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ECONOMIC & SOCIAL
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Spatial Distribution and Local Integration of Migrants in Ireland

EVAN CARRON-KEE, DANIEL CAPISTRANO, KEIRE MURPHY
AND LÚCÁS ROHAN



An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt,
Gnóthaí Baile agus Imirce
Department of Justice,
Home Affairs and Migration



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Abbreviations

ARP	Accommodation Recognition Payment
CIF	Community Integration Forums
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DEA	District Electoral Area
DoJ	Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration
ED	Electoral Division
EMN	European Migration Network
ETB	Education and Training Board
HSE	Health Service Executive
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Service
LA	Local authority
LAIT	Local Authority Integration Team
LDC	Local Development Company
LEA	Local Electoral Area
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
PPN	Public Participation Network
RTB	Residential Tenancies Board
SA	Small Area
SAPS	Small Area Population Statistics
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Executive summary

While migration is often discussed nationally, it is experienced locally, and migrants integrate into local areas as well as national communities. It is therefore important to understand how migration is spatially distributed, in what kind of communities migrants reside, to what extent migrants are living in segregated areas, and how migration is governed at a local level. All of these factors have implications for both host society acceptance of migration as well as migrant integration.

This report studies migrant integration from a spatial perspective. We examine the spatial distribution of migrants in Ireland and contextualise these results with qualitative findings about how this is functioning and being governed at a local level. To structure our analysis, we develop a concept of spatial integration which highlights the role of space in enabling or hindering migrant integration. We carry out a mixed-methods analysis, exploring Census and administrative data and carrying out seven qualitative semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in order to develop insights related to migrant integration in Ireland as well as policy implications.

Chapter 1 of this report introduces the context of migration in Ireland as well as the academic literature on the topic. We present the conceptual framework utilised in the research, explaining specific concepts on migrant integration, spatial distribution, and governance at the local level.

Spatial distribution

In Chapter 2, we first analyse the distribution of migrants across Ireland. Migrants are relatively evenly distributed across the regions of Ireland. However, migrants are far more likely to live in urban areas than rural areas. The urban–rural divide among migrants varies by country of birth, though, with those born in Great Britain and the United States (US) most likely to live in rural areas, and those born in some non-EU and Western EU countries most likely to live in urban areas. There are also distinct patterns across types of urban areas, with Eastern EU migrants most likely to live in towns compared to cities. Within Dublin, the migrant population is most concentrated in the city centre and the outer suburbs, compared with the Irish population which is more concentrated in the inner suburbs.

Findings presented in Chapter 2 also indicate that areas with a higher share of foreign-born residents tend to be associated with lower social deprivation. Migrants are also heavily concentrated in areas with a high proportion of housing rented from private landlords. Other area-level characteristics found to be positively associated with higher migrant share include the proportion of new accommodation built since 2016 and the rate of tertiary education.

Migration for asylum has increased in Ireland in recent years, although it has remained a very small proportion of the overall population of migrants in Ireland. This has led to an increase in the population living in housing provided by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS). We find that IPAS centres are not evenly distributed across Ireland, with many areas having no IPAS residents. However, Electoral Divisions (EDs) with IPAS centres were not any more or less likely to be classified as deprived on the Pobal HP Deprivation Index.

Spatial segregation

In Chapter 3, we analyse migrant segregation. To measure segregation for migrants compared to Irish people, we calculate the extent to which migrants are concentrated in different areas to Irish people. This measure is known as the dissimilarity index.

Comparing data from the 2016 and 2022 Census, we find that overall segregation remained at a low to moderate level between 2016 and 2022. However, there are significant differences when we look at segregation patterns for different countries of birth. Migrants from Great Britain, the US and Poland experience significantly lower levels of segregation compared to migrants from non-EU countries such as Moldova, China and Nigeria.

We then analyse how segregation at the Local Electoral Area (LEA) relates to key area-level characteristics. Segregation is higher in LEAs with lower levels of English language fluency, which may present a barrier to integration and the formation of bridging ties. There is a mixed relationship between unemployment and segregation. Overall, segregation is higher in LEAs with higher unemployment. However, some groups are more segregated in areas with low unemployment, and others are more segregated in areas with high unemployment. Segregation is also higher in LEAs with higher rental housing stock, although this relationship differs at the country-of-birth level too. Most

country-of-birth groups have lower segregation scores in high rental areas.

Local integration

In Chapter 4, we present a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with 11 stakeholders working in local integration, either at the national or local level. This analysis should be seen as giving some exploratory insights into local-level integration and governance dynamics.

Interviewees highlighted the positives of the recent introduction of Local Authority Integration Teams (LAITs), noting the benefits of having dedicated staff focused on supporting the integration of international protection (IP) applicants, refugees, people resettled in Ireland through government programmes, and Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BoTPs) within the local authorities.¹ Some interviewees, noting the success of the introduction of LAITs, suggested that the scope of LAITs should be broadened to all migrants. Key challenges highlighted by stakeholders working on local integration were uncertainty in relation to funding and the quality of funding, access to information for local stakeholders, and the centralisation of services in Ireland, which makes it more difficult to adapt responses locally.

Interviewees identified language and housing as the main barriers to integration, but also highlighted challenges with the recognition of qualifications, a lack of transport and isolation, challenges accessing healthcare, the integration impact of temporary permissions, and the particular impacts of the border with Northern Ireland for migrants. The LAITs were broadly welcomed as a good practice in migrant integration, as was the development of local integration strategies. A community development approach was highlighted as important for local integration, to ensure that long-term structures are put in place for supporting integration. Useful initiatives highlighted include training programmes for IPAS centre managers and supporting migrant groups to develop their own community structures with which to represent their issues to stakeholders.

¹ For brevity, in the rest of the report we refer to these migrants as ‘forced migrants’. This broader term encompasses all those ‘subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists’ (EMN, 2026). While this may not be accurate in describing IP applicants, whose status as refugees is not confirmed, it is preferable to other shorthands, such as ‘refugees’, which does not include IP applicants, BoTPs, or some forms of resettlement.

Summary and policy implications

Overall, this research highlights the importance of housing to migrant integration. Almost all stakeholders describe housing as the main barrier to integration in their area, and we find that housing availability is the main driver of both migrants' location of residence and migrant segregation. We also found that English language skills are an area of concern for migrants' spatial integration. We found that in areas with low average English language fluency, migrants from some Eastern EU and non-EU countries had higher segregation scores. Stakeholders also highlighted problems with accessing language training outside Dublin. Future research should focus on this issue, given that host country language skills are a fundamental facilitator for integration. Finally, we have found that overall segregation remained at low to moderate levels over recent years in Ireland, but there is significant variation in segregation levels for different migrant groups according to their countries of birth. While residential segregation is not necessarily good or bad for migrants' integration, it can present challenges in certain contexts. Previous research has shown that segregation is associated with more negative host society attitudes in Ireland (Laurence, McGinnity and Murphy, 2025).

It is clear from this research that migration differs significantly across Ireland, meaning that different local areas experience migration very differently. Ensuring that local stakeholders are empowered to both inform national policy and to adapt solutions at a local level is therefore an important part of a long-term integration strategy. Our interviews with stakeholders illustrate many challenges they face in this area, such as funding uncertainty, centralisation and limited local autonomy, limited feedback mechanisms to national policy, and a lack of access to information that would support their integration efforts. Resolving these concerns should have a positive impact on migrants' integration going forward.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Ireland has experienced a significant increase in immigration over recent years. This has been accompanied by an increase in the salience of migration as a political issue, changes in attitudes towards migrants, and changes in migration policy (Laurence, McGinnity and Murphy, 2025). In this context, understanding migrant integration is as important as ever. The most recent Monitoring Report on Integration found a mix of successes and challenges for migrants' integration in Ireland (McGinnity et al., 2025). It has been accompanied and complemented by a wide range of other research concerned with different aspects of integration from the Research Programme on Integration, Migration and Equality (RIME, funded by the Department of Justice) (Laurence, McGinnity and Murphy, 2025; Murphy et al., 2025, 2026; Alamir, Barrett and Maître, 2026; Timmons et al., 2026). However, the Monitoring Report focuses on national statistics and trends. Migrant integration, like any social process, is grounded in local areas, networks and relationships. This report builds on previous work by focusing on these local areas and the spatial factors and processes which affect migrant integration.

We draw on a mix of quantitative data and qualitative semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders to understand how migrant integration is spatially mediated. We do so with the goal of both developing our understanding of the spatial aspect of migrant integration and generating insights for policymakers who aim to support migrant integration. In this chapter, we first provide key context for the research, including an overview of migration to Ireland, a short review of previous research on segregation, and recent developments in local governance of migration. We then present the conceptual framework used in this research, linking our findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses to a broader understanding of integration.

1.1 Context and literature review

Below, we provide context for this study and situate its contributions within the existing literature. We first present an overview of migration to Ireland, before discussing existing literature on migrant segregation

in Ireland. This literature informs our quantitative analysis, including our choice of variables and our interpretation of results. We then summarise recent developments in the governance of local integration in Ireland and provide a short review of the literature assessing local integration. This section motivates the qualitative analysis in Chapter 4.

1.1.1 Migration to Ireland

According to the Census 2022, about 20 per cent of residents in Ireland were born abroad. The most common places of birth registered by the Census are England and Wales (4.1%), Poland (2.1%), Northern Ireland (1.2%), India (1.1%), Romania (0.8%), Brazil (0.8%), Lithuania (0.7%), the US (0.7%), Nigeria (0.4%) and Latvia (0.4%).

Estimates from the Central Statistics Office (CSO)² suggest that the foreign-born share of the population (defined as not born on the island of Ireland) in all regions increased immediately after the Great Famine and plateaued for several decades. It fell, particularly in Dublin, between 1911 and 1926, a period which coincides with the War of Independence, Civil War, and the establishment of the Irish Free State. Across the rest of the 20th century, the proportion of foreign-born residents in Dublin hovered around 5 per cent. However, regions outside of Dublin saw a sustained rise in foreign-born share between 1961 to 1981, mostly driven by those born in Great Britain (i.e. England, Scotland and Wales). Munster, Connacht and the Ulster counties in the south experienced a consistent rise in those born in Great Britain from the 1960s to the 1990s. From the 1990s to the present day, all regions experienced a historically rapid increase in their proportion of foreign-born residents. This has been mostly driven by immigration from those born in places other than the US or Great Britain. Although there was a brief slow-down after the economic recession in 2008, the proportion in all regions has risen since then.

The increase in immigration since 2022 in Ireland has been driven primarily by an increase in non-EU migrants, particularly people displaced by the invasion of Ukraine, and by migrants arriving under employment or education permits (McGinnity et al., 2025). There has also been a rise in applications for asylum, although these remain a very small proportion of the overall migrant population (see [Figure 2.9](#)).

² See Central Statistics Office [Table CNA31](#).

