

# Political Manifesto

An Equal Ireland for All

September 2022

Working for **equality**



Immigrant  
Council of  
Ireland

# Political Manifesto

## INTRODUCTION

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The [Immigrant Council of Ireland](#) was founded in 2001 and is the leading voice in securing improved rights and protections which benefit Irish citizens, migrants and their families. Since then our helpline, which provides over-the-phone advice on all immigration queries, has taken well over 100,000 calls. Our Independent Law Centre takes on approx. 100-150 cases per year. We research, campaign and lobby to improve Irish laws and policies, promoting a rights based approach to immigration and integration.

More specifically, we support those facing problems regarding human trafficking, family reunification, citizenship, access to social supports and many other issues fundamental to living a full life in dignity. We support and promote effective integration approaches, including taking action to end racism. Gender awareness is central to our work on migration and in addition to supporting migrant women subjected to sexual or domestic abuse, we undertake research and campaign to end the horrific exploitation of human trafficking. We are a human rights organisation and seek to protect the rights of immigrants, supporting them to feel welcomed into Ireland. Our vision is of an inclusive Ireland, free from prejudice.

On the whole, migration is viewed by the Irish public as having a net positive impact. It is the position of the Immigrant Council that to ensure the future cohesion of Irish communities and society, and the rights and dignity of those who chose Ireland as a new home, Ireland must plan for and invest in migration and integration, rather than react to it.



Our CEO Brian Killoran and brilliant spoken word poet Raneem Saleh relaunch the organisation's visual identity

## INTEGRATION

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Approx. one in eight people living in Ireland is from a migrant background. Ireland is not becoming more diverse – it is already diverse. But we are at real risk of sowing seeds for future division, segregation and community tensions unless the 33<sup>rd</sup> Dáil makes integration policy a priority. Research consistently shows those from a migrant background are more likely to have low paying jobs, live in overcrowded or unsuitable housing and ultimately live in poverty. This inequality must be tackled before it becomes entrenched.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Full implementation of the now expired [National Migrant Integration Strategy](#), with a comprehensive Progress Report to Government. Commencement of the consultations and drafting of the next Migrant Integration Strategy.
- All Local Authorities to have Local Integration Strategies, including in particular:
  - Dedicated staff to drive implementation
  - Ring fenced intercultural grant scheme for each Local Authority
  - Increased work and targets on migrant voter registration.
- Effective access to free English language lessons and other integration related supports for all newly arriving refugees and asylum seekers
- Increase Diversity within Local Authorities staff (including migrants, travellers and other ethnic minorities)
- The State must undertake systematic relevant data collection to support effective policy changes.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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The Immigrant Council of Ireland has been carrying out a variety of work in the area of migrant political participation:

- Regular outreach workshops on electoral rights with people from a migrant background;
- [Migrant-Councillor Internships](#). Five migrants interned with Councillors in 2018, 11 migrants interned with Councillors in 2022;
- Vlogs with Migrant-Councillor Alumni;
- [Multi-Lingual Electoral Rights Video](#) campaign. 10 professionally produced multi-lingual videos informing and encouraging migrants re voter registration, voting and running for election were launched in November and relaunched in April 2019 ahead of electoral register deadline;
- Public Webinar Series: “[Diversity in Politics](#)”;
- Focused workshops for prospective migrant local election candidates;
- Focused workshops for political parties to promote migrant political participation;
- One to one support and advice for prospective migrant local election candidates;
- Running in local elections in Ireland: a toolkit for candidates from a migrant background. (To be launched in November 2022)

The Immigrant Council of Ireland works on a non-party aligned basis, working with all political parties on strengthening their approach to diversity and recruitment, and supporting migrant candidates from all political interests.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support to increase diversity in local politics; funding available for leadership and training programmes for migrants interested in local and national politics.

