living in social housing when no costs are specified. There are no significant differences by housing situation in the other conditions.

Finally, political (left-right) orientation is strongly associated with responses to two of the conditions.⁹⁴ In the no-cost condition, those who identify as left wing are most supportive (68 per cent support), compared to 50 per cent of right wing and 42 per cent of centrist respondents. When pressure on services is mentioned, almost half (49 per cent) of those on the left are supportive, compared to 29 per cent of those on the right. Interestingly, when tax increases are specified, left-right differences are much reduced (33 per cent support for those on the left and 30 per cent for those on the right). In this condition the lowest support is among self-identified ‘centrists’ (17 per cent).

These findings show that what characteristics of people are important for predicting their attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees depends on how the question is asked. In addition, we also see that many of the differences in attitudes between groups of people shrink or disappear as the costs of support become more onerous to individuals.

⁹² Responses to the question ‘Which of the following best describes the area you live in?’; Urban/Rural.

⁹³ Taken from responses to the following question: ‘Thinking about your household’s total income, from all sources and all household members, would you say that your household is able to make ends meet?’

⁹⁴ Political orientation was measured using the following question: ‘In politics, people sometimes talk of left (liberal) and right (conservative). Where would you place yourself on the following scale, where 0 means the left (liberal) and 10 means the right (conservative)?’ Responses were on a scale from 0-10, with 1-4 coded as left wing; 5 centrist and 6-10 right wing.

5.3 UKRAINIAN REFUGEE/ASYLUM SEEKERS VIGNETTE EXPERIMENT

Another way of exploring variation in attitudes is to use a vignette experiment. A vignette experiment consists of a collection of vignettes, that is, in this case, a set of systematically varied descriptions of situations in order to elicit respondents' beliefs or attitudes (Steiner et al., 2016). Like other survey experiments, vignettes combine population representativeness with experimental control, permitting researchers to vary key factors (in this case the nature of the group) (see also Lawlor and Paquet, 2022). Vignettes are embedded in concrete, realistic situations and are typically viewed as being less susceptible to social desirability bias than direct questions for sensitive topics (Auspurg et al., 2015; Steiner et al., 2016). The fact that vignettes typically ask about the behaviour of another person rather than the respondent themselves contributes to this (Steiner et al., 2016). In the context of recent protests in Ireland against the housing of humanitarian migrants (see Chapter 1), the vignettes presented in this section concern the acceptability of objecting to the nearby housing of 100 Ukrainian refugees versus 100 asylum seekers and a control group (100 factory workers).

TABLE 5.3 VIGNETTE DESIGN: RESPONSE TO UKRAINIANS VERSUS ASYLUM SEEKERS VERSUS FACTORY WORKERS

Ukrainian Refugees	Asylum Seekers	Control (Factory workers)
Rosie lives in a small town in the West of Ireland. Recently around 100 Ukrainian refugees have been offered accommodation in a nearby hotel. Rosie is worried that they will put pressure on local services, especially schools, transport and housing, and wants them to leave.	Rosie lives in a small town in the West of Ireland. Recently around 100 asylum seekers have been offered accommodation in a nearby hotel. Rosie is worried that they will put pressure on local services, especially schools, transport and housing, and wants them to leave.	Rosie lives in a small town in the West of Ireland. Recently a poultry factory has opened and around 100 workers have been offered accommodation in a nearby hotel. Rosie is worried that they will put pressure on local services, especially schools, transport and housing, and wants them to leave.
Rosie decides to set up an online petition to lobby to get the accommodation moved.	Rosie decides to set up an online petition to lobby to get the accommodation moved.	Rosie decides to set up an online petition to lobby to get the accommodation moved.
How acceptable do you think Rosie's behaviour is?	How acceptable do you think Rosie's behaviour is?	How acceptable do you think Rosie's behaviour is?

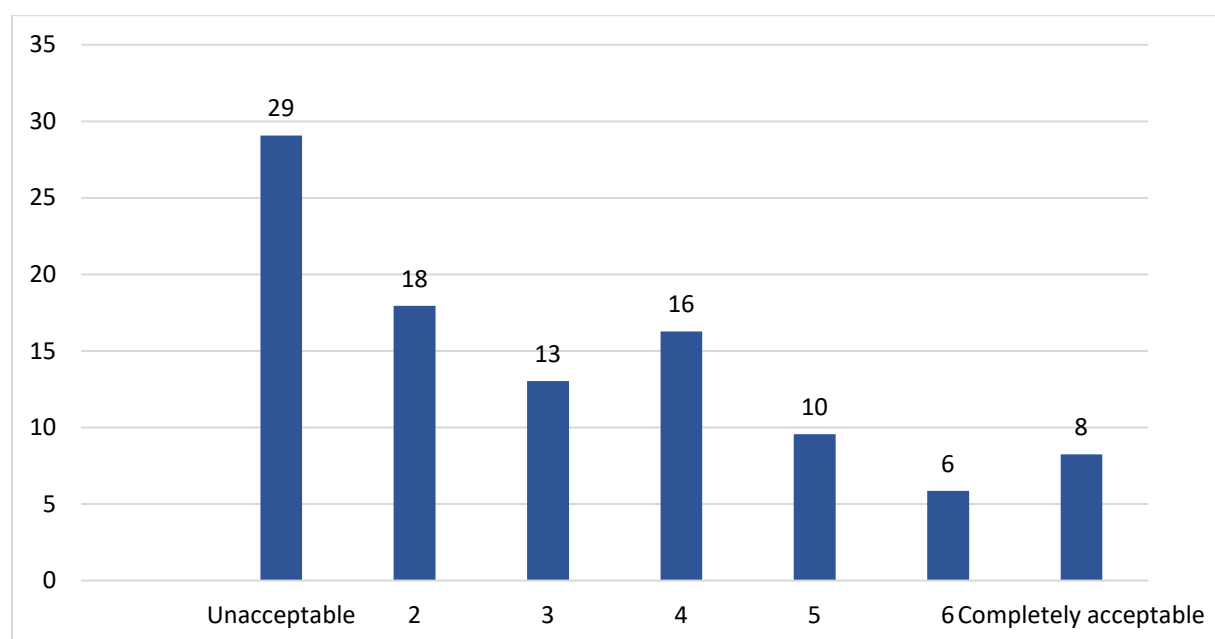
Note: All vignettes were constructed with both male and female versions of the protagonist (Rosie or Rob). The female version of each vignette is shown here for illustrative purposes.

