

# Migrant Electoral Empowerment Project

Evaluation Report 2021

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7-6-2021

Working for **equality**



Immigrant  
Council of  
Ireland

# Introduction

## WHO WE ARE?

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The Immigrant Council of Ireland is a human rights organisation and Independent Law Centre. We support and advocate for the rights of immigrants and their families and act as a catalyst for public debate, legal and policy change. Our vision in the Immigrant Council of Ireland is of a society that is fair, respects human rights and diversity and is committed to everyone, including people from a migrant background having the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

# Migrant Electoral Empowerment Project

## CONTEXT

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Democracy is about meaningful participation and fair representation. Every group in our society should feel empowered to participate in the Irish electoral system, and our political leaders should reflect the composition of the society that they serve. Democratic participation and representation should also include migrants even though they do not hold full citizenship rights. Migrants are members of our communities and decisions made by political establishment affects the life of migrants on a daily basis.

Ireland presents a highly inclusive electoral system for migrants' political participation. Every adult person living in Ireland, regardless of their nationality, can vote and run in local elections, which includes asylum seekers and international students. Irish policy in this area has been praised as [one of the world's best practices](#) for integration of migrants with the political system. However, migrants do not make a full use of their political rights and integration prospects.

1 in 8 (12%) of our society are people of a migrant background. However, only between 6% and 30% of eligible migrants are registered to vote across different electoral areas in Ireland. Irish politicians also do not fully represent the ethnic and migration diversity that is present in Ireland. At a local level only 11 out of 949 councillors are of a migrant background, representing 1.1%. National politics are even less representative as only one TD has some level of migratory background. Lack of migrant representation in Irish politics accounts to a democratic deficit.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

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The Immigrant Council of Ireland has developed a robust portfolio of work supporting migrant political participation. Our key work is voter education. Between 2017 and 2020 we have delivered over 70 workshops that were attended by nearly 1,000 migrants. Ahead of the 2019 local elections we produced [10 multilingual videos](#) informing migrants about their voting rights. We also rolled out a successful [Migrant – Councillor Internship Scheme](#) enabling migrants to gain a very practical experience of local politics and the role of local councillors. The Immigrant Council also conducted research on the [experience of migrant candidates running in the local elections](#). The research found that migrants face many additional barriers that other candidates do not face.

The Migrant Electoral Empowerment Project is another initiative implemented by the Immigrant Council that aims to further support migrant integration with the Irish political system and to improve the overall social cohesion in Ireland. The project was made possible due to the financial support of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Migrant Electoral Empowerment Project is a six week training programme delivered online that was designed to address the information gap for migrants interested in becoming election candidates. The core aspect of the training was to provide participants with a practical knowledge on how to run an election campaign. Training content was produced in collaboration with Aalaa Elmusharaf, an African migrant woman who gained experience in this area after serving as an election campaign manager for a female African Muslim candidate during the 2019 local elections. Her experience was instrumental in matching the content of the training with the practical demands and realities for prospect migrant candidates.

Sixty-eight candidates applied for the training, and eighteen applications were successful. Selection of candidates was based on their online applications. Motivation of candidates, their experience in community activism and/or previous political experience were taken under consideration in shortlisting the successful eighteen training participants. The participants represented EU and non-EU migrants, asylum seekers, as well as Irish people of a migrant background. Participants were recruited from across 7 different counties in Ireland:

<b>County</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Dublin	7
Galway	3
Roscommon	2
Cork	1
Kildare	1
Kilkenny	1
Leitrim	1
Longford	1

Waterford	1
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Table 1. Geographical spread of participants

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

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The overall objective of the programme is aimed at giving potential candidates insights into what is involved in running an election campaign. Training sessions were designed to focus on relevant techniques, and tips and perspectives for running and managing campaigns. Participants were encouraged to apply the lessons to tailor their own individual campaign accordingly to their own capacity and available resources. Upon completion of training, every participant was invited to become part of the Migrant Leadership Network intended to deliver ongoing learning opportunities and exchange of good practices and support between migrant activists and community leaders and potential election candidates.

## WORKSHOPS CONTENT

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The six week training was delivered on a weekly basis for 2hrs online. Sessions were comprised of presentation, exercises, discussions and keynote speeches delivered by current local councillors of a migrant background.