Migrants in Ireland have a higher employment rate (the proportion of the working-age population in employment) than Irish-born residents, at around 77 per cent in 2024, compared to 73 per cent for Irish-born (McGinnity et al., 2025). They also have a higher labour market participation rate (the proportion of the working-age population who are in work or looking for work) at 81.5 per cent compared to 75.3 per cent for Irish-born. This indicates that the migrant population in Ireland is highly oriented towards the labour market. While migrants also have a higher unemployment rate than Irish-born residents, at 5.8 per cent, compared to 3.5 per cent for Irish-born residents, this reflects their higher labour market participation rates. The unemployment rate is calculated as the proportion of those in work or looking for work who are not in work. Given that migrants have a higher employment rate than Irish-born residents, migrants can only have a higher unemployment rate if their non-working population is more likely to be looking for work than to be economically inactive for some other reason (such as caring, household labour, or tertiary education). Again, this reflects the importance of the labour market for understanding migration to Ireland.

Migrants in Ireland are also highly educated, with 58.5 per cent of working-age migrants having tertiary education compared to 42.4 per cent of Irish-born residents (*ibid.*), likely reflecting the importance of migration for work in high-skill industries. Migrant employment and tertiary education rates in Ireland are significantly higher than the EU average for migrants and the EU average for the overall population.³

At the same time, migrants in Ireland experience much higher levels of poverty and housing affordability challenges than the Irish-born population. In part, this is related to migrant dependence on the private rental sector: 57 per cent of migrants rent privately, compared to 14 per cent of Irish-born residents. Rents in Ireland are at very high levels and are continuing to rise (Lyons, 2025), resulting in very high rates at risk of poverty after housing costs for migrants (McGinnity et al., 2025). Migrants also face unique challenges in the private rental sector which may impact on their integration, such as discrimination and exploitation (Hossain, 2025; Lima, 2025; Murphy and Stapleton, 2024).

³ See Eurostat [Migrant integration and inclusion dashboard](#).

There is clear regional variation in these indicators. For instance, migrants in Dublin have higher employment rates, lower poverty rates, and are more likely to be in the private rental sector compared to migrants in the West and Border regions of the country (Gilmartin and Dagg, 2021). Indeed, parts of Dublin that experienced an increase in the migrant population between 1996 and 2006 saw a rise in area-level tertiary education and employment rates, suggesting that migrants who moved there were generally focused on high-skill jobs (Fahey and Fanning, 2010). However, research on the characteristics of migrants in regions across Ireland is limited, in part due to the limitations of available data.⁴

1.1.2 Migrant segregation in Ireland

While there are clear differences between regions, integration is also shaped by context at the neighbourhood level, such as the level of migrant segregation. Indeed, segregation is a key indicator used in our quantitative analysis of migrant distribution. Below, we summarise the findings and limitations of previous literature on the topic in Ireland.

Vang (2010) studies the predictors of segregation and diversity in Ireland over the Celtic Tiger period. In particular, she provides a useful overview of developments in the Irish housing market and how they relate to the distribution of migrants throughout the country. Unlike many other European countries, Ireland did not experience growth through heavy manufacturing in the 20th century. Instead, Irish economic growth took off in the 1990s, mostly driven by high-tech industries and finance. This meant that unlike European countries with industrial cities, where the private rental sector was large, low-quality, and concentrated in the city centre, Ireland had a relatively small and widely distributed private rental sector. With the housing construction boom in the 1990s and 2000s, the private rental sector grew, encompassing both older second-hand homes in cities and new-build rentals in the suburbs. Vang (2010) finds that the diverse and distributed character of private rental and new-build supply over this period meant that it was associated with lower segregation. This is the opposite finding to many other contexts internationally at the time,

⁴ When depending on surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey and the Survey on Income and Living Conditions, the sample size of migrants available is generally too small to draw conclusions about differences across small areas. When using Census data, information on location of residence is generally not available to protect the identity of respondents.

where private rental supply, dominated by low-income inner-city housing, was associated with increased segregation.

Fahey and Fanning (2010) focus just on Dublin, again over the Celtic Tiger period. They highlight some particularly unique aspects of Irish migration over the period. First, while Ireland was not unique at this time for attracting a migrant population with higher average education levels than the host population, the percentage of foreign-born with tertiary level of education was 1.8 times higher than that of natives, the third-highest ratio among OECD countries in 2001. They also note that given the very low level of migration to Ireland prior to the Celtic Tiger period, there was no pre-existing pattern of segregation with which migrants had to interact – this makes Dublin a particularly unusual case study internationally. Finally, unlike other contemporary contexts, the human capital gap did not lead to ‘occupational polarisation’, where migrants ended up doing more well-paid jobs than Irish people. This is partly because of the widespread economic growth in Ireland at the time and because of overqualification among migrants. They find that migrants were somewhat more likely to move to more deprived areas, and that the increase in migration to these areas led to a reduction in spatial inequality over the period 1996–2006. Similar to Vang (2010), they find that private rental housing was the strongest predictor of the distribution of migrants across the city. Overall, these studies present a positive picture for spatial integration in Ireland. As Fahey and Fanning (2010) note, ‘the classic associations between immigration, ethnic segregation and socio-spatial inequalities’, are not present in Dublin, at least over this period.

While they present useful insights for the present situation in Ireland, both Vang (2010) and Fahey and Fanning (2010) analyse segregation from before the Great Financial Crisis. The only study of segregation in Ireland since then is by Fahey et al. (2019). They present key segregation indicators based on the 2016 Census, finding that the migrant population is mostly located in urban areas, especially cities such as Dublin, Cork and Limerick. They also find that migrants are more likely to live in more affluent areas. To better understand the most disadvantaged migrants, they also focus on the population with low English language skills, finding that these groups are more likely to live in independent urban towns, and in areas with average affluence and below-average education levels. They present dissimilarity index scores for a range of groups, finding that segregation is relatively low, but that it is highest for those with poor English language skills. This

suggests that segregation may pose particular problems for the most disadvantaged migrant sub-groups. Again, in line with both Vang (2010) and Fahey and Fanning (2010), they find that private rental housing is the most important predictor of migrant distribution across the country.

The existing literature, while informative, has some key limitations which we attempt to address in this report. First, both Vang (2010) and Fahey and Fanning (2010) treat integration and residential segregation as though they are opposites, with integration defined as the absence of segregation. Fahey et al. (2019) acknowledge the more complex relationship between these concepts, but focus on measures of segregation alone. We attempt to relate these measures to migrant integration more explicitly, through both our quantitative and qualitative analysis. Second, while each study deals to some extent with sub-groups of the migrant population, we are able to extend the analysis of distribution and segregation to a wide range of country-of-birth groups. This is particularly important for segregation, as chain migration and voluntary segregation patterns are more likely to operate around nationality groups. Third, as noted above, there have been several important developments in migration to and from Ireland since 2016. This study uses the 2022 Census, as well as administrative data sources, to present more up-to-date findings. We build on these findings in Chapters 2 and 3, which study migrant distribution and segregation respectively.

1.1.3 Governance of local integration in Ireland

1.1.3.1 Recent developments

Ireland's integration policy broadly takes a 'mainstream' approach.⁵ This means that the needs of migrants are met through mainstream services rather than through targeted supports or agencies, with adaptations and additional supports provided where necessary. Ireland also has a highly centralised system of governance, ranking last on the EU's decentralisation index.⁶ Local authorities have very limited

⁵ See Department of Justice and Equality (2017), *The migrant integration strategy: A blueprint for the future*, <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/departments-of-justice-and-equality-migrant-integration-strategy-a-blueprint-for-the-future.pdf>

⁶ See European Committee of the Regions: Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs, Milieu Consulting SRL, Borrett, C., Tugran, T., Gancheva, M., and Zamparutti, T. (2021). *Developing a decentralisation index for the Committee of the Regions Division of Powers Portal*, European Committee of the Regions, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2863/841455>

fiscal independence, and very few powers compared with other EU countries. This means that until recently, local authorities had a relatively small role in migrant integration.

Ireland's Migrant Integration Strategy (2017–2021) (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017) aimed to mainstream migrant integration in the work of national and local authorities. Nonetheless, many local authorities have drawn up their own migrant integration strategies (see Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2022), sometimes with the support of national government (particularly the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration before it was closed; Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). The 2017 strategy called on local authorities to update their migrant integration strategies, although they were not obligated to do so, and by 2020 just 11 of 31 local authorities had an in-date migrant integration strategy (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2020). Limited national–local co-ordination structures existed, and as the approach was one of mainstreaming, many local authorities dealt with migrant integration as part of their mainstream social inclusion work in teams, rather than having specific teams for migrant integration.

This policy context changed, however, with the White Paper on Ending Direct Provision (2021)⁷, which strongly prioritised integration into local communities and increased community engagement and consultation. As a result, Local Authority Integration Teams (LAITs) were set up in every local authority, funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (now funded by the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration). The teams consist of four people explicitly mandated to support the integration of international protection applicants, recognised refugees, Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BoTPs), and resettled refugees (for brevity, in this report we refer to these groups collectively as 'forced migrants'. For more detail, see Potter et al., 2025; Murphy et al., 2025). This is the first time every local authority has had a team explicitly focused on migrant integration (although some had already established integration teams or had an integration worker). The teams are co-ordinated by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), with reporting mechanisms back to national government, another first for multi-level migrant

⁷ See Department of Children, Disability and Equality (2021). *A white paper to end Direct Provision and to establish a new International Protection Support Service*, <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/white-paper-on-ending-direct-provision-03e5db80-9f45-473a-8280-d9211a9b302c.pdf>

integration governance in Ireland. Additional roles were added to the teams in 2025 in areas with higher migrant populations.

Around the same time, Community Integration Forums (CIFs) were established in all local authorities. These evolved from Community Response Forums that were set up to co-ordinate the local-level response to COVID-19, which were then repurposed in 2022 to co-ordinate the response to the arrival of BoTPs following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In 2023, in line with the establishment of the LAITs, a review was carried out to expand this forum to include integration supports to international protection applicants and beneficiaries of international protection. They were renamed Community Integration Forums in line with their expanded remit (Potter et al., 2025). The forums bring together key stakeholder organisations and service providers at local level and are chaired by the local authority. The Community Integration Forums are co-ordinated by the LGMA.

Other local actors such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups and family resource centres are also increasingly involved in migrant integration, due to increasing resources available for migrant integration initiatives (e.g. the establishment of the International Protection Integration Fund and the Anti-Racism Fund in addition to the pre-existing Community Integration Fund).⁸ Local Development Companies (the main partners implementing Ireland's social inclusion programming) have also expanded their work in this area following the establishment of New Arrivals funding and the Community Connection Project. New Arrivals funding has been given as part of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP, Ireland's largest social inclusion programme)⁹, focused on responding to the significant number of arrivals from Ukraine across Ireland. The Community Connection Project aims at improving local attitudes towards new communities, particularly after the opening of new International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) centres.

This has represented a significant shift in local governance of migrant integration, at the same time as local communities have seen increases in all types of migration, but particularly forced migration,

⁸ Note that these funds have now been consolidated into a single Integration Fund.

⁹ See Pobal (2025) 'New Arrivals: 2022–2023 Profile' https://www.pobal.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/New-Arrivals-SICAP-Profile-2022_2023.pdf; Tiernan, Eithne (2025) 'New Arrivals: SICAP Implementers Perspectives' <https://www.pobal.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/New-Arrivals-LDCs.pdf>.

due to the scale of arrivals from Ukraine and the settlement patterns of these groups.