Similar to the policy questions presented in the previous section, this vignette experiment was fielded as part of a larger study of attitudes to disability in Ireland in August 2022 (Timmons et al., 2023a). While the overall survey contained 2,000 participants, the vignettes experiment was designed so that each version of the vignette would be shown to at least 250 participants (see Timmons et al., 2023b).

In each version the situation is identical, with just the group varying so that any differences in response can be attributed to the group, with a less sensitive group acting as a type of ‘control’. The second factor varied was the gender of the protagonist (male or female) which was implied through names or pronouns. In each item, responses were recorded on a scale from 1 to 7 (Sauer et al., 2020). Table 5.3 presents the detailed wording of the vignette versions used here.

When judging how acceptable it was for a community to object to 100 persons (responses on all three groups combined) being housed in their neighbourhood (see Figure 5.3), a much greater proportion of participants gave a response below the midpoint than above (60 per cent versus 23.7 per cent). Indeed almost one-in-three (29 per cent) thought it was completely unacceptable to start an online petition against the housing of people in their neighbourhood. The mean response was 3.1 out of 7 ($SD = 1.93$). Most people surveyed do not find it acceptable to protest or object to the arrival of 100 people being housed locally.

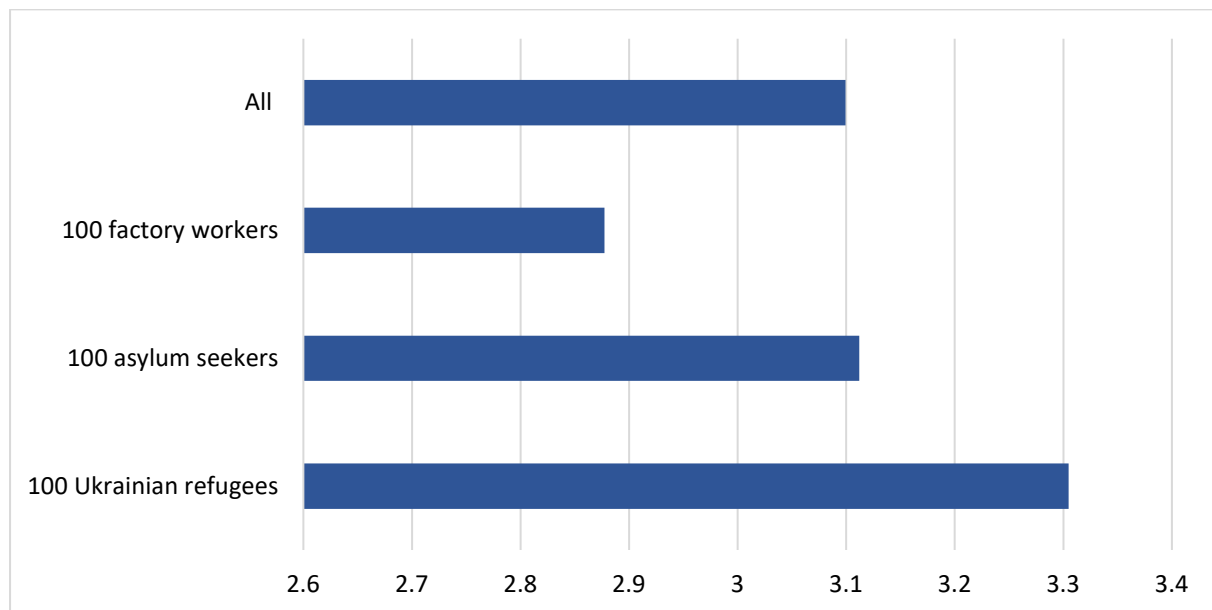
FIGURE 5.3 DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO VIGNETTE ASKING ABOUT ACCEPTABILITY OF OBJECTING TO 100 PEOPLE BEING HOUSED LOCALLY IN AN ONLINE PETITION



Source: Authors' analysis.

Note: NDA Vignette experiments of attitudes to disability (Timmons et al., 2023b).

Figure 5.4 shows that participants judged it to be more acceptable to object to both Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers being housed in their neighbourhood than the control group (factory workers). While the acceptability of objection against Ukrainian refugees was slightly higher than for asylum seekers (see Figure 5.4), this difference in judgement was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 0.64$, $p = .422$).

FIGURE 5.4 AVERAGE ACCEPTABILITY RATINGS FOR OBJECTING TO 100 PEOPLE BEING HOUSED LOCALLY

Source: NDA Vignette experiments of attitudes to disability (Timmons et al., 2023b).

Note: Scale runs from 1-7 (see Figure 5.3).

Is there variation among respondents in terms of support for online petitions against Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers? Table 5.4 pools the responses to the vignette asking about the acceptability of online petitions against Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers.⁹⁵ Therefore, we are testing what characteristics are associated with how acceptable it is to start an online protest against the nearby housing of any migrants seeking protection (Ukrainian refugees or asylum seekers).

