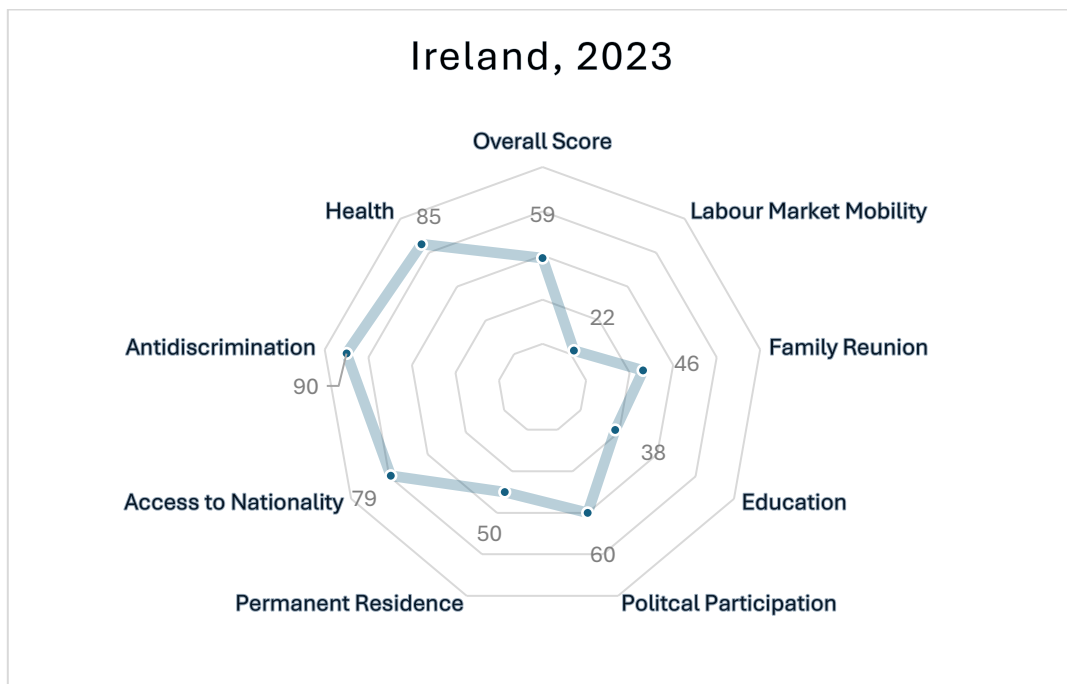




MIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICY INDEX 2024

IRELAND - COUNTRY REPORT



Changes in policy

As a result of its focused policies during the 2017-2020 Migrant Integration Strategy period, Ireland has previously made it into the MIPEX 'Top Ten'. However, this strategy was not continued or expanded, resulting in setbacks in many integration policy areas including political participation, education, family reunification, and anti-discrimination. Since 2021, immigrants to Ireland have faced greater obstacles to integration. This is reflected in the overall MIPEX score for Ireland, which has decreased by five points on the 100-point MIPEX scale. This stands in sharp contrast to the previous upwards trend between 2014 and 2019, when Ireland's overall score increased by five points following the implementation of the 2017 Migrant Integration Strategy. Over the last five years, there have been no improvements in Ireland's integration policies. Instead migrants now have fewer opportunities to be informed and consulted, in the absence of the official, national, migrant-specific consultative structures implemented under the 2017 strategy. Additionally, migrants now face more obstacles in accessing guidance on education systems in languages other than English and Irish, and certain groups of migrants need to meet additional accommodation requirements in order to be reunited with their families.

Positive changes on MIPEX indicators:

- None

Negative changes on MIPEX indicators:

- Accommodation requirement for family reunification
- Education guidance at all levels
- Strength of national consultative body
- Active information policy
- Public funding/support for national immigrant bodies
- Law covers positive action measures

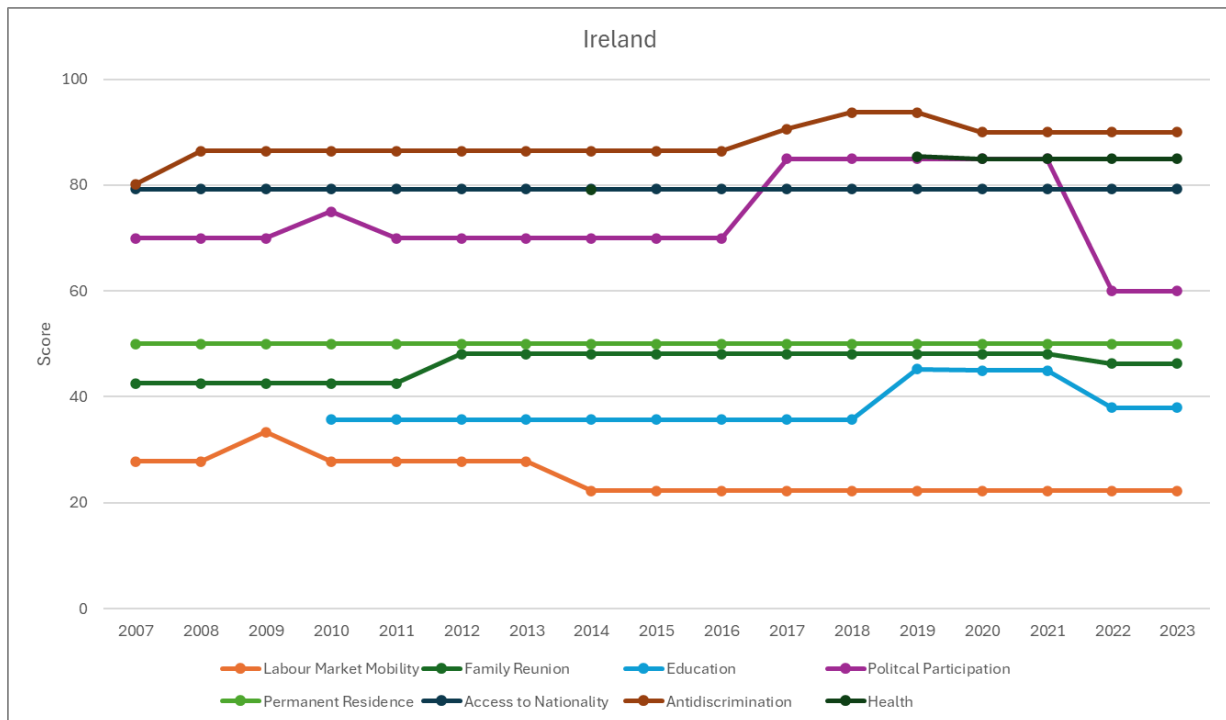
Conclusions and recommendations

Ireland's approach to integration is classified as, on the whole, only "halfway" favourable for integration. While immigrants benefit from Ireland's areas of strength on integration, they do not enjoy equal rights and opportunities in all areas of life, particularly in terms of employment, education and family life. More broadly, non-EU immigrants can only feel halfway secure about their future in Ireland. The Irish immigration system makes it harder for non-EU newcomers to secure their career, family life and residence in Ireland than in most MIPEX countries. These policies encourage the public to see immigrants as their neighbours and their equals, but not yet as full citizens.

Non-EU residents regularly face problems of administrative discretion, bureaucracy and uncertainty about their permits and legal status. This undermines immigrants' willingness and ability to invest and settle in the country: they feel insecure in their family life and future. These problems in the Irish immigration system were exacerbated by COVID-19, even while - according to a 2020 Study by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre - immigrants represented 26% of the country's key workers during the pandemic.

Similarly, while - on the whole - policies addressing anti-discrimination and access to citizenship are seen as positive when compared internationally, significant issues remain within these areas. In the area of anti-discrimination, the lack of comprehensive hate crime and hate speech legislation, a national action plan against racism, or well-resourced and accessible victim support services constitutes a significant barrier to provision of appropriate responses to victims of racism. As regards access to citizenship, while ministerial discretion can be utilised positively in the determination of an application, it can also lead to a lack of clarity and transparency in decision making. This is exacerbated by the lack of an appeals mechanism to challenge negative decisions.

A country's integration policies matter because the way that governments treat immigrants strongly influences how well immigrants and the public interact with and perceive each other. Drawing on 130 independent scientific studies using MIPEX, integration policies emerge as one of the strongest factors shaping not only the public's willingness to accept and interact with immigrants, but also immigrants' own attitudes, sense of belonging, participation and even health in their new home country. It is therefore imperative that Ireland renews and advances its previous progress in integration policy, particularly in the domains of labour market integration, education, and access to permanent residence, in order to achieve more favourable integration outcomes.



Labour market mobility: Slightly unfavourable: Scoring far below average, Ireland continues to offer much less support than many other EU member states when it comes to securing equal opportunities on the labour market. Non-EU citizens with the right to work do not enjoy equal access to all types of jobs, education, training or social protection. Irish law does not grant non-EU nationals immediate access to the labour market unless specifically authorised by the Minister for Justice on a discretionary basis, and only in such cases will permit holders be entitled to access public employment services. Support for higher education and vocational training is limited to refugees and certain categories of third-country nationals who meet strict residency, nationality, and income requirements. Additionally, newcomers face significant challenges in having their foreign qualifications recognised and must fulfil the ‘habitual residence’ condition, as established by the Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2014, to qualify for social security assistance.

Family reunification: Halfway favourable: Scoring slightly below average, Ireland’s policy is more discretionary and insecure than most MIPEX countries. Although the 2013 INIS Policy Document improved clarity and security for separated non-EU families, Ireland’s policy is still far below EU standards. Only holders of international protection status are exempt from meeting income and accommodation requirements for family reunification. The Minister for Justice has the discretion to renew family reunification permits in cases of changing circumstances, but there are no clearly defined statutory criteria governing this decision. In August 2021, the Irish Government opened the Afghan Admissions Programme by way of humanitarian response to the situation in Afghanistan, which enabled Irish citizens and Afghan residents to apply to sponsor certain categories of family members but under financial and other sponsorship requirements.

Education: Slightly unfavourable: Going from halfway favourable to slightly unfavourable, Ireland now only provides general support in access to guidance on educational systems for migrants, as the online ‘Guide to the Irish Education System’ for parents has not been available in different languages since 2022. While there are no legal restrictions on access to education, and all children can enrol in both compulsory and non-compulsory schooling, practical barriers

persist—particularly in third-level education. Schools lack systematic academic and financial support to guarantee equal opportunities for immigrant pupils. Notably, the Intercultural Education Strategy (2010–2015) was not revised or updated after its expiration, and the 2017 National Integration Strategy does not set specific targets for funding or guidance provision. However, Ireland continues to offer teacher training and *ad hoc* support for schools, including via initiatives such as the Migrant Teacher Project.

Health: Favourable: Ireland ranks among the top countries in addressing migrant health outcomes, thanks to its 2nd National Intercultural Health Strategy 2018-2023. All persons who are ordinarily resident in Ireland are entitled to access public healthcare. However, depending on their income, age, illness, or disability, they may need to pay a subsidised fee for certain services. Those who qualify for a Medical Card, available to individuals with low income or specific long-term illnesses, receive free GP visits, hospital care, prescriptions, and other medical services. Although both legal and administrative obstacles exist for immigrants to be eligible for a medical card, immigrant patients are generally well informed and supported by responsive health services and the HSE National Social Inclusion Office.

Political participation: Slightly favourable: Since the end of the 2017 Migrant Integration Strategy, Ireland has taken a big step backwards in enabling political participation of migrants through regular information and consultation structures and is no longer among the top countries in this strand. The concluded strategy had committed to ongoing political participation support, a Migrant Consultative Forum, the inclusion of migrant representatives in local fora, and a Migrant Integration Forum in every municipality. However, since its conclusion, these commitments have not been upheld and no regular funding stream exists for immigrant organisations, with only occasional, one-off government grants provided upon request.

Permanent residence: Halfway favourable: Just 1% of non-EU residents are able to settle as long-term residents in Ireland, under some of the most restrictive and discretionary policies in the EU. Unless they become Irish citizens, non-EU citizens only have two options to secure their future and basic rights in Ireland: the Long-Term Residency Scheme and the Without Condition As To Time (WCATT) permission. However, neither offers a truly permanent solution. The Long-Term Residency Scheme is generally available to employment permit holders after five years of residence but provides only a five-year permit. The WCATT is available to certain third-country nationals after eight years of residence and grants permission to stay only for the remaining validity of the holder's passport. In addition, behind the rather favourable requirements on paper lies a highly discretionary and uncertain procedure. Although the 2017 Migrant Integration Strategy promised a statutory scheme for long-term residency, no legislation was progressed under the strategy and has not been since its expiration either.

Access to nationality: Slightly favourable: Ireland has positive approaches and practices regarding access to citizenship, similar to the traditional destination countries of Portugal and Sweden. Foreign nationals must fulfil a five-year residence condition, which may be reduced to three for some categories of foreigners such as refugees, stateless persons or spouses of Irish nationals. Citizenship for immigrant children born in Ireland is automatic but conditional to the parents' residence status prior to birth. The Irish government encourages immigrants to become citizens through streamlined requirements, shorter processing times, acceptance of dual citizenship and citizenship ceremonies. The continued practice of 'Citizenship Ceremonies', where persons who have newly been granted Irish citizenship swear their oath of fidelity to Ireland together in a group celebration, is a model many other countries can learn from. However, the absolute use of ministerial discretion, the lack of an appeals process, the cost of applications

and the issue of processing time for some applications remain areas for considerable improvement.

Anti-discrimination: Favourable: Following the 2018 Education (Admissions to School) Act and the Actions under the 2017 Migrant Integration Strategy, immigrants began to benefit from greater discrimination protections and equality duties. Since the end of the 2017 strategy, there is no positive action measure to increase the number of people with an immigrant background working at all levels. Otherwise, Ireland's favourable laws and Human Rights and Equality Commission continue to raise awareness of discrimination and promote reporting on it, though mechanisms to enforce these laws and equality could be stronger in practice. The development of appropriate hate crime and hate speech legislation, coupled with an overall national action plan against racism, is key. In 2022, the Minister for Justice established a review group to explore the potential introduction of civil legal aid for individuals who may be victims of discrimination. Currently, no legal aid is available for people seeking to bring claims of discrimination under the Equal Status Acts or the Employment Equality Act.