1.1.3.2 Previous research

Previous research has identified several issues with local governance of integration in Ireland. However, most of this literature focuses on the period before 2022, when the policy changes described above were not in place. Here, we outline the concerns and issues raised in the literature, before presenting the findings of our research in sections 4.3 and 4.4.

In 2022, the Immigrant Council of Ireland contacted all local authorities to assess progress towards improving local integration. As part of this report, they collected data on key aspects of local integration. They found that most local authorities were not making progress in key areas ‘of internal structures, staffing, funding allocation, and diversity’ (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2022). They noted that very few local authorities had stand-alone integration officers, and that in most areas, integration was ‘generally only part of a role’. They also found that 10 local authorities did not have local migration integration strategies in place, and only four had formally evaluated their previous integration strategy.

The issue of staffing was also highlighted by Gilmartin (2023), who noted that understanding of the role of local authorities was poor in general, and that communication with migrant communities should be improved. She found that many migrants depended on informal relationships with a small number of key individuals in order to access supports. This presents a particular problem given uncertainty in funding; when these key individuals do not have permanent contracts, the networks on which integration supports rely are precarious. A key recommendation from those interviewed in Gilmartin (2023) related to the need for permanent dedicated staff.

Another issue highlighted by previous research relates to the provision of different services to different categories of migrant. For instance, Arnold et al. (2019) criticised the large disparity in service provision between resettled refugees, who receive a wide range of integration supports, and international protection applicants and recognised refugees, who receive very few targeted integration supports. Gilmartin and Dagg (2022) also highlighted that most settlement services are

only provided to forced migrants, and some groups of migrants are explicitly excluded from accessing these supports.

Ntaliou (2025) provides a broad critique of local integration governance in Ireland. Analysing Dublin, she described the approach to integration by the local authority as ‘pragmatic assimilationism’. She finds that the local authority generally expects ‘immigrants to adapt to pre-existing frameworks without significant accommodation for their unique cultural or social needs (assimilationism), while also engaging in situation-specific responses when pressures arise (pragmatism)’. Building on the idea of pragmatism, she suggested that the typical approach of local authorities can be described as ‘projectisation’, where the local authority relies on ‘short-term project-based responses rather than long-term cohesive strategies’. The roots of this problem lie both in limited autonomy of local authorities, and in the unstable nature of integration funding.

Gilmartin and Dagg (2022) focus on the state as a whole, and yet identify similar issues to Ntaliou (2025). In particular, they connect specific issues (such as those highlighted by Gilmartin (2023), Gilmartin and Dagg (2018), and Immigrant Council of Ireland (2022)) to two characteristics of Ireland’s system of local integration governance: the state’s reliance on NGOs to provide key services, and the limited autonomy of local authorities.

First, the state’s reliance on NGOs means that the state has limited ability to address gaps in service provision or respond in a systematic way to increases in service demand. The role of non-state bodies in providing social services has a long history in Ireland, beginning with the outsourcing of key roles to the Catholic Church, and is not limited to migrant integration supports (Gray, 2016). This can cause issues, for instance because NGOs find it difficult to maintain permanent staff, but also because NGOs are typically smaller and less prevalent outside the main cities in Ireland. Service availability is therefore ‘spatially uneven’, according to Gilmartin and Dagg (2022). In practice, support services are usually reliant on a small number of ‘motivated individuals’; if these individuals leave, ‘efforts directed towards developing integration processes [dissipate]’.

Second, while Ireland is, along with many other European countries, committed to mainstreaming integration, Gilmartin and Dagg (2022) note that in other contexts mainstreaming is accompanied by the

empowerment of local authorities. If integration supports are mainstreamed at the national level, it falls to local authorities to identify gaps in service availability and provision and to provide targeted supports. However, they suggest that the limited autonomy of Ireland's local authorities, as well as the continued reliance on NGOs for service provision, means that these gaps were not being identified. They argue that while integration policy was committed to mainstreaming, the state had not developed effective mainstreaming supports where they are needed or invested in local authorities to support integration more effectively. The result was that 'individual immigrants who struggle to access services are constructed as the problem, rather than the system itself'.

A key aim of our interviews with stakeholders was to assess to what extent the recent policy changes in local governance of integration, such as the introduction of LAITs, have addressed these concerns, and what gaps or concerns may remain relevant.

1.2 Conceptual framework

Having established the background for this research, we now present the conceptual framework we use to generate insights about integration and governance from our analysis. We draw on Ager and Strang (2008). While their model was developed through interviews and fieldwork with refugees in the United Kingdom (UK), it has wider applicability. They hold that the core socio-economic domains of employment, housing, health and education are both 'markers and means' of integration. While employment rates or good health may indicate that a given group is well-integrated, they also provide a means for the group to become integrated. At the base of their model are rights and citizenship. Having the same basic rights as non-migrants, such as the right to work or the right to social welfare, and having pathways towards citizenship are fundamental precursors to successful integration. They then define two groups of factors which mediate the connection between foundational rights and the top-level markers and means of integration: 'facilitators', which remove systemic barriers to integration, and the structure of migrants' social connections. They identify two 'facilitators', language and cultural knowledge and safety and security, which are key to enabling integration to take place. They then outline three aspects of migrants' social network structure which impact integration: bonding ties (relationships between migrants of a particular social group), bridging

ties (relationships between migrants and other groups, such as non-migrant residents or other migrant groups), and social links (relationships with local stakeholders or service providers which enable migrants to access necessary resources). Below, we explore how these concepts can be understood spatially.

Integration is spatially mediated, insofar as the role of location, the built environment, and proximity to various resources and services affects the possibility of integration. Under the Ager and Strang (2008) framework, we can think of spatial factors as cutting across several levels of integration. Living, working or studying in areas with better public transport or access to health services improves the core socio-economic ‘means and markers’ of integration. Living in an area with active and inclusive community groups enables the formation of bridging ties, whereas living somewhere with a community of migrants from a similar background can support social bonds.

Social links are also spatially mediated. These are the vertical ties which allow migrants to access resources from important institutions, such as government services. Of course, people need to access services in the place in which they live. The way in which local government and other stakeholders working in integration engage with migrants is therefore essential to understanding migrant integration. This is especially true for more vulnerable groups, such as refugees, who are likely to rely more on these social links for their integration. Ager and Strang (2008) noted how in areas with long histories of ethnic diversity and refugee resettlement in their specific study, local services were better able to support refugees’ specific needs.

In this report, we take a mixed-methods approach to studying the spatial aspects of integration. First, we present a quantitative analysis of migrant distribution. In Chapter 2, we discuss the methods and data used, and present descriptive statistics on the geographic distribution of migrant groups around the country and their relationship to key area-level characteristics. In Chapter 3, we analyse the relationship between migrant segregation and these area-level characteristics. In the subsection below, we briefly outline why these variables were chosen and how they relate to integration.

Second, in Chapter 4, we present results from qualitative interviews with stakeholders working in local integration. This analysis is divided into two sections. We first focus on findings relating to governance

practices. Here, we are particularly interested in how the recent changes to local integration in Ireland (see section 1.1.3.1) are perceived by stakeholders. We then focus on findings about integration from the perspective of local stakeholders, drawing again on the Ager and Strang (2008) framework.

1.2.1 Area-level characteristics

In this analysis, we present the level of association between migrant proportion and segregation, for each of the individual country-of-birth groups we have data for, and seven area-level characteristics. They are:

- Proportion of the population that are **unemployed**
- The average **English language fluency** score of the area
- The share of households **renting from a private landlord**
- The share of households living in properties that were **built after the year 2016**
- Proportion of the population that have completed **tertiary education**
- Proportion of the population that are living in a household headed by an **unskilled** or **semiskilled worker**
- The **Pobal HP Deprivation Index**

We chose these variables in order to cover a wide range of aspects of spatial integration, and also partly based on the variables used in Fahey et al. (2019). We include indicators relating to three of the key ‘markers and means’ of integration (employment, education, and housing), as well as a variable capturing variation in English language fluency. Unfortunately, we cannot capture all aspects of integration as outlined above, due to limitations of the data available to us. For instance, the only data on health available from the Census is a self-reported general health, measured on a five-point scale from ‘very bad’ to ‘very good’. As this lacks an objective basis, and instead relies on cultural and social understandings of health, we believed it was not appropriate for an analysis focused on spatial integration and health. Below, we group these variables into three categories, and outline why they were chosen and how they relate to spatial integration.

First, we consider two key facilitators of integration: labour market access, as measured by unemployment rates, and English language fluency. Drawing on the Ager and Strang model, these are key factors in integration. Access to employment improves access to resources and provides a social context which usually enables the formation of bridging ties, while English language fluency is essential for integration within the community.

Second, we consider two housing variables: proportion of households who are in the private rental sector, and proportion of the housing stock built since 2016. These variables can indicate the extent to which housing availability is correlated with migration in Ireland, and how this differs across groups. Rented and newly built housing is likely to be more available to migrants, because migrants may have arrived in Ireland recently, may not be planning to settle in Ireland, and may lack the social networks to find properties being rented informally. Rental housing is also in short supply in Ireland, meaning its location is particularly likely to affect the spatial distribution of migrants across Ireland.

Finally, we consider three socio-economic variables: proportion with higher education, proportion working in low-skilled jobs, and score on the Pobal HP Deprivation Index (a lower score indicates greater deprivation). These variables indicate the level of socio-economic challenges facing the areas in which migrants live.

It must be emphasised that our analysis can only provide evidence of associations between migrant proportion or segregation levels and these variables. Without individual-level data, a causal design, or qualitative fieldwork with migrants, it is not possible to draw direct conclusions about the impact on integration. Rather, the goal of this portion of the study is to describe spatial patterns in migrants' location of residence and key area-level characteristics.

Chapter 2

Data and descriptives

2.1 Data

We use several data sources for the quantitative analysis of migrant spatial distribution in this report. They are outlined below.

2.1.1 Census data

The main data source used is spatially aggregated data from the 2022 Census. We use this data at three levels of granularity: Local Electoral Area (LEA), Electoral Division (ED), and Small Area (SA). Table 2.1 shows the number of LEAs, EDs and SAs in the country, as well as their median population and population range. There is an average of around 114 SAs in each LEA. We also use the CSO's six-way urban–rural classification, which assigns each SA to one of six categories, based on population, urban influence and the workplaces of residents.¹⁰ The categories are: city, satellite urban town, independent urban town, rural area with high urban influence, rural area with moderate urban influence, and highly remote rural area. Finally, when presenting analysis about Dublin City, we use the Dublin City and Suburbs area from the CSO 'Towns/Urban Areas' Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) boundary dataset, which identifies all contiguous urban areas in the state.

Table 2.1 Descriptive statistics on Census 2022 boundaries

Boundary	Number	Median population	Lowest population	Highest population
Local Electoral Area	166	29,808	10,878	74,708
Electoral Division	3,420	675	71	43,905
Small Area	18,919	259	37	2,777

¹⁰ More information on the classification can be found on the CSO's 2022 Census website: <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022smallareapopulationstatistics/>

For data on migrants, we use a special table provided by the CSO, which breaks down the population of each SA by the country of birth of its residents, for the 20 most populous country-of-birth groups. We also have this data for the 2016 Census, with the same country list as the 2022 Census table. This data counts the usually resident population on Census night, meaning that those who happen to be temporarily away from home are counted in their normal area, and that visitors or those who own second homes but who live elsewhere are excluded.