Model A includes the group in question, the gender of the protester, the gender of the respondent, respondent's age category and highest educational qualification. Model B adds respondent's current employment status, financial strain, nationality and housing situation. Model C adds respondent's political orientation. After controls, men were more likely to believe an online petition is acceptable than women, implying they are less supportive of the group being housed locally (Models B and C).⁹⁶

There were no marked age differences, but those with a university degree believe it is less acceptable to set up an online petition against Ukrainian refugees or asylum seekers than those with lower qualifications (at least until political 'left-

⁹⁵ Respondents to the question on factory workers were excluded from the model given the substantive focus of this report on Ukrainian refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants.

⁹⁶ All models reported here pass the assumption of proportional odds (Brant, 1990). Approximate likelihood ratio test of proportionality of odds across response categories: Model A $\chi^2=8.13$; Model B $\chi^2=34.61$; Model C $\chi^2=46.01$.

right' orientation is accounted for in Model C). Models B and C both indicate that those currently employed are more supportive of online protest than the non-employed (including students, retired, those caring for dependants full-time, unemployed).

TABLE 5.4 ACCEPTABILITY OF OBJECTION TO 100 UKRAINIANS OR ASYLUM SEEKERS COMING TO THE LOCAL AREA (ORDINAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODEL)

	Model A	Model B	Model C
Asylum seekers	-0.121	-0.172	-0.128
Protagonist male (Rob)	0	0	0
Protagonist female (Rosie)	-0.002	-0.013	-0.047
Female respondent	ref.	ref.	ref.
Male respondent	0.251	0.270+	0.315*
Age <40	ref.	ref.	ref.
Age 40-59	0.178	0.147	0.243
Age 60+	-0.076	0.189	0.183
No University Degree	ref.	ref.	ref.
University Degree	-0.305+	-0.294+	-0.223
Not in employment		ref.	ref.
Currently employed		0.404*	0.373+
Easily or fairly easy		ref.	ref.
Difficult to make ends meet		0.334*	0.380*
Non-Irish national		ref.	ref.
Irish national		-0.211	-0.265
Social housing		ref.	ref.
Live with parents		-0.267	-0.119
Private renter		-0.154	-0.2
Home owner		-0.297	-0.348
Right wing			ref.
Centrist			-0.206
Left wing			-0.956***
/			
Cut1	-1.049***	-0.971*	-1.451**
Cut2	-0.238	-0.148	-0.6
Cut3	0.279	0.379	-0.046
Cut4	1.065***	1.180**	0.787+
Observations	559	559	559
r2_pseudo	0.006	0.012	0.028

Source: NDA Vignette experiments of attitudes to disability (Timmons et al., 2023b).

Notes: *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05, + p<.10; Ordered logit model of acceptability of setting up an online petition. Responses 5,6 and 7 were combined for modelling.

These models also show that those who are struggling financially are more supportive of online protest than those who are living comfortably on their income. There are no significant differences between respondents in different housing

situations in responses to these two vignettes. However, those who identify as more left wing are much more opposed to online protests against the nearby housing of those seeking protection than those who identify as right wing. This echoes the findings above regarding policy support for Ukrainian refugees, with left-wing respondents being more supportive. The findings from these experiments represent the first time in Ireland that an association between left-right orientation and attitudes to immigrants and immigration has been found (see Chapter 1).

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter considered the idea that some respondents may have been overstating their support for immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the previous chapters. We found some effects of survey mode, with some tendency for respondents to be more positive towards specific ‘out-groups’ in in-person interviews, compared to telephone interviews. However we found no differences by survey mode for responses to overall attitudes to immigration.

Evidence from the policy question clearly demonstrates support for refugees drops when costs and trade-offs are mentioned. Support for refugees is somewhat lower when pressure on services is mentioned, and much lower when policy support for refugees is to be funded by a tax increase. Even with no costs specified (Version 1), the support for the government doing as much as it can for refugees coming to Ireland is lower than in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.2). Different factors may underly this. The wording is different – the DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey specifies Ukrainian refugees, while the experimental policy questions refer to refugees more generally. Secondly, the wording is different – ‘Ireland should help Ukrainian refugees’ versus the slightly stronger ‘The government should do as much as it can for refugees who have come to Ireland’. Thirdly, this experimental question was embedded in a different survey, which focused primarily on attitudes to disability and disability supports, rather than attitudes to different equality groups, as in the DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey. In addition, the survey was online, which may illicit more socially undesirable responses than in person or by telephone (see Section 5.1). In any event, the key take-away from the experiment is that mentioning costs and trade-offs explicitly reduces the support for policies.

Chapter 3 showed that in the DCEDIY Equality Survey, attitudes to Ukrainian refugees were more positive than attitudes to asylum seekers, in line with international literature (Chapter 1). However, in a vignette experiment asking about the acceptability of online protest at the arrival of 100 new Ukrainian refugees and 100 new asylum seekers, there was no difference in responses. The vignette evokes a very specific situation – choosing to protest online about the housing of 100 people locally – whereas the questions in the Equality Attitudes Survey were more general, asking whether ‘Ireland should help refugees’

(Figure 3.2) or comfort with groups (Figure 3.3). It is plausible that people might prefer Ukrainians over asylum seekers (Equality Attitudes Survey), but they might also believe people should be equally allowed to protest any housing of people seeking protection in their areas.

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 also consider factors associated with responses in the experiments. While the smaller sample sizes in the experiments reported in this chapter mean that some effects fail to reach statistical significance, there are some drivers of support that are consistent between the experiments and the DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey reported in Chapter 4. For example, those who are finding it difficult to make ends meet are less supportive on the policy questions, whatever the condition, and find online protests against both Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers more acceptable than those who have no difficulty making ends meet. This echoes findings from Chapter 4. The higher educated tend to be more supportive of policy and the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers to the local area – though the effects are smaller in this chapter than in Chapter 4, and no longer significant when financial strain, employment status and political orientation are included. Finally, while many questions on civic engagement and issues facing Ireland and the world today were not asked of experiment respondents, they were asked about their political (left-right) orientation. Left-wing respondents are more supportive than either centrists or liberal/right-wing respondents on policy support with no condition or with pressure on services, and they are more opposed to online protests against humanitarian migrants. This suggests a left-right split may be emerging in attitudes to immigrants in Ireland, consistent with Müller and Regan (2021) finding that left-right positions increasingly structure voter choice.

CHAPTER 6

Summary and implications

6.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

6.1.1 Have attitudes changed?

In order to answer the question of whether attitudes in Ireland towards immigration, people seeking protection, and the salience of immigration in Ireland have changed in recent years, we looked at current and historical data to put current attitudes in Ireland in perspective. We also considered EU data to understand how attitudes in Ireland compare with EU averages.

We found that in recent years, attitudes towards immigration in Ireland remain positive in comparison with the EU27 as a whole, with Ireland having some of the most positive attitudes towards immigration across all European countries. Attitudes generally remain very positive compared with the last 20 years in Ireland, with most attitudes we looked at either at or close to their most positive levels seen over the time periods attitude data were collected. However, there is evidence that attitudes towards immigration in Ireland have seen some recent declines, especially in the latter half of 2023. Between June and November 2023, positivity towards EU, and especially non-EU, immigration, support for helping refugees, and a belief that immigrants contribute to Ireland declined. On one hand, this marks a negative change from the generally improving and stable attitudes towards immigration observed over the past ten years or so. On the other hand, these declines are relatively small, and attitudes have improved from similar declines in the past ten-year period, so it is too early to tell whether this trend will continue, reverse, or plateau. The declines in Ireland were also mirrored by similar (albeit often smaller) declines across the EU27.

At the same time, there has been a marked change in the salience of immigration as a national issue, meaning that more people (14 per cent in 2023) have reported immigration as one of the top two issues facing the country than at any time since immediately prior to the 2008 recession. This increased salience brings Ireland closer to the salience levels of immigration in the EU27 as a whole. In November 2023, 20 per cent of EU27 respondents felt immigration was one of the top two issues facing their country. While the size of the increase in salience in Ireland does not seem to directly translate into a similarly sized negative change in people's immigration attitudes, the decrease in attitudes in 2023 may indicate that salience (among other factors) is beginning to play a role in shaping people's attitudes. This relationship has been found in previous literature, particularly when combined

with other factors such as neighbourhood diversity or economic hardship (Hopkins 2010; 2011; Paul and Fitzgerald, 2021).

6.1.2 Do attitudes differ towards different groups?

We also attempted to answer the question of whether Irish attitudes differ towards different groups of migrants, in particular focusing on Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers, as conversations about these groups are becoming increasingly prominent. We were particularly interested in distinctions between Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the link between those attitudes and wider attitudes towards immigration in Ireland. To answer this question, we analysed a survey that asked about attitudes towards different groups to better understand how they relate to one other.

This analysis showed that while attitudes to all immigrant groups are generally positive, there are some marked differences in attitudes to particular groups. Respondents were more positive about immigration from other EU countries or Ukraine than from outside the EU or asylum seekers, in line with previous research. Levels of comfort were also higher for EU migrants, and somewhat lower for Ukrainian refugees and Indians, with people least comfortable with asylum seekers. These findings of distinct attitudes were supported by factor analyses which showed that people in Ireland hold two distinct underlying sets of attitudes: attitudes towards immigration in general and attitudes towards whether Ireland should help people seeking protection. While these attitudes are strongly correlated for most people, we also find just because people may be positive towards one type of immigration does not mean they are positive to all types. In particular, while people who are supportive of Ireland helping refugees are almost all positive about immigration in general, there are sizeable proportions of people who are not supportive, or unsure, as to whether Ireland should help refugees but who are still positive about immigration in general. This may reflect different perceptions of deservingness or of contribution potential of these groups (see Bansak et al., 2016), reflecting sociotropic concerns (see Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), or perceived social distance.

This distinction between types of immigrant and immigration appears to be particularly relevant when it comes to asylum seekers. Analysing comfort levels towards different groups, we find people who feel comfortable with one type of migrant generally feel similar levels of comfort for all types. However, there is a small minority of people in Ireland (around 7 per cent of the sample) who are comfortable with EU migrants, Indians, and Ukrainian refugees but noticeably uncomfortable with asylum seekers.

6.1.3 What are the main drivers of attitudes?

The report sought to understand the drivers of these attitudes by looking at both socio-demographic and attitudinal and behavioural factors that are related to (a) attitudes to immigration in general and (b) comfort levels with different migrant groups. It showed, in line with previous studies, that educational qualifications are one of the most consistent socio-demographic determinants of attitudes, with more highly educated people being more positive towards immigration, more comfortable with having different groups of immigrants in their everyday lives, more supportive of policies to help refugees and less supportive of protests against housing people seeking protection in the local area (see also Dražanová et al., 2022; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014).

We found that attitudinal and behavioural factors can be stronger determinants of attitudes towards immigration and comfort levels with immigrants than socio-demographic factors. In particular people who are confident about the future are more positive about immigration and comfortable with immigrant groups in Ireland. Confidence in the future is generally high among the population in Ireland, with 67 per cent of the population agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement ‘you have confidence in the future’ in spring 2023. These findings suggest that people’s attitudes towards immigrants are closely linked to their sense of the social and political context they live in, and that policy goals around improving social cohesion need to take these contexts into account and carefully consider how economic and political decisions more broadly influence attitudes. We return to this point below.

