

Election Manifesto

An Equal Ireland for All

JANUARY 2020

Working for **equality**



Immigrant
Council of
Ireland

Election Manifesto

INTRODUCTION

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

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 33rd 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 [National Migrant Integration Strategy](#)
- All Local Authorities to have Local Integration Strategies, including in particular:
 - Dedicated person to drive implementation
 - Ring fenced intercultural grant scheme for each Local Authority
- Effective access to English language lessons for all newly arriving refugees and asylum seekers

ANTI-RACISM

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. A new one 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 have dedicated hate crime legislation, with independent research noting we are lagging behind neighbouring European countries in our response. 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/ helpline for victims of racism
 - Public awareness campaigns tackling unconscious bias and promoting the benefits of cultural diversity
- Introduction and commencement of effective hate crime legislation



ANTI-TRAFFICKING

While the [Second National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking](#) was published in 2016, progress on achieving its goals has been slow. Since its publication 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 report, which downgraded Ireland for the first time in 10 years in 2018 to tier 2. Ireland maintained this rating in 2019, which means the State does not meet the minimum standards 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](#) and [2019 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

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 Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) 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. To ensure a modern effective immigration system, comprehensive reform is required, with a legislative underpinning.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Immigration and Residence legislation setting out the statutory criteria for immigration-related applications and appeals
- Adequate resourcing of INIS 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

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. Effective access to the labour market for those seeking international protection is an essential way to help restore dignity and facilitate integration. A review of recent measures facilitating the right to work to ensure they deliver practical and fair routes to employment should be considered.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Resource the International Protection Office to ensure asylum applications are efficiently processed within the six month timeframe outlined in the International Protection Act 2015
- The State should explore alternatives to direct provision in consultation with stakeholders (NGOs, residents, housing experts, etc.) in order to minimise institutionalisation, and physical and mental health problems
- Direct provision to be phased out and replaced with accommodation facilities which afford dignity to residents
- Review guidelines granting those awaiting decisions on international protection applications access to the labour market to ensure the provisions are working in a practical and fair sense