1. **The Political Landscape of Ireland** session aimed to bring clarity about the Irish political and electoral systems and migrant voting rights. Participants were also invited to engage in a discussion on why it is essential to the future of Ireland's political leadership to have more migrants involved.
  - Keynote: Councillor Uruemu Adejinmi (Longford)
2. **Community engagement & Building the Team** session looked into exploring ways of transitioning from a resident to an active member of the local community, and what role community engagement plays in candidates' election strategies. This session also gave practical tips on how to build their election team.
  - Keynote: Councillor Madeleine Johansson (South Dublin County)
3. **Communications (Offline)** session focused on the importance of designing communication strategies during an election campaign. This session also gave practical tips on effective media engagement and basic interviewing skills.
  - Keynote: Councillor Yemi Adenuga (Meath)

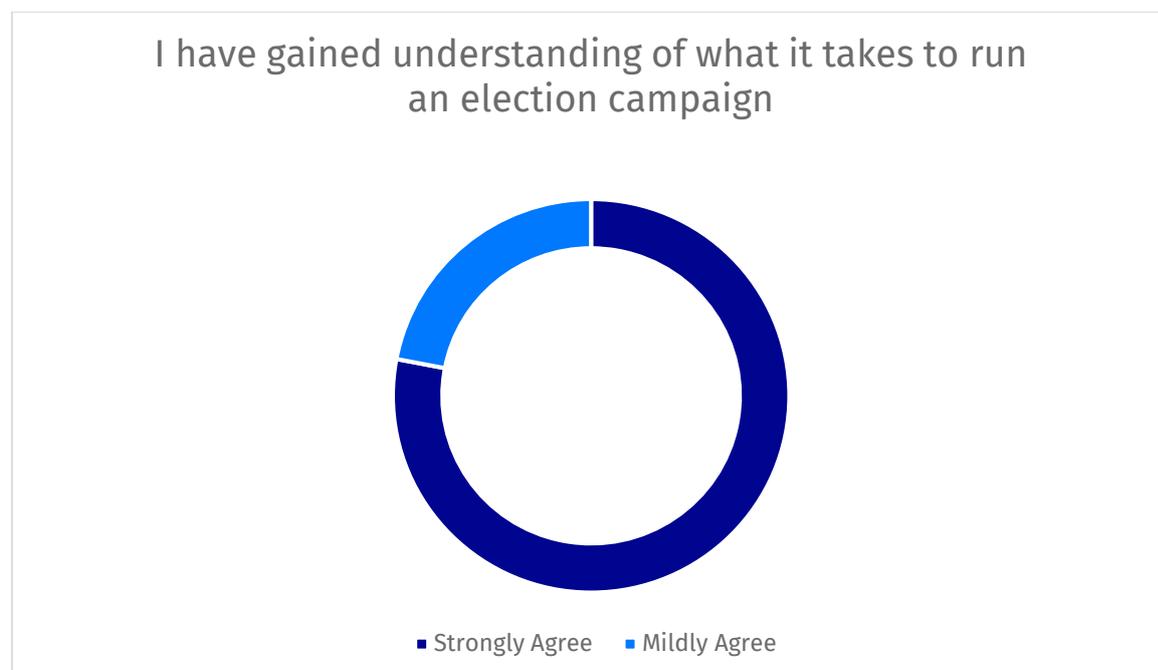
4. **Canvassing** session elaborated on the essential practice of connecting with potential voters through door-to-door campaigning or hosting public rallies. Participants had an opportunity to practice canvassing life scenarios.
  - Keynote: Deputy Mayor Abul Kalam Azad Talukder (Limerick)
5. **Communications (Online)** session addressed the challenges and opportunities of online campaigning, as well as safety measure against online hate speech and harassment.
  - Keynote: Lord Mayor Hazel Chu (Dublin City)
6. **The Personal is Political** session gave an opportunity for participants to discuss and analyse the connections between the personal, the social and the political aspects of the candidate's lives and the lives of their electoral.