The evidence in this report also supports previous research revealing a more complex relationship between people’s socio-economic characteristics and immigration attitudes. While it is clear that some indicators of individual economic vulnerability do not appear consistently related to immigration attitudes (as evidenced by the lack of any relationship with unemployment and housing tenure type), the story is slightly more nuanced than previous studies indicate, at least in Ireland. The clear negative relationship between people finding it more difficult ‘to make ends meet’ and almost every dimension of their attitudes towards immigration throughout this report shows that individuals’ perception of their economic situation does appear important for their attitudes. This is an important contribution to the literature and may explain previous mixed findings regarding the impact of people’s objective economic situation. Whatever an individual’s income, the fact that they are struggling to meet financial demands appears to be what is most salient for their attitudes to immigration and perceptions of threat. One notable exception is comfort levels with asylum seekers, which may indicate that attitudes towards this group are more influenced by cultural than economic concerns.

It is nonetheless interesting that current housing tenure type does not appear to influence attitudes in the manner predicted by group threat theory, especially in the context of Ireland's deep housing crisis. However, this may be as a result of sociotropic concerns being more influential than people's personal situation, as has been found in previous literature (see Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). This is supported somewhat by the findings in this analysis that those concerned about the 'economic situation' and 'cost-of-living' in Ireland have more negative attitudes than those who were concerned about other issues (such as racism and discrimination or climate change). In other words, while people might be secure in their own situation, they may still be concerned about how immigration affects the wider housing and economic situation in Ireland, which might shape their attitudes towards immigration.

Another finding is that, for the first time in research on the topic in Ireland, we see evidence of a link between left-right political orientation and support for immigration, at least where this is measured. According to an experiment, those who identify as politically left wing are more opposed to protests against housing people seeking protection, and more in favour of policy supports for refugees (Chapter 5). This has been consistently found in international literature, and may indicate the emergence of a left-right split in attitudes to immigrants in Ireland, consistent with Müller and Regan (2021) finding that left-right positions increasingly structure voter choice in Ireland.

Finally, the factors which predict people's comfort towards one group of migrants will generally predict their comfort towards other migrant groups as well (although there are exceptions). In other words, how people feel towards different migrant groups appears to be linked to the same characteristics. However, comfort levels with asylum seekers (and to a lesser extent, Ukrainian refugees and Indians) tend to be more sensitive to people's individual characteristics and beliefs than their comfort towards European migrants.

6.2 LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

An important limitation of this research is that we only looked at attitudes over time and individual level factors that influence attitudes. However, a significant body of literature has developed that shows that local-level contexts can be very important for attitudes. This can mean that certain areas of the country may become more hostile, without this being reflected in overall statistics. This is a particular danger where attitudes polarise, with attitudes among some groups becoming more positive while attitudes among others become more negative, which can be hidden in averages. Laurence and Bentley (2018), focusing on the UK, found that this can happen in more diverse communities. A better understanding

of local-level factors and their impact on attitudes in Ireland would therefore be useful to draw stronger conclusions. Laurence et al. (forthcoming) analyse what kinds of communities tend to express greater aversion to people seeking protection and immigration more broadly, by matching data from the (2023) DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey, analysed in this report, to a wide range of local-level data, including small-area level data from the 2022 Census.

The role of the media and the consumption of media have also been found to have an important impact on attitudes to immigrants (Eberl et al., 2018) but were not explored in this report. This is a potentially important gap for research in Ireland, but was outside the scope of this report.

It should also be noted that the relationships observed between people's characteristics and views (the 'drivers' of immigration attitudes) and their attitudes towards immigration are cross-sectional in nature. This could mean that, in some cases, the relationship operates the other way around or in both directions. For example, it may be that people with less confidence in the future feel less secure in their situation, and more averse to immigration. However, it could also be the case that being more averse to immigration affects how confident people are in the future. Future research that can disentangle the direction of relationships will be important to more robustly test the relationships observed here. This could be by using panel data – having repeated measures from the same group of people over time, or experimental methods testing to what extent prior information or priming influences attitudes to immigration and different immigrant groups (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2014).

6.3 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Improving our understanding of attitudes towards immigrants is a crucial part of public policy in a country that has gone from decades of widespread emigration to 20 per cent of the population having been born abroad in the 2022 Census.⁹⁷ This transformation can lead to governance and social cohesion challenges, which is why it is crucial to monitor and understand feelings towards both immigrants and immigration. This research both attempted to monitor and understand the current level of attitudes, and to better understand the factors that are associated with these attitudes.

It is clear from this research that, on the whole, people in Ireland are positive about, and supportive of, immigration, with attitudes remaining very positive in a

⁹⁷ In 2002, for example, 10 per cent of the population were born outside Ireland, of which half (5 per cent) were born in the UK (2002 Census of Population, Ireland, Volume 4).

European and historical context. However, there are important caveats to this. One is the recent decline in attitudes, which was particularly marked in the last months of 2023. Another is that immigration is becoming more salient as a national issue in Ireland, and research has shown that salience may be a risk factor for more negative attitudes, especially when people are experiencing ethnic change in their local areas (potentially through increased *perceptions* of the number of migrants in the area) (Crawley et al., 2019; Hopkins et al., 2014) or economic hardship (Paul and Fitzgerald, 2021). This might also link with the finding that positivity can depend on the perceived costs and implications for society. Experimental evidence described in Section 5.2 showed how, compared to when no costs are specified, support for refugees is somewhat lower when pressure on services is mentioned, and much lower when funding a policy through a tax increase is mentioned. This suggests that positive attitudes towards immigration may be sensitive to perceived costs and trade-offs. If the Government wants to maintain high levels of support for helping refugees in Ireland, these results suggest that it should not come at the cost of pressure on services or, in particular, be directly linked to tax increases. It is therefore crucial to ensure that areas hosting refugees and asylum seekers are supported to expand services to meet the needs of this population, so that services for the rest of the population are not affected, leading to a perceived burden. This is in line with recent findings about the causes of compassion fatigue among refugee hosting populations (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024).