## ANTI-RACISM

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Irish society is rightly famed for its kind and welcoming nature. However we know from our own research with individuals and communities affected, as well as the experience of other civil society organisations and migrant led groups, racism remains a malignant reality for too many. The most recent [National Action Plan Against Racism](#) expired 12 years ago. While consultations on the National Action Plan Against Racism took place in 2021, this work has still to be progressed. A new plan is needed, informed by those directly affected; best practice approaches and including a clear objective about improving the recording of hate crimes and effective anti-racism public messaging campaigns. Ireland does not yet have dedicated hate crime legislation, despite the legislation being promised for many months. Independent research has noted that we are lagging behind neighbouring European countries in our response to hate crimes. Gaps in the State's approach have been noted most recently by the [UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) and the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) country reports. Research consistently indicates under-reporting is a major issue and because of the lack of hate crime legislation, victims cannot adequately avail of Victims' Directive supports.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Comprehensive National Action Plan Against Racism to include:
  - Cultural competency training for public services frontline staff
  - Mandatory diversity strategies in all sectors
  - Ring fenced funding for an independent support for victims of racism, including legal advice and representation.
  - Public awareness campaigns tackling unconscious bias and promoting the benefits of cultural diversity
  - The State should be proactive in their anti-racism approach to education. Training should be provided to teacher and school staff in order to create a more inclusive culture from early years.
- Introduction and commencement of effective new hate crime and hate speech legislation to include:
  - The establishment of a National Action Plan against Hate Crime and Hate Speech to ensure the successful implementation of the new legislation.



## ANTI-TRAFFICKING

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While the [Second National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking](#) was published in 2016, progress on achieving its goals has been slow. Currently the drafting of the third National Action Plan to combat Trafficking is underway, as well as consultations on a new National Referral Mechanism to better identify and support victims of human trafficking. These

areas of work not only need to be progressed as a matter of urgency but also need to ensure that progress is made for victims of trafficking in Ireland. Ireland has been criticised by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and by the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons annual reports over a number of years for the lack of progress in this area. Among the concerns are chronic deficiencies in trafficked victims' treatment and the need for an improved identification process. Appropriate, gender-sensitive accommodation should be provided to sexually abused trafficked women alongside adequate humanitarian supports.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Full implementation of the [GRETA 2022 Third Report On Ireland](#) and 2022 Trafficking in Persons annual report recommendations ensuring the international law standards are met:
  - Improved identification procedures for victims
  - Gender sensitive accommodation and victims provided specialised support services
- Implementation of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, recognising its spirit and ethos as the most effective legislative approach to prevent sex trafficking.

### **IMMIGRATION REFORM**

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Ireland's current immigration system, largely based on discretion, lacks transparency and consistency. Applicants currently navigate a very complex system with unclear application procedures, often without any guidance published by the Immigration Service Delivery (ISD) and a lack of civil legal aid. Applications often take at least 12 months (or longer) to be processed. Ireland needs an effective immigration system which is clear, fair, just and well communicated. The immigration system is not working effectively for immigrants and especially children requiring an immigration status or separated from their families. For those who have been lawfully resident and comply with eligibility criteria, there should be access to independent and permanent residence status. There should be clear administrative procedures for dealing with change of residence status and non-renewal/revocation of residence status. There should be right of independent appeal for all immigration related and citizenship application decisions. A clear structure for an appeal process is provided by most countries and Ireland is lagging behind by not having such a system in place. Those subject to the immigration system must have clear routes to permanent, independent residency status as quickly as possible to ensure their labour and social mobility and security. To ensure a modern effective immigration system, comprehensive reform is required, with a legislative underpinning where appropriate. In addition, access to Irish citizenship must be improved by a review of fees (including the introduction of a fee waiver for low income families), improved access for children (including those in the care of the State) and improvements in processing times to within six months of receipt of application.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Immigration and Residence legislation setting out the statutory criteria for immigration-related applications and appeals where appropriate. Reform of administrative and policy procedures to ensure efficiency, transparency and security of status.
- Adequate resourcing of Immigration Service Delivery to ensure efficient processing of applications