In all analyses using Census data, we consider migrants to be those who were born outside of the island of Ireland. This measure has some advantages over other options, such as citizenship. Firstly, place of birth does not change over time for an individual. In contrast, using citizenship as an indicator of migrant status would exclude those who have obtained Irish citizenship. Ireland does not have a widely available long-term residence permit, meaning migrants intending to settle in Ireland obtain citizenship at much higher rates than in other countries (McGinnity et al., 2025). Also, using a ‘born on the island’ definition means we can distinguish between those born in Great Britain (England, Scotland or Wales) from those born in Northern Ireland. This is particularly helpful in border areas, where many residents in Ireland may be born in Northern Ireland, and vice versa. Using a ‘place of birth’ definition also introduces some caveats and limitations, however. For instance, people who may not consider themselves to be migrants – such as those born to Irish parents abroad, and who moved to Ireland at a young age – are counted as migrants in our analysis.

Data on area-level characteristics comes from the publicly available Census SAPS tables, which present a wide range of socio-economic and demographic statistics for geographic areas across Ireland. We combine these tables with boundary files from the CSO to calculate spatial statistics and present maps.¹¹

2.1.2 IPAS accommodation

The data on International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) accommodation comes from the Department of Justice. It provides the location and occupancy of every IPAS centre from 2021 to 2025. Using CSO boundary files, we produce maps and link this data to area-level

¹¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2022/census2022smallareapopulationstatistics/>

characteristics. IPAS accommodation primarily houses those who are seeking asylum in Ireland. However, those who have been granted or denied legal status to remain may also reside in IPAS accommodation for a period of time (Murphy and Stapleton, 2024). For this reason, we refer to this population as IPAS residents, rather than as asylum seekers or refugees. It is also important to note that this data does not include Ukrainian migrants to Ireland who arrived in Ireland after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

2.1.3 Area-level disadvantage

We use the Pobal HP Deprivation Index to provide a single measure of area-level disadvantage. We use this at the ED level.

2.1.4 Limitations

There are some important limitations to the quantitative analysis in this report. First, we do not take a causal approach in this report. Instead, we focus on presenting straightforward associations and descriptive statistics. While this enables us to present an overview of the spatial distribution of migration in Ireland, it limits our ability to present explanations for what we observe. Second, we mostly rely on Census data collected in 2022 for an overview of the whole migrant population. This means our data do not capture the full extent of migration from Ukraine or the full extent of the increase in migration from non-EU countries in recent years. Third, our data are all spatially aggregated. For instance, we have data on the average socio-economic status of an area, and the number of migrants in that area, but not on the socio-economic status of those migrants. This limits the extent to which we can draw conclusions about integration. Finally, we only have data on where migrants live, not on where they work or socialise.

2.2 Spatial distribution of migrants

Below, we present a descriptive analysis showing how migrant share varies across Ireland and Dublin, as well as between urban and rural areas. In section 2.3, we explore the relationship between selected area-level characteristics, the proportion of migrant population, and the change in this proportion over time.

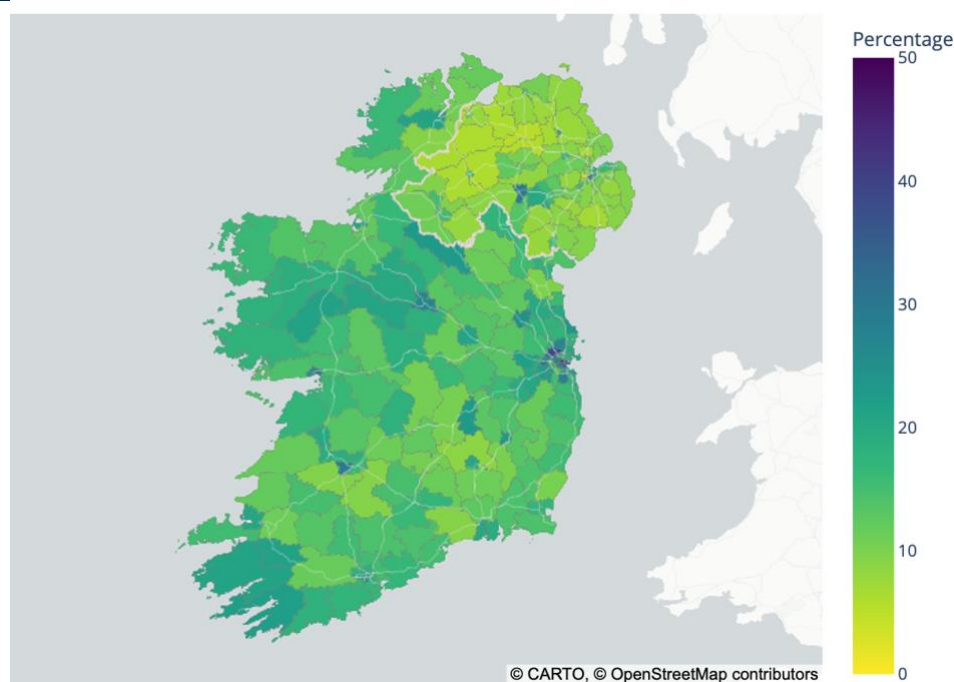
2.2.1 Ireland

[Figure 2.1](#) presents migrant proportion across the island of Ireland. The left panel presents the proportion of the population who were not born on the island, with shades closer to dark blue indicating a higher

proportion of foreign-born in the LEA/District Electoral Area (DEA). Conversely, shades closer to yellow denote lower proportion of residents born outside the island of Ireland.

The proportion of residents who were born abroad is highest in and around urban centres, such as Dublin, Galway, Cork and Limerick. It is lowest in Northern Ireland, and relatively low across the south-east of the country. On the other hand, Mayo, Connacht and eastern Midlands have relatively higher migrant proportions. While there are some regional differences, the most important feature of this map is the relatively even distribution of the migrant population south of the border. The most obvious spatial pattern is the difference between Ireland and Northern Ireland, with a very low proportion of migrants in Northern Ireland compared to Ireland (see McGinnity et al., 2023).

Figure 2.1: Foreign-born proportion in Ireland, LEAs/DEAs, 2022

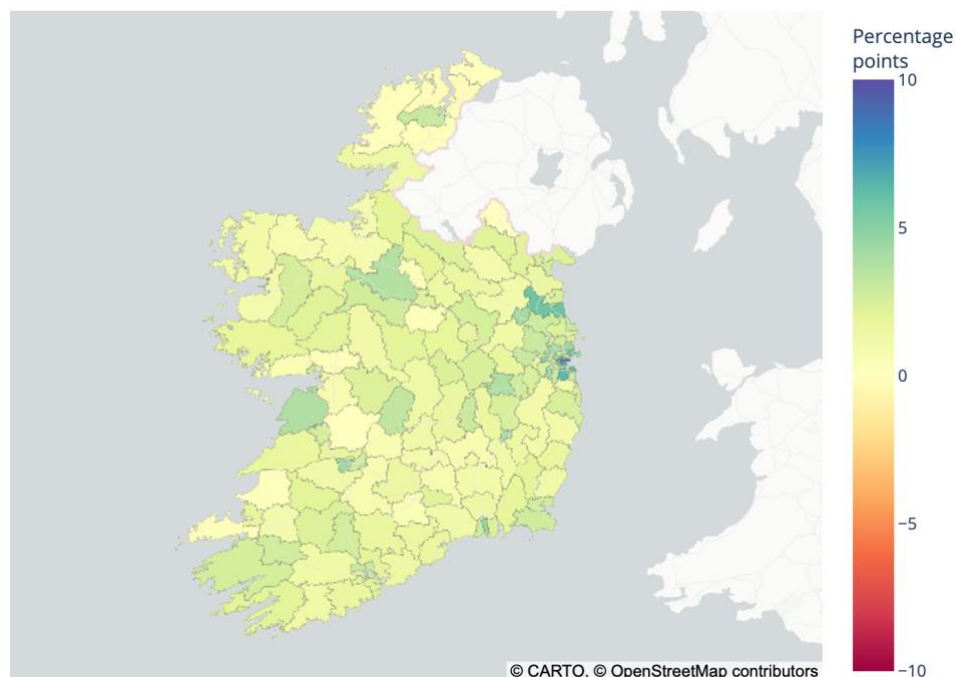


Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Census Microdata.

Figure 2.2 shows the difference in percentage points (pp) between 2016 and 2022 for each LEA. This is calculated as the simple difference between the percentage of foreign-born residents in 2022 compared to 2016. No comparable data was available for Northern Ireland. The highest increases are in Dublin City LEAs, which are discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Outside of Dublin City, the highest increases are in Laytown–Bettystown, Co. Meath (5.8pp), Cork City

South Central (4.8pp) and Waterford City South (4.4pp). The only areas in which the share of migrants fell were Buncrana and Milford in Co. Donegal and Dingle in Co. Kerry, although the change was less than 1pp in all cases. The mean change across all LEAs was a 2.3pp increase (not accounting for the size of the population of each LEA).

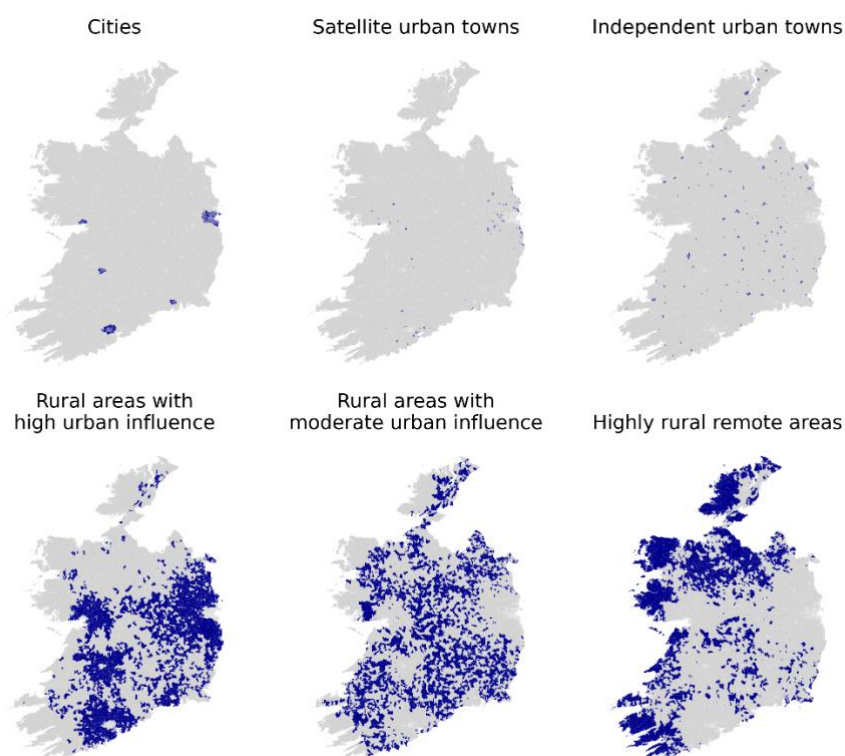
Figure 2.2: Change in foreign-born proportion in Ireland, LEAs, 2016/2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

2.2.2 Urban Areas

The proportion of people living in rural areas in Ireland is considerably higher than the European average (OECD, 2026). However, as shown in [Figure 2.2](#), the largest concentration of foreign-born residents is in urban areas. To better understand these patterns, this section focuses on the various types of urban and rural areas distinguished in the Census. These are: city, satellite urban town, independent urban town, rural area with high urban influence, rural area with moderate urban influence, and highly remote rural area. Satellite urban towns are defined by the CSO as towns with between 1,500 and 49,999 residents, where 20 per cent or more of the usually resident employed population's workplace address is in a city. Independent towns are towns of the same size where less than 20 per cent of workplace addresses are in a city. The distribution of these areas across the country is shown in [Figure 2.3](#).

