

Ireland's Approach to Managing Collaboration with NGOs on Migration Issues

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Migration in Ireland: the Context

- Census 2016 confirms that 535,475 persons or 11.6% of the Irish population were categorised as of migrant origin.
- 104,784 persons described themselves as holding dual nationality, an increase of 87.4% between 2011 and 2016.
- Poles constitute the largest migrant community (122,515 persons), followed by UK nationals (103,113) and Lithuanians (36,552 persons).
- Most migrants are first generation migrants. Second generation migrants are only now beginning to reach adulthood and to enter employment and third-level education.

Principal Strands of Irish Action on Migration

- Three main strands of activity:
- The Migrant Integration Strategy (2017-2020) – targeted at migrants, at refugees or persons with ‘status’ and at the children of migrants.
- The Irish Refugee Protection Programme (the IRPP), a Government programme to bring 4,000 asylum seekers and refugees to Ireland – 1,014 relocated from Greece under the EU’s relocation programme, 1,040 from Lebanon under the UNHCR resettlement programme and the balance through mechanisms such as the Irish Humanitarian Assistance Programme, essentially a family reunification programme.
- 5,681 ‘spontaneous’ asylum seekers in the Direct Provision system.

Migrant Integration Strategy



Migrant Integration Strategy (2)

- Vision – that migrants are facilitated to play a full role in Irish society, that integration is a core principle of Irish life and that Irish society and institutions should work together to promote integration.
- It envisages migration as a two-way process involving action by Irish society, public bodies and by migrants.
- It includes 76 actions aimed at:
 - addressing barriers which prevent migrants from integrating into Irish society (e.g. education / employment);
 - Ensuring that public services are reflective of, and able to respond effectively to, the diversity of Irish society;
 - Promoting greater participation by migrants in the political process;
 - Promoting integration initiatives at community level.

How We Engage: Structures

- Migrant Integration Strategy has an oversight committee chaired by Minister David Stanton, Minister for Equality, Immigration, and Integration, which brings together Government Departments, public bodies, NGOs, and social partners to review progress on the Strategy. The Committee meets quarterly and is supported by sub-committees working on specific themes such as education.
- The Irish Refugee Protection Programme is overseen by a Taskforce which includes Government Departments, the City and County Managers' Association representing local authorities, the UNHCR and the Irish Red Cross. The Taskforce is again chaired by Minister Stanton and meets approximately three times a year.
- Inter-agency committees (local authority / HSE / Education and Training Boards etc) are established in each county where refugees are resettled / relocated to plan for their resettlement.

How we Engage: Civil Society

- Civil society organisations participate formally in the national oversight mechanisms to monitor agreed Government policies.
- We consult NGOs on specific processes such as Ireland's latest report to the UN on the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- We provide national funding for integration projects.
- In 2017, Minister Stanton launched a Communities Integration Fund to sponsor grassroots activity in support of integration. 115 projects have been awarded funding in 2018 to promote integration in sport, the arts and for specific categories of migrant (elderly / LGBTI).

How We Engage: Civil Society (2)

- We fund NGOs to provide specific services to refugees – Jesuit Refugee Service is helping refugees in Direct Provision to secure housing.
- We establish 'Friends of the Centre' networks for Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres (EROCs) and Direct Provision centres to coordinate volunteer activity for refugees / asylum seekers.
- We have NGO-focused committees to work collaboratively on specific issues – the development of standards for Direct Provision centres.
- Irish Red Cross is managing housing and other pledges from the general public for refugees.

Community Sponsorship

- Working on a model already implemented in Canada and the UK where communities sponsor refugee families.
- The benefit is that these families can be more integrated than those resettled in Ireland under the IRPP.
- We are working with a group of NGOs to develop the model.
- There are challenges. Many NGOs do not have direct experience of resettling migrants and of the potential issues needing to be addressed.
- It can be difficult to maintain a quality outcome within an initiative dependent on volunteer engagement and on small, loose structures. Who maintains oversight?
- What happens when problems arise / when relationships break down? Who holds liability? Who has the responsibility to take action?

Complexities

- The recession had a highly negative impact on funding for civil society organisations. Funding opportunities remain below pre-recession levels and are disproportionately focused on service delivery.
- There is limited funding from philanthropic sources – as a result NGOs are disproportionately dependent on Government funding.
- These factors create tensions in the relationship between Government and civil society. On the one hand, the competition for scarce resources means that NGOs need media attention to highlight the relevance of the issues that they wish to have addressed.
- On the other hand, Government, as a minority government, is sensitive to negative media reporting.

Complexities (2)

- It is difficult to build trust against a background of strong criticism of Government policy in the national media by civil society organisations.
- It feeds into the temptation to shrug shoulders and retain the status quo where policy is developed without direct input from civil society.
- The media cycle is built on sensationalising complex issues – it drives a short-term agenda to respond to the demand for immediate action. That can divert resources from longer term reform processes.
- It is difficult in this context to build the longer-term relationships between Government Departments and NGOs that are needed to achieve systemic change in the interests of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Positives

- No political party has articulated a racist agenda. Those articulating racist views are not gaining mainstream support.
- There is broad support for migration with a view that it has brought benefits to Ireland. EU nationals in particular are positively regarded for their skills and contribution to the Irish economy.
- Many people see parallels between the needs of Irish migrants and migrants coming to Ireland.
- NGOs enjoy relationships of trust with the communities that they represent.

Steps for the future

- Government and NGOs have worked together successfully on key projects such as on developing standards for direct provision centres. That has given us key learning in terms of future collaboration.
- Developing evidence-based policy-making requires specialist expertise. There is a space for NGOs to build specialist expertise that can inform Government policy.
- NGOs enjoy relationships of trust with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. They act as crucial mediators between these groups and the Government to identify needs and to raise problems. That role will remain important for the future.
- It would be useful for NGOs to work collaboratively together on larger-scale issues to provide solutions to complex challenges.

Thank You

Questions and Comments?



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