Another important caveat is that reported attitudes may be influenced by social desirability bias for some respondents, suggesting that overall levels of support for immigration and immigrant groups may be somewhat overstated (see Chapter 5 and McGinnity et al., 2020). That said, unless this tendency to overstate support among some groups has markedly changed over time, which seems very unlikely, we can be reasonably confident that the results accurately reflect trends over time.

An important point for understanding the implications of these findings is that attitudes differ towards different groups. In general, attitudes towards non-European migrants are noticeably less positive than attitudes to migrants from the EU or Ukraine (though when examining social distance, comfort towards Indians was similar to comfort towards Ukrainians). Asylum seekers emerged from this research as a group of particular concern in relation to attitudes. Not only are comfort levels lowest towards this group, they are also distinct in that a small minority of people in Ireland are comfortable with all migrants but quite uncomfortable with asylum seekers. In addition, there does appear to be more support for helping Ukrainian refugees than asylum seekers (notwithstanding the lack of a difference in people's belief in the acceptability of protests towards housing centres of these groups). Furthermore, when we examine what factors are associated with people's comfort with migrant groups, where a characteristic is negatively linked with comfort towards different migrant groups (for example,

feeling that life was better in the past, less optimism about the future, or lower levels of education), these are more strongly related to attitudes towards asylum seekers. This suggests that when things go wrong (socially or economically), attitudes to this group are most likely to be affected, reflecting theories that asylum can be a ‘touchstone issue’ around which broader social, economic and political concerns can come to be articulated (Crawley et al., 2019, p.105). However, attitudes towards particular ethnic/religious out-groups may also explain some of this, with racial/religious prejudice likely playing a role, as asylum seekers are more likely to be members of ethnic/religious minorities in Ireland than, for example, EU migrants.

Previous research in Ireland has shown how having come through the international protection system is negatively associated with integration, even after accounting for ethnicity, language skills and educational qualifications (Privalko et al., 2023). This suggests that the group may need additional support to successfully integrate in key sectors of society, as proposed in the ‘White Paper to End Direct Provision and to Establish a new International Protection Support Service’ (DCEDIY, 2021). In addition to these challenges, the findings of our research suggests that this group experiences extra challenges in terms of negative sentiment, meaning that they may face disadvantages on both sides of the ‘two-way process’ of integration. This is an important consideration for the new Migrant Integration Strategy, with the previous strategy not including asylum seekers at all, an approach that has shifted with the White Paper.

Overall, the findings in this report indicate that attitudes to immigration and immigrants in Ireland currently remain positive, although recently there have been relatively small but marked declines in people’s attitudes. The narrative of a broad-base change in sentiments towards immigrants is therefore not borne out in the evidence presented here. With the available data it remains too early to say whether the recent declines in attitudes will continue, plateau, or reverse. What has seen a significant change in the past year is in how salient the issue of immigration has become in Ireland. With high salience of immigration, combined with the report’s findings of more negative attitudes towards certain groups that are becoming more prominent in migration figures in recent years (such as migrants from outside the EU who are increasingly filling labour market gaps and asylum seekers whose numbers have been increasing), there is a risk that the somewhat less positive attitudes observed over the last year or so will be maintained or that sentiment will continue to decline. It should be noted particularly that previous international research has shown that where the salience of immigration is higher, people’s immigration attitudes can be more sensitive to changes in their own lives and environment. In addition, the link between financial strain and negative attitudes in a cost-of-living crisis should also be carefully considered. Previous research has shown the sensitivity of immigrant sentiment to a deep and prolonged recession combined with far-reaching austerity measures in

Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2017). The findings in this report indicate how attitudes are linked to people's perceptions of their economic situation as well as the national economic and political context, which are both subject to change.

One important policy implication of these findings is the key role that economic and social policy plays in influencing attitudes towards immigrants, and the need to consider social cohesion concerns when making these policies. Migrant integration needs to be properly funded, to maintain social cohesion, so that the population does not come to believe that supporting migrants comes at their expense. While it is tempting to see migrant integration narrowly, in terms of language learning and labour market engagement, this report also indicates that many other policies can be seen as migrant integration policies, too. This research reflects a broad literature that analyses the impact of the welfare state on attitudes towards immigration, and shows that mainstream welfare policy can also be seen through the lens of migrant integration. This highlights the importance of a whole-of-government approach to migrant integration, as well as broader considerations informing the next Migrant Integration Strategy. Recent research analysing the causes of compassion fatigue for refugee populations indicates the importance of long-term integration planning, ensuring that investment is made to meet the needs of host communities (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2024).

On a narrower level, one area where policy could broaden its remit of integrating immigrants is by providing further opportunities for positive interethnic contact between migrants and non-migrants. Such social contact is a well-established driver of positive attitudes towards immigration, as has been shown in Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2023b). In this sense, understanding the impact of reception policies that often leave refugees and asylum seekers isolated and segregated from the native population is crucial. One site amenable to intervention in the short term is via fostering civic engagement, such as volunteering, which can provide opportunities for interaction across groups (Laurence, 2020). Another area policy could support positive attitudes towards immigration is via working towards maintaining and improving people's perceived political efficacy – that is, the extent to which they feel they have a voice in society. As previous work has shown in Ireland, feelings of alienation and disenfranchisement (that one's voice does not count) is associated with more anti-immigrant sentiment (McGinnity et al., 2023b).