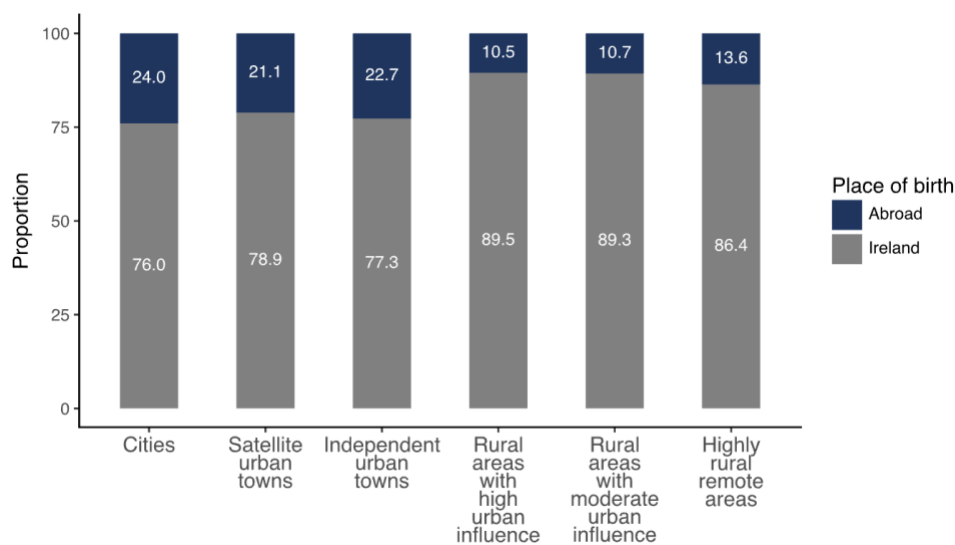
Figure 2.3: The CSO six-way urban–rural classification of Small Areas in 2022

Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

Foreign-born residents in Ireland live mainly in urban areas (78%), with 43 per cent living in cities, a further 15 per cent in satellite urban towns and 20 per cent in independent urban towns. In contrast, a significantly lower proportion of those born in Ireland live in urban areas (60%), with 31 per cent living in cities, 13 per cent in satellite urban towns, and 16 per cent in independent urban towns.

Figure 2.4 presents the proportion of foreign-born residents across each of these six area types. Within urban areas, between 21 per cent and 24 per cent of the population are foreign-born, with the highest proportion found in cities. In rural areas, however, between 10 per cent and 14 per cent of residents are foreign-born. This relatively small proportion may result in a different spatial configuration in rural areas and pose different challenges for integration comparing the access to networks and services available to those living in urban areas.

Figure 2.4: Proportion of residents by urban/rural areas and place of birth, 2022



Source: Authors’ own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

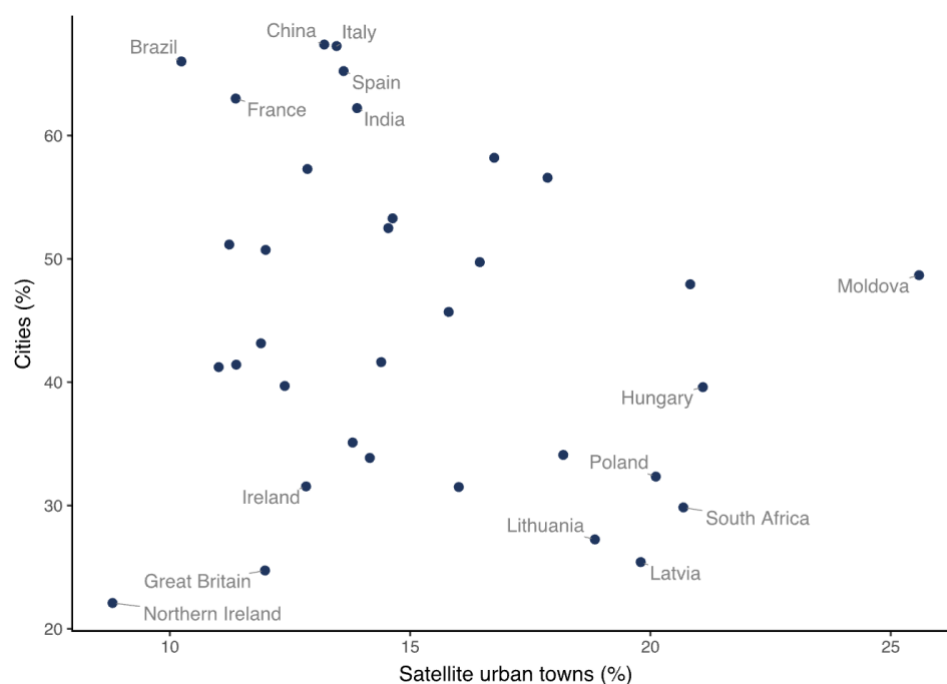
Figure 2.5 focuses on individual countries of birth, comparing the proportion of each country-of-birth group that lives in satellite urban towns to the proportion that lives in cities. This plot provides a comparative insight on how the migrant population is distributed across large urban areas, indicating which place-of-birth groups are concentrated in cities, and which are concentrated in commuter or satellite towns.

The groups most concentrated in cities are those born in Brazil, China, India, France, Spain, Italy and India. It is likely that the relatively high proportion of Asian and Western European migrant groups who live in cities reflects the concentration of well-paid professional jobs in urban centres, particularly Dublin. Previous ESRI analysis found that residents born in Asia and Western Europe have much higher rates of tertiary education than Irish-born residents (70–80% compared to 42% for Irish-born residents), and those from Western Europe are also estimated to have similar or higher incomes compared to Irish-born residents (McGinnity et al., 2025). This urban concentration may also reflect the greater ability of these migrant groups to afford city centre rents, which tend to be much higher (Slaymaker et al., 2026).

On the other hand, several place-of-birth groups are much more likely to live in satellite towns. These are mostly those born in Eastern Europe. Migrants from Eastern Europe first arrived in Ireland in substantial numbers after the accession of post-Soviet states to the

EU in 2004. Their concentration in these areas can be largely explained by the association between choice of residence and social networks (Büchel et al., 2020). Ireland was one of only three countries (along with the UK and Sweden) that granted immediate free movement rights to this group, so many moved to Ireland for work in construction, which was booming, particularly outside of the capital and other major cities (Kitchin et al., 2012). Compared to other place-of-birth groups, they have also generally lived in the country for longer, and are more likely to be homeowners (McGinnity et al., 2025). Low proportions of the Irish-, Northern Irish- and Great Britain-born populations live in either cities or satellite towns. This is partly explained by the high proportion of these groups which live in rural areas, as shown in [Figure 2.6](#).

Figure 2.5: Proportion of each country of birth that resides in cities and satellite urban towns, 2022

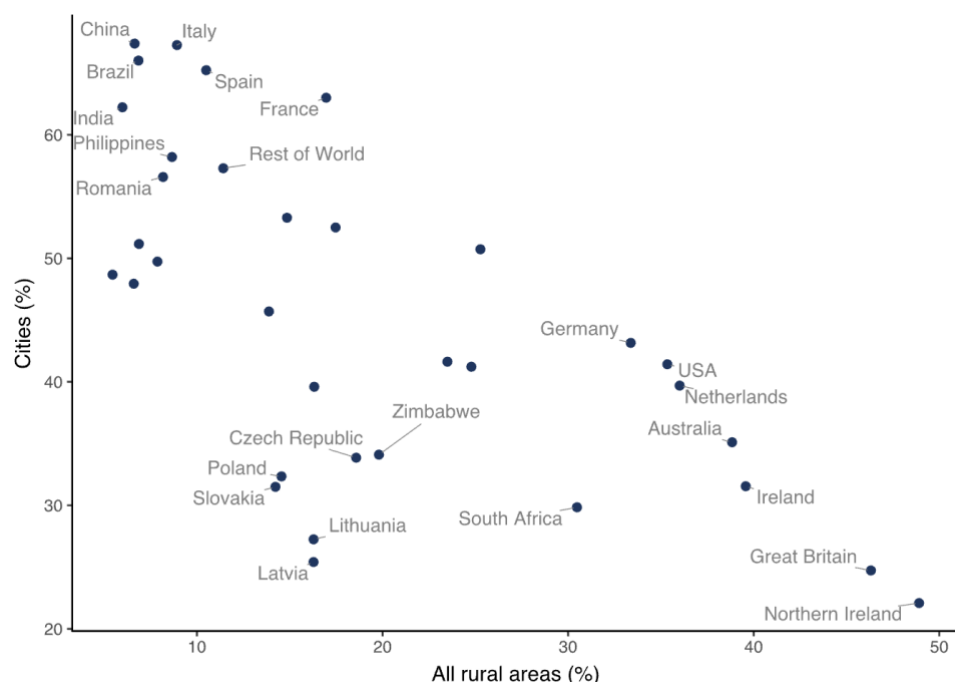


Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

Figure 2.6 compares the proportion of each place-of-birth group living in cities to the proportion living in any rural area (including high urban influence, moderate urban influence, and highly remote areas). The groups most concentrated in rural areas are those born in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and Ireland. In fact, nearly half of all those born in Northern Ireland live in rural areas, likely reflecting the rural nature of areas around the border (see Figure 2.3). Those born in Northwestern and Eastern European countries are also relatively more concentrated in rural areas compared to cities.

The other groups of countries which are most concentrated in rural areas compared to cities are non-EU countries where English is widely or predominately spoken (US, South Africa and Australia). On the other hand, English is only widely spoken in two of the countries which are most concentrated in cities (India and the Philippines). The highly diverse Rest of World group are also much more concentrated in cities than rural areas; given that our dataset distinguishes many of the largest anglophone countries, these migrants are less likely to have strong English language skills. This may be explained by the low availability of English language education in rural areas compared to cities, as noted in Chapter 4. Such education not only enables integration, but also attracts migrants who intend to learn English.¹² Additionally, cities are more likely to have strong and well-connected migrant communities which can make life easier for new migrants, helping them to find housing and work in an unfamiliar context. This support is particularly important for those who do not have strong English language skills (Figure 2.6).