- Published guidelines for all immigration applications and registration related requirements, including children whether accompanied or living in the care of the State
- Access to civil legal aid and independent appeals mechanism for all immigration and citizenship decisions
- Specific single agency or contact point established to provide information and legal advice on immigration to children and professionals working with them
- Implement a statelessness determination procedure

## **DIRECT PROVISION**

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Direct Provision is unfit for purpose. People seeking international protection in Ireland are waiting too long for decisions, living in substandard facilities and forced to put lives on hold. The accommodation and supports provided by the State do not afford a life of dignity. Children are particularly at risk of losing their precious childhood years in a degrading system.

In 2020, the Day Advisory Group Report (Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support, including Accommodation, to Persons in the International Protection Process) published their report recommending an end to direct provision and other immediate measures taken to improve the international protection process. The Day Report received widespread support both internationally and among the Irish people. The same year, influenced by the interim recommendations of the Day Advisory Group, the Programme for Government contained a commitment to end direct provision within the lifetime of this government. In February 2021, the Government published their long-awaited White Paper on Ending Direct Provision setting out their plan for reforming the international protection process and ending direct provision. However this White Paper has not been progressed and has steadily been put on hold.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Ensure the Government replaces Direct Provision with alternative systems of accommodation, compliant with human rights standards and meets the dignity of the individual by 2024. In the interim, use of emergency centres should be discontinued as an immediate priority.
- Reduce processing times for international protection applications and appeals which now stand at 24 months (median time for non-prioritised cases) and 10 months respectively.
- Proper implementation of HIQA (Health Information and Quality Authority) role for independent inspections of direct provision centres and emergency accommodation locations, until the new permanent system comes into force.
- Immediately implement the urgent measures identified in the 'Catherine Day' Report, including an increase in the Daily Expenses Allowance, making the right to work available after three months, providing comprehensive vulnerability assessments to all those in the process and appointing HIQA as an independent inspectorate until such time as all direct provision centres are closed.
- Publication of a revised timeline for implementation of government White Paper on the Abolition of Direct Provision recommendations.

## **UKRAINE**

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Ireland's response to those fleeing conflict in Ukraine has been supportive but not without its challenges. Resources, structures and leadership needs to be in place to deliver a coordinated response to the needs, emerging and pre-existing. The war is not ending and we need medium and long term solutions to be driven from the highest levels of the government. In response to the needs of Ukrainian nationals who have arrived in Ireland since February 24<sup>th</sup> 2022, the Immigrant Council established and are supporting a Ukraine Civil Society Forum, comprising of over 70 community, regional and national level community and voluntary sector organisations and groups across the 26 counties. The below recommendations are endorsed by all members of the forum.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Appoint and resource a National Lead for Ireland's Refugee Response. Government cannot do this alone. It needs to be able to engage with a broader stakeholder group. Having a Lead for the Refugee Response mandated to work across government would enable the government to engage with communities, local authorities and the private sector to deliver solutions.
- Drive the development of medium-term accommodation for refugees – for ease of implementation we recommend mandating the Housing Agency to do this. It has the expertise and relationships to bring vacant properties into circulation urgently. In the interim, if we are to galvanise the public goodwill again to support the short-term challenge, we strongly recommend that you recognise publicly the role that hosts have played and all who have pledged property and rooms. Supporting and sustaining these matches is a low cost initiative that will reap huge rewards. But it is a time limited solution, if we are to grow offers, people need to have confidence that alternative accommodation is coming on stream.
- Urgently resource welfare and integration supports available to refugees in line with the increasing needs for these resources. This requires on-going investment in the next budget that ensures welfare and integration of refugees in all our communities.
- Establish a Refugee Agency as per the White Paper Recommendations on Ending Direct Provision. Given the increasing number of people seeking international protection and arrival of Ukrainian refugees in the State, this recommendation from the White Paper is even more pressing at this time.