These findings can help to inform the next Migrant Integration Strategy, work on which is currently underway.⁹⁸ A coherent, evidence-based understanding of what influences attitudes towards migrants (which are a fundamental part of migrant integration) will be crucial to its success and ability to genuinely address the drivers of negative sentiment.

⁹⁸ See DCEDIY (2023) 'Public consultation to inform a national strategy for migrant integration'. Available at www.gov.ie.

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APPENDIX I

Data sources used

A.1 SURVEY ON PEOPLE IN IRELAND'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIVERSITY ('EQUALITY ATTITUDES SURVEY')

Data owner: the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

Data of data collection: All interviews were conducted between 7 March and 12 April 2023.

Sample size: 3,008 individuals (aged 16 and over).

Mode of collection: Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) (n=1,500 individuals) and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) (n=1,508 individuals).

Sample selection:

CATI:

- All 1,508 CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) respondents were selected using random digit dialling to ensure maximum population coverage.
- The list of numbers for dialling was a combination of 85 per cent randomly generated mobile numbers and 15 per cent randomly generated landline numbers.
- Landline numbers are randomly generated from stems taken from the numbers listed in published telephone directories. Directories are published by region, so stratification is built into the process. A systematic 'step' approach is used to select numbers from each regional directory, and the stems from these selected numbers are then used for random landline number generation. This approach ensures directory and ex-directory numbers are eligible for selection.
- Respondents were selected for participation at random: no quota controls were imposed.

CAPI:

- All 1,500 face to face (F2F) respondents were identified using stratified random sampling.
- IPSOS interviewers were sent to 100 locations across Ireland and instructed to take a random route from a random start address to identify respondents for interview. Interviewers were further required to fill quotas by age, gender and

socio-economic status, to limit bias in respondent selection at the household level.

- At analysis stage, corrective weights (age within gender, socio-economic status and region) were applied separately to the CATI and F2F data to fully align each sample with the known Irish population aged 16 years and upwards. Subsequent to being weighted individually, the samples were combined to provide a robust picture of national opinion on attitudes to equality.

For more details see ‘Survey on Attitudes towards the Equality Grounds Poll’ report <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/262032/7adc792f-7eb8-4027-90d7-0e556d277449.pdf#page=null>.

A.2 EUROBAROMETER (‘EB’)

Data owner: European Commission.

Data of data collection: Multiple waves of EB used, covering period 2004 to 2023.

Sample size: Ireland (average sample size per wave: n=1,011 individuals); EU27 (average sample size per wave: n=26,274 individuals).

Mode of collection: Primary mode of collection is CAPI. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data for August 2020 (EB 93.1) were collected via an online questionnaire (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing – CAWI) in Ireland, Estonia, Finland, Luxembourg and the UK. In May 2022 (EB 97.3), face-to-face interviewing was supplemented by CAWI interviewing in Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden to boost sample size (see EB 97.3 technical specification for rates). All other data-points are collected via face-to-face interviewing.

Sample selection: Multi-stage probability sampling design undertaken to achieve a sample of at least 1,000 respondents aged 15 and older per country <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/about/eurobarometer>. Please consult the additional information in the Technical Specifications in the basic questionnaire for each wave for further information <https://www.gesis.org/home>.

A.3 EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY (‘ESS’)

Data owner: European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC).

Data of data collection: Biennial surveys, starting in 2002, with data collection covering (approximately) one year. Exception is Round 10 which began data collection in 2021, not 2020 (period of data collection: 23-11-2021 to 16-12-2022).

Sample size: Ireland (average sample size per wave: n=2,279 individuals).

Mode of collection: Primary mode of collection is CAPI.

Sample selection: Multi-stage probability sampling design undertaken. Please consult the additional information in the Technical Specification for Ireland for each wave for further information (<https://ess-search.nsd.no/>).

A.4 NDA SURVEY EXPERIMENT ON ATTITUDES TO DISABILITY ('NDA ATTITUDES SURVEY EXPERIMENT')

Data owner: Shane Timmons, Eamonn Carroll and Frances McGinnity (ESRI).

Data of data collection: Data were collected between 11 and 26 August 2022.

Sample size (total): 2,000 individuals aged 18 and over.

Mode of collection: Online survey experiment, programmed in Gorilla Experiment Builder (Anwyl-Irvine et al., 2020).⁹⁹

Sample selection: Participants were recruited from a leading polling company's online panel to be nationally representative of the adult population in Ireland. The online panel is populated through advertisements to the general public and through probability sampling. The sample approximates the population estimates to within 2 percentage points (Table 5.A). Participants were paid €3 for undertaking the study, which took ten minutes on average.

The study was presented to participants as relating to 'their opinion of different policy issues' and while the main focus was on attitudes to disability, it also contained non-disability policy questions, including attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers. Participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers.

For more details see 'Experimental Tests of Public Support for Disability Policy' <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS159.pdf>, and 'Ableism differs by disability, gender and social context: Evidence from vignette experiments' <https://www.esri.ie/publications/ableism-differs-by-disability-gender-and-social-context-evidence-from-vignette>.

⁹⁹ In order to complete the study, participants had to correctly answer an instructed response attention-check question (which was failed by 39 additional participants, who were thus excluded and did not count towards the target sample size).