¹² In 2022, education was the most common reason for issuing a residence permit (see Potter et al., 2025).

Figure 2.6: Proportion of each country of birth that lives in cities and rural areas by country of birth, 2022

Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

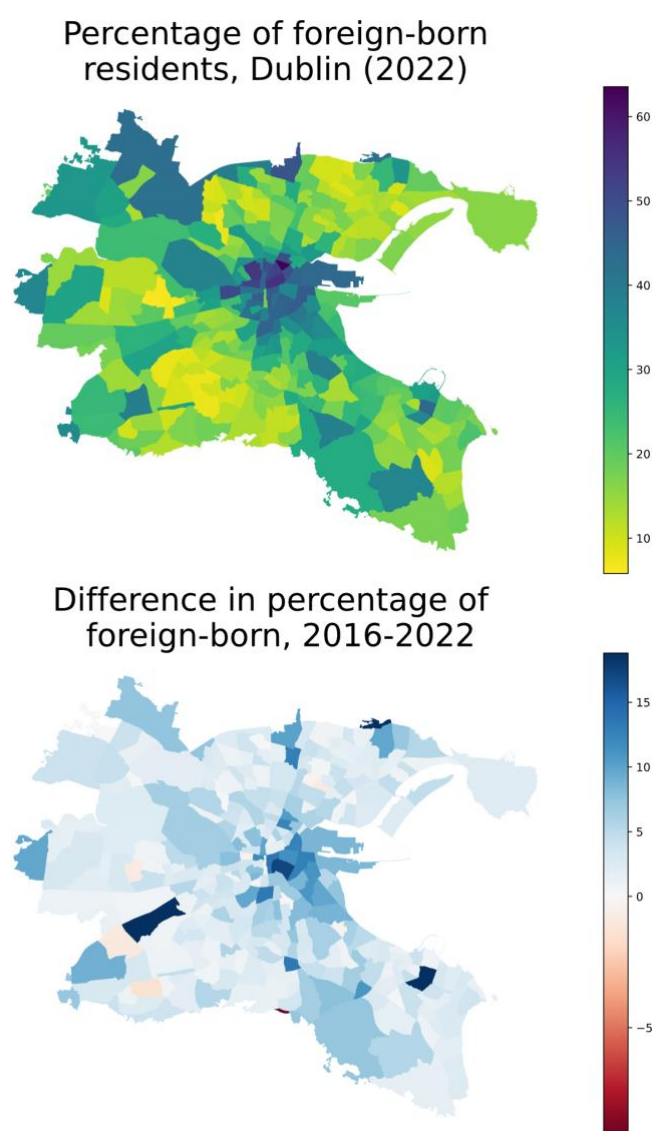
2.2.3 Dublin

Figure 2.7 focuses on the spatial distribution of residents in the Dublin City and Suburbs area. The left panel presents the proportion of migrants in each Electoral Division. The districts with the highest foreign-born proportions are all in the North Inner City, such as Mountjoy B (63%) and Arran Quay B (54%). Parts of the South West and South East Inner City also have particularly high proportions of foreign-born residents. Outside of the city centre, the highest foreign-born proportions are in parts of Swords, Cabra–Glasnevin, Kimmage–Rathmines, and Dún Laoghaire. The lowest proportions of foreign-born residents are in the Electoral Divisions of Ballyfermot–Drimnagh, such as Carna (6%), and areas of Ballymun–Finglas, such as Finglas South C (7%). The areas with the highest proportions of foreign-born residents are concentrated in the city centre of Dublin, particularly in the north inner city. Broadly speaking, there is a high concentration of migrants in the city centre, and in specific areas in the outer suburbs, with particularly low proportions of migrants in inner suburban areas. This is a pattern which is highlighted in Figure 2.8.

The right-hand panel of Figure 2.7 shows the percentage point (pp) difference in migrant share between 2016 and 2022 in each Electoral

Division. Between these two years, migrant share increased or remained the same almost everywhere in Dublin. The largest increases occurred on the outskirts of the city, in areas such as Dún-Laoghaire–Glenageary (23pp), Balgriffin (23pp) and Clondalkin–Ballymount (19pp). Within the city, the largest increases occurred in parts of the South East Inner City, such as Royal Exchange B (17pp) and Mansion House B (17pp). The few decreases in foreign-born proportion over the period were marginal (between -1pp and -4pp) and occurred mainly in the outer suburbs of Tallaght and Glencullen–Sandyford.

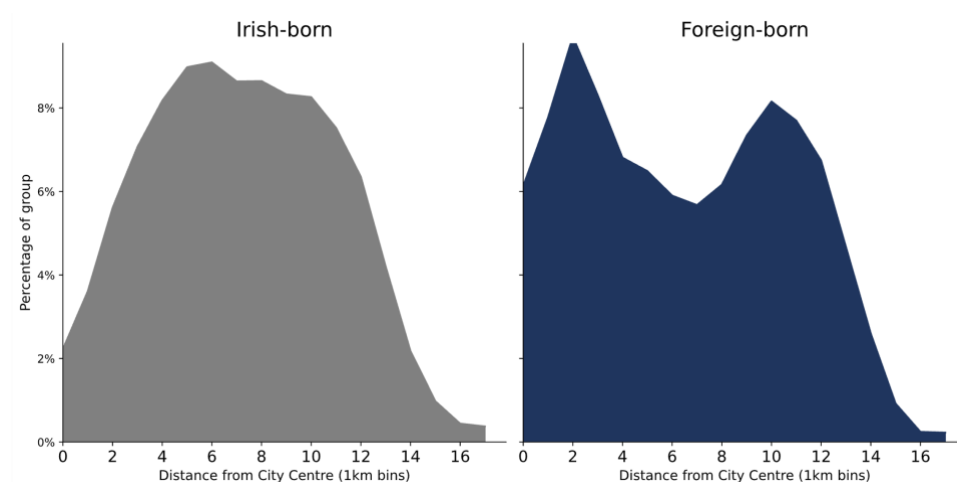
Figure 2.7: Proportion of residents born abroad within EDs, Dublin, 2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

Figure 2.8 shows how the foreign-born and Irish-born groups are distributed across Dublin. The bottom axis represents distance from Dublin City Centre (here defined as O’Connell Bridge). Far more of the foreign-born group live within 0–2km of the city centre. However, the Irish-born group are more likely to live 3–9km from the city centre. This area includes relatively affluent inner suburbs, which combine easy access to the city centre with suburban characteristics like larger properties, houses instead of apartments, and quieter streets. Migrants and Irish-born residents are equally likely to live 10km or more from the city centre. This area contains outer suburbs, where new large-scale developments are more likely to be built. While the urban area charts above, such as Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6 highlight variation in migrant proportion between types of urban places, Figure 2.8 shows clear patterns within specific urban settlements as well. These differences have relevant implications for integration patterns. Migrants living in the city centre will face different challenges and opportunities compared to migrants living in the outer suburbs.

Figure 2.8: Distribution of foreign-born and Irish-born residents by distance from Dublin City Centre, 2022



Source: Authors’ own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

2.2.4 IPAS accommodation

Ireland has recently seen a historic rise in the number of applications for international protection (IP). IP applications previously spiked in 2002, at around 12,000 applications that year. From 2003, applications fell and for most of the period 2004–2021, applications were at or below 4,000 per year (McGinnity et al., 2025). In 2021, the number of first-time IP applications per thousand people in Ireland was slightly below the EU-27 average (Eurostat, 2024). From 2022, applications have risen rapidly. In 2024, applications were above 18,000 (McGinnity et al., 2025) and Ireland ranked fourth out of 31 European countries for first-time asylum applications per thousand people (Eurostat, 2024). The number of first-time asylum applications per thousand people was 0.52 in Ireland in 2021, rising to 3.45 in 2024. In the EU-27, this figure rose from 1.41 to 2.03 over the same time period.

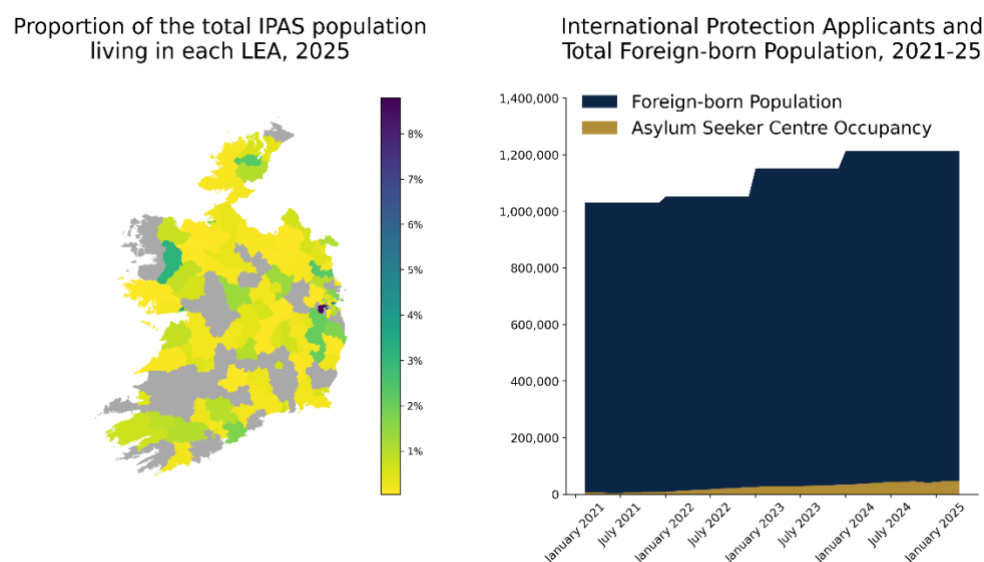
The Irish state is legally obligated to provide asylum applicants with basic needs, including accommodation, after opting into the EU Reception Conditions Directive (EMN, 2024). While asylum seekers do not have to live in state-provided accommodation, many do until they have legal status. This accommodation is provided by the International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS). This means that the distribution of asylum seekers throughout Ireland is largely the result of government policy instead of structural economic or social processes. Therefore, we discuss it separately from the general population of migrants in the Census. We use data from the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration which provides the location and occupancy of IPAS centres throughout Ireland on a weekly basis from 2021 to 2024. As noted at the start of this chapter, some residents in IPAS accommodation may have already been granted legal status to remain in the country (including refugee or subsidiary protection status), and others may have been denied legal status but not yet left the country. In January 2025, around 30,000 people were living in IPAS centres.

The map on the left of [Figure 2.9](#) shows the proportion of the total IPAS population living in each LEA. Compared to the general migrant population, IPAS residents are highly clustered in specific areas. Around a quarter of all IPAS residents live in just four LEAs: Clondalkin, Tallaght Central, North Inner City (Co. Dublin) and Galway City Central. Outside of cities, high proportions of IPAS residents live in a few rural towns, such as Castlebar (Co. Mayo) and Letterkenny (Co. Donegal) on the west coast and Laytown–Bettystown (Co. Meath) and Naas (Co.

Kildare) in the Greater Dublin Area. The rest of the IPAS population are spread across a wide geographic area, with many in the Connacht–Ulster area and across the Midlands, although many LEAs have no IPAS residents.