## IMPACT

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Following the completion of the training we conducted a survey amongst the participants to evaluate the content of the training and its impact. The participants reported an impact in three main areas:

### 1. Skills

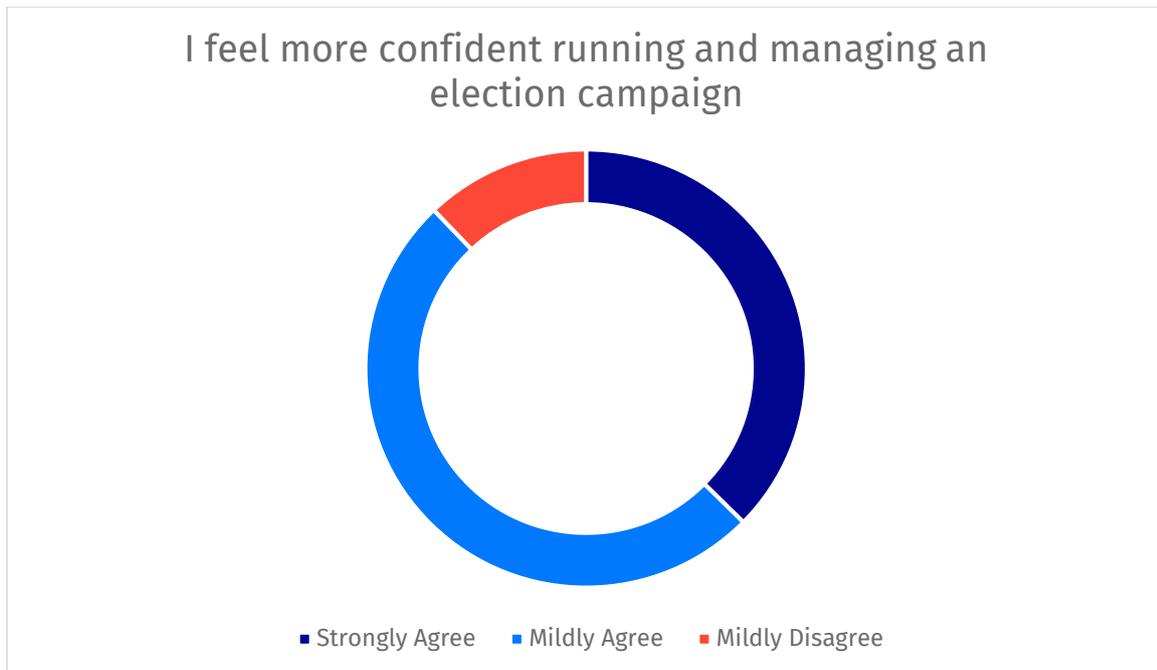


78% of participants strongly agreed, and a further 22% mildly agreed that the training helped them to understand what it takes to run an election campaign

“It was an excellent empowering experience for me. The most interesting topics for me were: ‘Canvassing’ and ‘Social Media’. As a result of this training, I got the knowledge and confidence I needed to get involved in Irish politics; I created my first personal twitter account, I joined [political] party, and became their LEA Rep for [my] County.”

- Catherine

## 2. Confidence



37% of participants strongly agreed, and a further 50% mildly agreed that they gained more confidence in running and managing an election campaign, 12% of participants mildly disagreed with this statement.

“The training was essential especially coming from an asylum-seeking background where a lot of applicants still do not have the confidence to engage with the community. Representation goes a long way to help inspire others to get involved also support their integration journey.”

- Ola

“I believe that the biggest benefit of this training is to empower the people of migrant background and help them build the confidence to pursue their ambition and become future leaders.”

- Feedback from a participant

“Thanks as always for your tireless work. You really do make us feel like we can do those things we think we cannot.”

- Feedback from a participant

### 3. Connections

“Overall great training, the insights from the facilitators really gave you the right perspective. And the invited guests, being the elected or co-opted councillors of migrant background were the highlights of each session. The sessions helped broaden the social circle and the contacts with fellow participants on the time off helped greatly in making up one's mind [about running for elections].”

- *Bart*

“Migrant Electoral Empowerment Training has provided me with a network of migrants like me – active in their community and desiring to make a great Irish future. As migrants, we share the barriers that have led us to be underrepresented in politics. Now we have shared something else – learning about how to campaign for elected office. With the course material behind us, but the network of politically active migrants around us I feel like I can take the next step forward.”

- *Megan*

#### WOULD YOU RECOMMEND IT TO OTHERS?

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“It was a real pleasure and inspiring experience to take part in your training. The Immigrant Council of Ireland is doing an amazing job for a more equal and inclusive society. I will strongly recommend your training for anyone interested in campaigning for minority rights and building an inclusive society.”

- *Anna*

**100% of participants strongly agreed with the statement:  
‘I would recommend this training to others’**

**Funding provided by the  
Department of Housing, Local  
Government and Heritage**



**An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage**