

Ireland is a truly
multicultural state



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

'Ireland is a truly multicultural state'. Discuss this statement with reference to other European societies and assess the Irish government's approach to diversity.

In a state like Ireland, globalization and a talented workforce have combined to produce economic success which has led to an increased diversity of people in response to an increased demand for labour. This has led Ireland to become a multicultural state, due to the influx of foreigners from around the world looking for a better standard of living in a country with a booming economy. Over the past two centuries, Ireland has had the highest emigration rates of any European country, with around 70 million people worldwide, claiming Irish ancestry (1). From the Great Famine of 1845-47 to the 1950s, the natural population of Ireland was continually offset by emigration, leading to an almost continuous decline in the population for more than a century. However, starting in the mid 1990's, Ireland changed from being an emigrating country to a country of immigrating. This is due to the Irish economy expanding very rapidly, with annual rates of growth in excess of 8 per cent averaged over the period 1993-1997, with employment rates growing by 25 per cent between the years 1993-1998 and by 1998, unemployment rates fell to less than 8 per cent (2).

The reason Ireland is today, a multicultural state is because of the rapid growth of the Irish economy in the 1990s, which was due to a variety of reasons. These included EU aid, which improved the education and infrastructure of the country, the low corporation tax rate which was implemented by the Irish government to attract large foreign multinationals and grants the government offered companies to setup in Ireland. All of

these factors resulted in the creation of wealth and new jobs for Irish citizens. The Irish economy needed labourers to fill certain jobs in the economy, so the government encouraged immigration into the country to fill the skill shortages. There was a great demand for labour across a wide range of sectors, including construction, financial, information technology, and health care. They did this in several different ways including showcasing the potential jobs in Ireland through job fairs and advertising campaigns in foreign countries. These initiatives were arranged by agencies such as FAS, the Department of Trade and Enterprise and Employment (3). In 2006, 10.1 per cent of Irish residents were foreign-born up from 5.8 per cent in 2002 (4), which displays how multicultural the state has become. In 2006, 2.7 per cent of population were from the UK, 3.9 per cent from the rest of the EU, 0.8 per cent from Africa, 1.1 per cent from China and 2 per cent from the rest of the world (5). These figures demonstrate all the different cultural and ethnic backgrounds that have come to live in Ireland. A large proportion of immigrants have come from Poland, this is because Ireland, as well as the United Kingdom and Sweden agreed to allow citizens from the 10 countries that joined the EU in May 2004 to work in their country immediately. Other EU countries such as France, Germany and Austria did not offer these opportunities to citizens of the new member states. Many of the EU nationals from the new member states have filled lower skilled jobs in Ireland.

Due to the increasing levels of immigration, the rising unemployment and the need to protect the Irish identity, the Irish government introduced several policies to reduce immigration. First, to slow a rising number of asylum applications, the government created a list of safe countries of origin

and began prioritizing applications from these countries. This resulted in the applications for asylum in Ireland dropping from 8000 in 2003, to just under 4000 in 2004 (5). Second, Ireland's citizenship laws were changed to eliminate an Irish born child's automatic right to citizenship when the parents are not Irish nationals. Third, Ireland sought to meet most of its low-skilled labour needs from within the enlarged European Union (5). In 2009, non-Irish nationals made up 15.6 percent of the labour force (5). There are generally four types of classification for immigrants into Ireland. There are people migrating to get jobs, people reuniting with families who have settler's rights, illegal immigrants and finally there are refugees. Between 1992 and 2008, 9,574 non-EU nationals received refugee status (5).

Between 2004 and 2006, it is estimated that Ireland received 200,000 immigrants from Central Europe (6). By 2007, Ireland had the third highest migration rate across the 27 EU Member States which was 14.5 migrants per 1,000 inhabitants, surpassed only by Spain and Cyprus (5). The large number of immigrants resulted in the government introducing several new policies to make it harder for non-nationals to gain citizenship. One of these policies was the restriction of access to the Irish labour market for nationals from Bulgaria and Romania which came into effect from January 1st 2009 (6). Other countries in the EU have different policies implemented by their governments who ultimately control immigration. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s, the French and British governments introduced policies granting people from their former colonies full citizenships and gave them the same rights as any other citizen (7). They granted these people full citizenship as the need for more workers grew and so the countries could maintain their

distinct nationality by bringing in immigrants from countries connected to their own. This is one of the main reasons why Ireland has one of the highest proportions of EU nationals as they did not have colonies, making other countries in the EU more obvious choices for people from Asia and Africa to emigrate to. In 1990, the Schengen Convention was introduced which moved the EU closer to a borderless union which involves removing border controls between EU countries while making it harder for people from outside the EU to come in and work (8). This has not yet been implemented completely. Ireland is also one of the few EU countries not to have signed on for it, as the government look to maintain control about who comes into the country.

Cultural diversity is not new in Ireland. The Traveller community is estimated at 22, 000 (12), and there are long established Jewish, Islamic, Asian and Chinese communities here. However, there has been a dramatic rise in inward migration in recent years. There are now approximately 160 different nationalities living in Ireland. In response to this the Irish government has taken a proactive approach to integration and diversity in the state. In May 2008, the integration minister's office published a report on Irelands integration strategy which stated that it was keen not to make the integration mistakes that other European countries have made (5). Ireland is seen in a leader in integration for allowing non nationals to vote in local elections. This was followed by the election of Nigerian immigrant Rotimi Adebari as mayor of Portlaoise in June 2007 (9). Also, for the first time in 2006, the Census included a question on ethnic and cultural background which helps monitor the changing ethnic and cultural diversity in Ireland (10). These initiatives have certainly helped immigrants integrate into their

local communities. The government, in an effort to promote a more multicultural society has also implemented policies to promote and protect non Irish nationals. These include public awareness initiatives such as support for an intercultural week and intercultural strategies in the workplace, the government has also reviewed the criminal legislation to sure that it is effective in addressing hate crimes. They have also introduced a major overhaul of Garda recruitment in a bid to make the Garda more ethnically diverse. This will allow non Irish nationals to join the Garda, which is a significant step in the process of making non Irish nationals feel welcome in their local communities. This multinational state that Ireland has become can also be seen in the schools, with an estimated 10 per cent of primary school children coming from immigrant families. In Ireland non Irish national children can enjoy the benefits of the Irish Education System. The Griffeen Valley Educate Together national school in Lucan is perhaps the best example of this, with children of 43 nationalities attending the school speaking twelve different languages in 2007 (13).

With 160 nationalities living in Ireland today, it is clear that Ireland has changed dramatically since the start of the Celtic Tiger. In response to this, the Irish government has introduced several policies to help non Irish nationals integrate into Irish society resulting in a truly multicultural state. From allowing non Irish nationals to become gardai to allowing them to vote in local elections, the Irish government has made a good effort to make non Irish nationals feel welcome in Ireland. The government has also been more welcoming to nationals of EU countries, more so then countries like France

and has implemented more successful policies for integrating these non Irish nationals into the Irish society.

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