The chart on the right of [Figure 2.9](#) presents the recent trend in the migrant population, distinguishing between those in IPAS accommodation and all other migrants. Although the recent increase in IPAS residents is substantial relative to its previous level, they remain a very small proportion of the overall population of migrants in Ireland (around 2%). Additionally, the recent rise in the absolute number of migrants in Ireland is also mostly driven by migrants outside the IPAS system. One important caveat to this analysis is that it does not consider Ukrainian migrants to Ireland who arrived in Ireland after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For the most part, this group do not live in IPAS centres, as they are protected under the Temporary Protection Directive and accommodated through a separate system.

Figure 2.9: Trends in international protection applicants (2021–2025)



Source: Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (DoJ)/IPAS.

2.3 Area-level characteristics

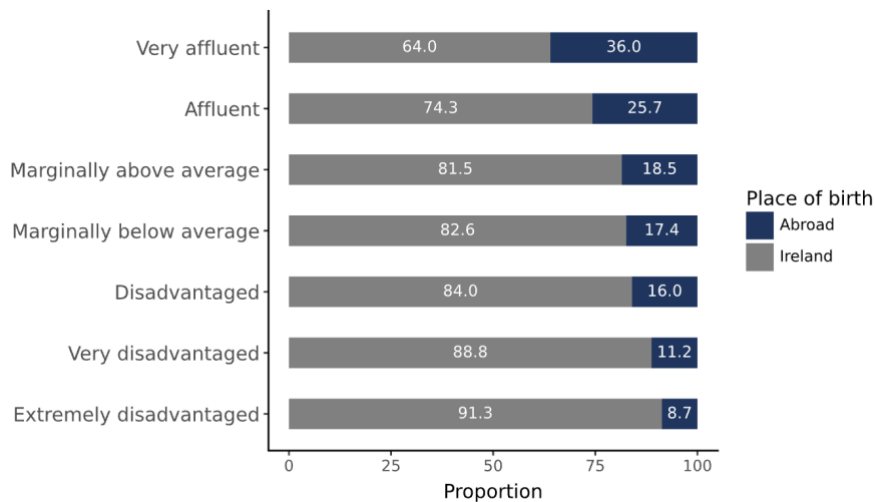
We now turn to the characteristics of the areas that migrants live in. We first use Census data to present the relationship between migrant proportion and area characteristics at the SA level. We then break this down by country-of-birth group, showing how these relationships differ across the 15 most populous groups in Ireland in 2022. Second, we use data on the location of IPAS centres to analyse the relationship between area disadvantage and whether an area has an IPAS centre.

2.3.1 Foreign-born population

First, we assess the correlation between these variables and the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. For our analysis, we use the relative value of the index based on a scale that varies from -50 to 50 with lower values denoting lower affluence and higher disadvantage.

We find a significant and positive association between migrant proportion and the Deprivation Index ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), meaning that a higher share of migrants in the small area is associated with higher affluence and lower deprivation. The index can also be grouped into seven different levels of deprivation. [Figure 2.10](#) shows the proportion of foreign-born living in small areas according to this classification. In small areas classified as very affluent in 2022 ($n = 185$), about 36 per cent of the population was born abroad. Conversely, in areas considered very disadvantaged ($n = 618$), only about 11 per cent were foreign-born.

Figure 2.10: Proportion of the population born outside Ireland by deprivation type of Electoral Division, Ireland, 2022



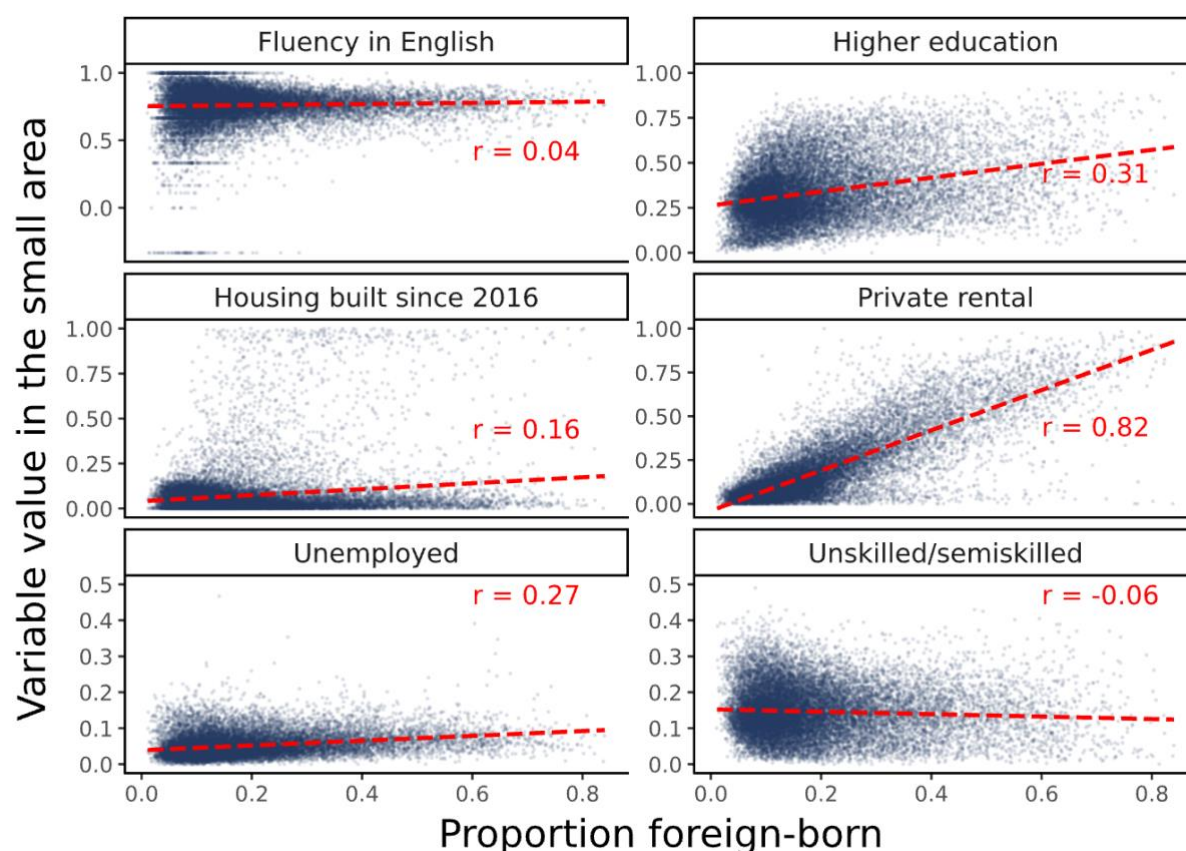
Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

In addition to social deprivation, we also examine the association between migrant-related variables and specific area-level characteristics. We use bivariate correlations to evaluate the magnitude of these associations at the level of the Small Area. We look at the following area characteristics, as outlined in section 1.2.1:

- Proportion of the population that are **unemployed**
- The average **English language fluency** score of an area
- The share of the housing stock that is **rented from private landlords**
- The share of the residential properties that were **built after the year 2016**
- Proportion of the population that have completed **tertiary education**
- Proportion of the population that are living in a household headed by an **unskilled** or **semiskilled** worker

Figure 2.11 presents the coefficients expressing the strength of association between area characteristics and the proportion of foreign-born residents, at the Small Area level. In this analysis, all variables have a positive and significant coefficient, except for the proportion of households headed by an unskilled/semiskilled worker, which has a negative association with the proportion of foreign-born. The proportion of households in the private rental sector shows the strongest level of association with migrant share. This is in line with previous studies of the spatial distribution of migration in Ireland (Fahey et al., 2019; Fahey and Fanning, 2010; Vang, 2010). Migrants are much more exposed to the private rental sector, as they may not be committed to staying in Ireland long term, are less likely to be eligible for or to obtain social housing, and are less likely to have the resources to buy a house (McGinnity et al., 2025).

Figure 2.11: Correlation between proportion of foreign-born and characteristics of the Small Area, Ireland, 2022



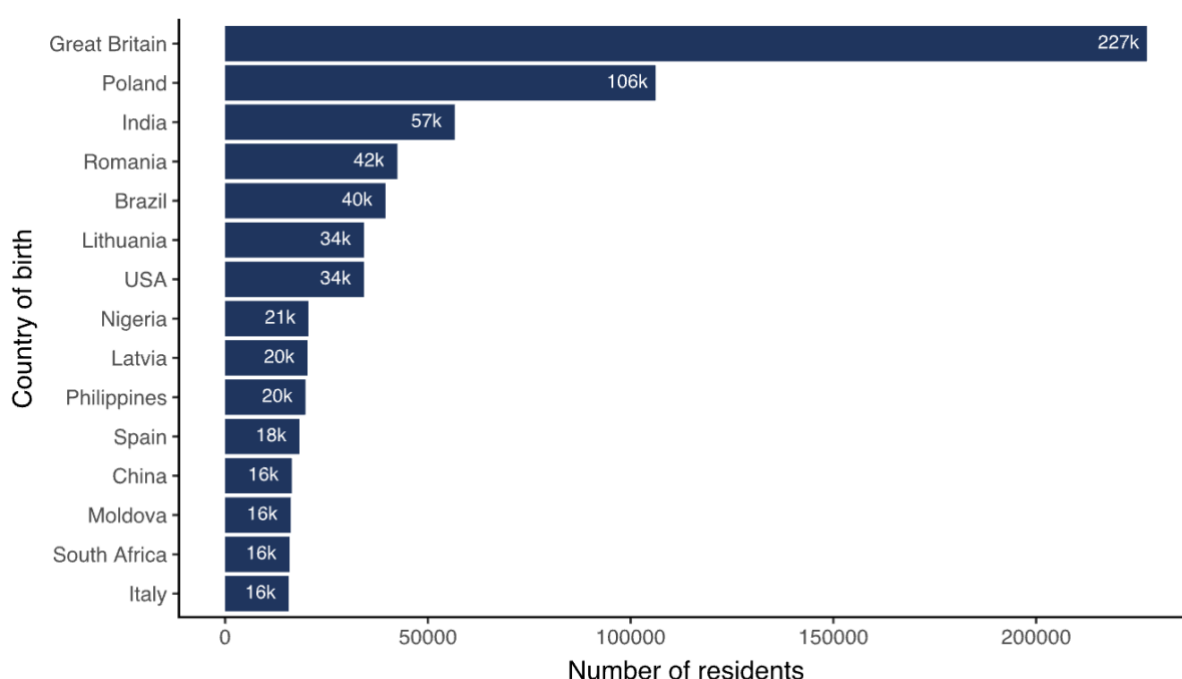
Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

Another relatively strong association is with the proportion of the population who has completed tertiary level education. Regarding the correlation with unemployment, we know from representative survey data that migrants are more likely unemployed than the Irish-born population. Of course, migrants are also more likely to be in employment than the Irish-born population. Unemployment is defined as all those looking for a job as a proportion of everyone who is either in a job or looking for a job. Migrants who are not in a job are more likely to be looking for a job than the Irish-born population, as they are less likely to be in other non-employed categories such as retired, in a caring role, or disabled such that they cannot work (Devlin et al., 2025). Migrants are therefore more likely to live in areas where more people are economically active; this may be driven both by the presence of migrants themselves, and by structural factors affecting the entire population of an area. However, it is not possible to establish with census data which factor is driving this correlation.