**TABLE 5.A SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE SURVEY
EXPERIMENT ON ATTITUDES**

		n	%	Population ^a %
Gender	Men	961	48.1	48.9
	Women	1,029	51.5	51.1
	Non-Binary ^b /Other	10	0.5	-
Age	18-39 years	786	39.3	40.4
	40-59 years	696	34.8	35.1
	60+	518	25.9	24.5
Educational Attainment	Below Degree	1,175	58.8	58.0
	Degree or above	825	41.3	42.0
Employment	In Labour Force	1,339	67.0	65.2
	(of which, Employed)	(1,276)	(95.3)	(95.2)
	(of which, Unemployed)	(63)	(4.7)	(4.8)
	Not in Labour Force	661	33.1	34.8
Living Area	Urban	1,274	63.7	63.3
	Rural	726	36.3	36.7

Source: Timmons et al., 2023a.

Note: ^a Population estimates are based on 2021 Central Statistics Office (CSO) data where possible and 2016 Census data, except for Employment which is based on Q2 2022 data from the Labour Force Survey.

^b There are currently no population estimates for non-binary individuals.

APPENDIX II

Research Question	Variable	Questions used	Source
Have attitudes in Ireland towards immigration changed noticeably since 2022? (Chapter 2)	Attitudes towards EU immigration (Section 2.1)	'Please say whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you?' (a) '...Immigration of people from other EU Member States'.	Eurobarometer
	Attitudes towards non-EU immigration (Section 2.1)	'Please say whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you?' (b) '...Immigration of people from outside the EU'.	Eurobarometer
	Contribution of immigration (Section 2.2)	'For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you totally agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or totally disagree...' (a) 'Immigrants contribute positively to Ireland'.	Eurobarometer
	Support for helping refugees (Section 2.2)	'For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you totally agree, tend to agree, tend to disagree or totally disagree...' (b) 'Ireland should help refugees'.	Eurobarometer
	Immigrants make country a better place to live (Section 2.3)	'Is Ireland made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?' (0 = 'Worse place to live' to 10 = 'Better place to live').	European Social Survey
	Country's cultural life enriched by immigrants (Section 2.3)	'Would you say that Ireland's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?' (0 = 'Cultural life undermined' to 10 = 'Cultural life enriched').	European Social Survey
	Immigration good for the economy (Section 2.3)	'Would you say it is generally bad or good for Ireland's economy that people come to live here from other countries?' (0 = 'Bad for the economy' to 10 = 'Good for the economy').	European Social Survey
	Salience of immigration: facing the country (Section 2.4)	'What do you think are the two most important issues facing Ireland at the moment?' Options given are: crime, the economic situation, public transport, rising prices/inflation, taxation, unemployment, terrorism, defence/foreign affairs, housing, immigration, the healthcare system, the education system, pensions, environmental protection, other and don't know.	Eurobarometer
	Salience of immigration: facing you personally (Section 2.4)	(after the question on issues facing the country) '...and personally, what are the two most important issues you are facing at the moment?' Options to choose from were the same as above.	Eurobarometer

Contd.

Research Question	Variable	Questions used	Source
Do people's attitudes towards different groups differ? (Chapter 3)	General attitudes towards immigration (Section 3.1)	'For each of the following, please tell me if you are very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative? (a) immigration of people from other EU Member States; (b) immigration of people from the Ukraine; (c) immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine'.	DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey
	Attitudes towards people seeking protection (Section 3.1)	'For each of the following statements, please tell me if you agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or disagree strongly? (a) Ireland should help Ukrainian refugees; (b) Ireland should help asylum seekers'.	DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey
	Comfort with different migrant groups (Section 3.2)	1. In neighbourhood: 'The next question is about how uncomfortable or comfortable you would feel if any of the following people were living next door to you/in the nearest house to where you live. For each type of person I read out, please tell me how comfortable on a scale from 1 to 10 where '1' is 'very uncomfortable' and '10' is 'very comfortable'. So out of 10, how comfortable would you be if a ... was living next door/in the nearest house to where you live? Please score 1 to 10 for each.' 2. In their child's class: 'And this time, using the same 1 to 10 scale, can you indicate how comfortable you would feel if the following children were in the same class as your child?' (Prompt if required – if respondent does not have children, ask them to assume/imagine that they have school-aged children to answer this question). 3. In love relationship with their child: 'This time please tell me, how uncomfortable or comfortable you would feel if one of your children was in a love relationship with a person from one of the following groups. Using the same scale of '1' means that you would feel 'very uncomfortable' and '10' that you would feel 'very comfortable'. So out of 10, how comfortable would you be if one of your children was in/are in a relationship with ...?' (Prompt if required – if respondent does not have children, ask them to imagine or assume they have children). For all of these questions, respondents were given a list of 46 categories of people, with distinctions based on age, nationality, ethnicity, family status, gender, class, religion, disability status, migration status, HAP status, addiction, and criminal record. The categories used in this section were: - A person who is from Eastern Europe - A person from another EU country. - A person who is Indian - A person who is a Ukrainian refugee - A person who is an asylum seeker	DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey

Contd.

Research Question	Variable	Questions used	Source
What are the main drivers of attitudes? (Chapter 4)	Overall attitudes towards immigration (Section 4.1)	‘For each of the following, please tell me if you are very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative?’ (a) immigration of people from other EU Member States; (b) immigration of people from the Ukraine; (c) immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine’.	DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey
	Comfort with different migrant groups (Section 4.2)	Questions as in comfort with different migrant groups above (Section 3.2), but ‘a person who is from Eastern Europe’ not included in the analysis	DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey
Might support be overstated? (Chapter 5)	General attitudes towards immigration (Section 5.1)	See Section 3.1	DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey
	Comfort with different migrant groups (Section 5.1)	As in Section 4.2	DCEDIY Equality Attitudes Survey
	Policy support for Ukrainian refugees (Section 5.2)	See Table 5.1	NDA disability attitudes experiment
	Acceptability of protesting housing centres (Section 5.3)	See Table 5.3	NDA disability attitudes experiment

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