The positive association with new housing implies that migrants are more likely to live in newly built neighbourhoods. This aligns with our earlier observations about the concentration of some migrant groups in commuter towns and the suburbs of Dublin.

However, these associations at the Small Area level are related to the number of a heterogeneous group of migrants. As shown in Figure 2.12, the distribution of migrants by country of birth indicates that specific groups are much larger compared to others and their spatial distribution may have different dynamics.

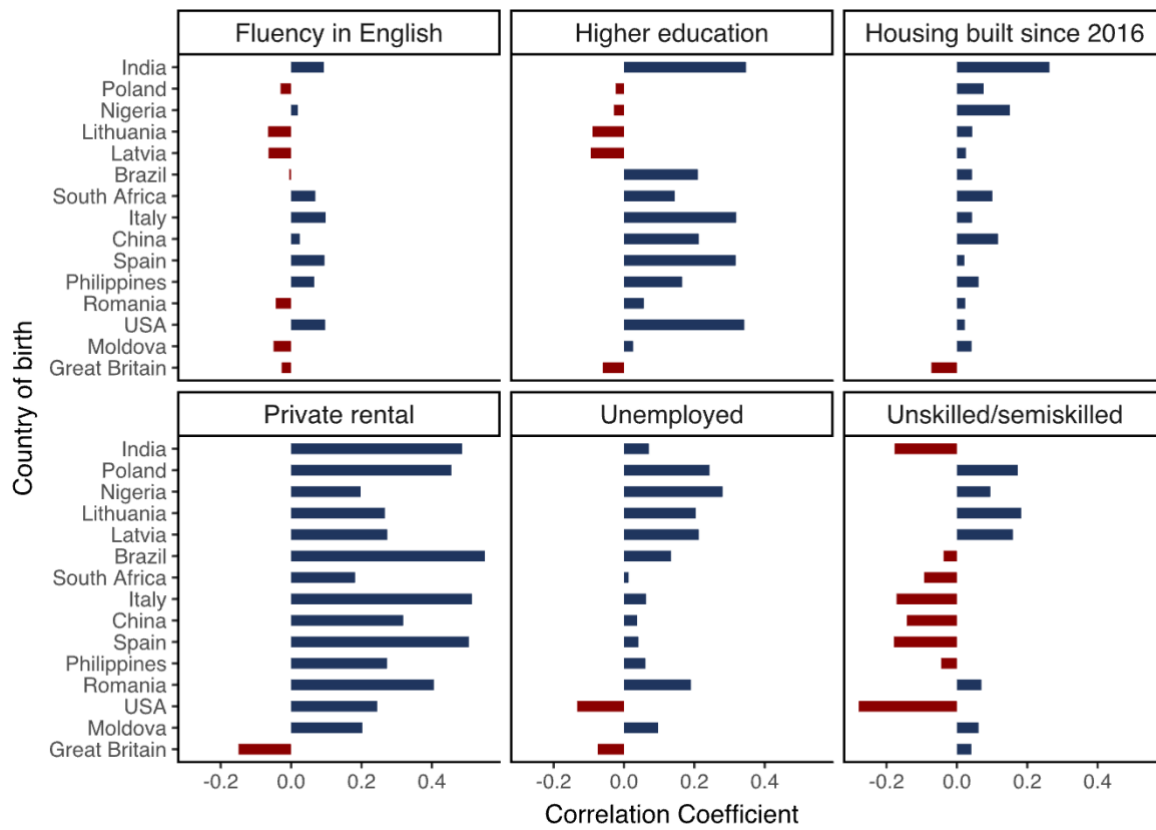
Figure 2.12: Total number of residents by country of birth, 15 largest groups, 2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

To examine this heterogeneity, [Figure 2.13](#) presents the association between number of migrants and local level characteristics for each country of birth. We focus here on the 15 largest foreign-country-of-birth groups in the state. While the direction of and strength of the correlation is generally similar across these countries, there are some notable exceptions. For instance, contrary to all other groups, a higher proportion of those born in Great Britain is associated with a lower proportion of households in the private rental sector. The correlation between unemployment rate and migrant share is negative for those born in Great Britain and the US, but is significantly positive for the proportion of those born in all other selected countries.

Figure 2.13: Correlation between proportion of foreign-born by country and characteristics of the Small Area, Ireland, 2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

Fluency in English is an important variable for understanding integration challenges. We found significantly negative coefficients for individuals born in Moldova, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. This indicates that these groups are more likely to live in Small Areas with lower average English fluency scores. While this may be helpful if others in the area speak their native language, it also suggests that there is some degree of language-based segregation in Ireland, a finding also observed by Fahey et al. (2019) using Census 2016 data. We discuss segregation in greater detail in the next chapter.

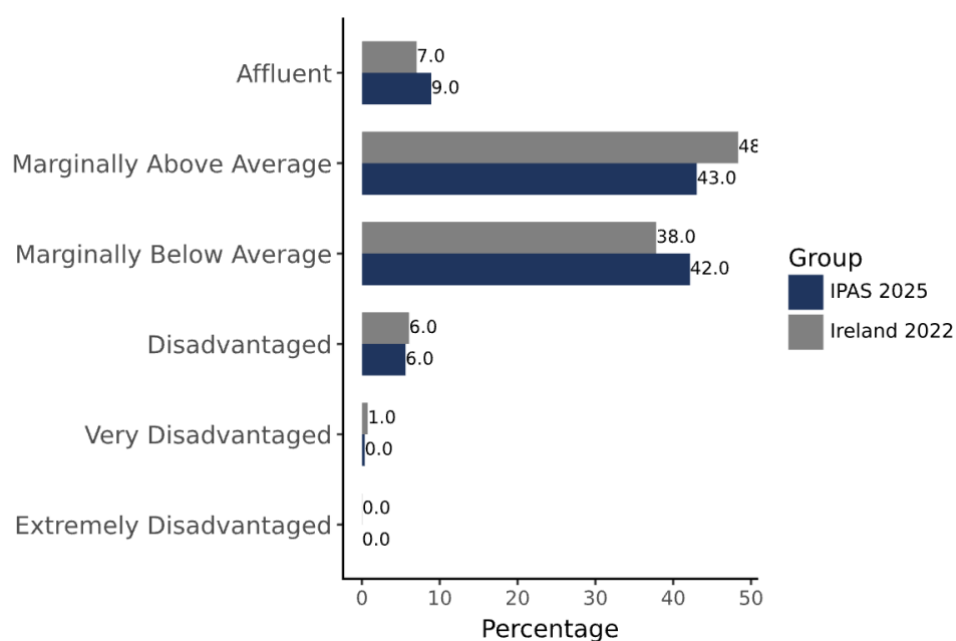
It is worth emphasising that this analysis allows us to measure the magnitude of these relationships in conjunction, but they are still measurements of association at the aggregate level. Based on these data aggregated at the Small Area, it is not possible to gather any evidence of association at the individual level or the existence or direction of causality.

2.3.2 IPAS residents

To examine area characteristics of the distribution of IPAS residents, we use the Electoral Division (ED) level, instead of the Small Area level. This is because IPAS centres are sometimes large relative to the typical population of a Small Area (around 200 residents), and therefore may represent a high proportion of the residents in the Small Areas in which they are located. Analysing relationships at the ED level allows us to better understand the local context and neighbourhood characteristics we are interested in.

Figure 2.14 presents the distribution of the Irish-born and IPAS population across EDs of various disadvantage levels. Overall, the distribution of both groups is very similar. We also find no statistically significant difference in the numeric value of the index between EDs that have an IPAS centre and EDs that do not have an IPAS centre.

Figure 2.14: Distribution of IPAS centres and Irish-born population by type of Electoral Division, 2022/2025



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics and DoJ.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has examined the size of the foreign-born population in Ireland, the change between 2016 and 2022, as well as the patterns of distribution of this population across small areas. Overall, the proportion of people born abroad is highest in major urban areas like Dublin, Cork and Galway, and this trend shows a notable increase between 2016 and 2022 across most localities. We find some regional disparities, such as a much lower proportion of migrants in Northern Ireland. However, the most important pattern is the divide between urban and rural areas, with foreign-born residents significantly more likely to live in urban areas than Irish-born residents.

This analysis also identified different patterns of residential distribution by country of birth, with migrants from Western Europe, China, India and other high-education groups more concentrated in major cities, a pattern likely linked to the concentration of professional jobs, higher incomes and the ability to afford accommodation in large cities. On the other hand, certain groups, such as those born in Great Britain and Northern Ireland are more concentrated in rural areas.

These findings suggest that migration patterns are not random, they are associated with factors such as migrant networks, professional opportunities, language skills and housing.

Finally, this chapter also examined characteristics of areas in Ireland where migrants reside. Findings indicate that areas with a higher share of foreign-born residents tend to be associated with higher affluence and lower social deprivation. The strongest association was related to rental housing. Migrants are much more likely to live in areas with a high proportion of housing rented from private landlords. Other variables found to be positively associated with higher migrant share include the proportion of new accommodation built since 2016 and the rate of tertiary education.

While this analysis measures associations and cannot provide insights on causality, it provides relevant insights on how various factors, such as deprivation, housing, and educational attainment are related to the geographical distribution of migrants in Ireland. In the next chapter, we focus on this spatial dynamic in more detail, analysing migrant segregation.

Chapter 3

Spatial segregation

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on measures of migrant residential segregation across Ireland. Drawing from the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, we conceptualise residential segregation as fundamental for enabling or hindering the formation of social bonds and bridges. For instance, segregation may pose challenges to the formation of key social bridges if migrant groups with low resources are concentrated together, or if migrant groups are concentrated in areas with poor education or employment opportunities. On the other hand, strong pre-existing migrant communities can help new or vulnerable migrants settle, with networks providing access to accommodation, work and a familiar cultural context (Ager and Strang, 2008). Certain patterns of segregation can therefore enable the formation of strong social bonds. Group clustering can also allow migrants to establish ethnic infrastructure (e.g. shops, restaurants, religious spaces) that can support their integration and give insight into the communities and culture among the host population (Ager and Strang, 2008). Segregation is therefore neither inherently good nor bad – its impact on integration depends on the context in which it occurs.

3.2 Methods

To assess these relationships, we look at the relationship between segregation and the area-level variables introduced in Chapter 2 (unemployment, English language fluency, private rental housing, housing built after 2016, third-level education, people working in unskilled or semiskilled jobs, and the Pobal HP Deprivation Index). This allows us to better understand the context of segregation in Ireland, allowing us to draw preliminary findings around how segregation impacts the integration of migrants in Ireland.

To measure segregation, we use the dissimilarity index. We explain this in further detail below. An online appendix of this report includes an interactive feature which helps to visualise how these segregation

measures work¹³. While our analysis provides valuable insights into segregation, we cannot offer conclusive findings regarding these processes. Future research on this topic should focus either on qualitative research with migrants, or on causal quantitative analysis of outcomes at the local level.

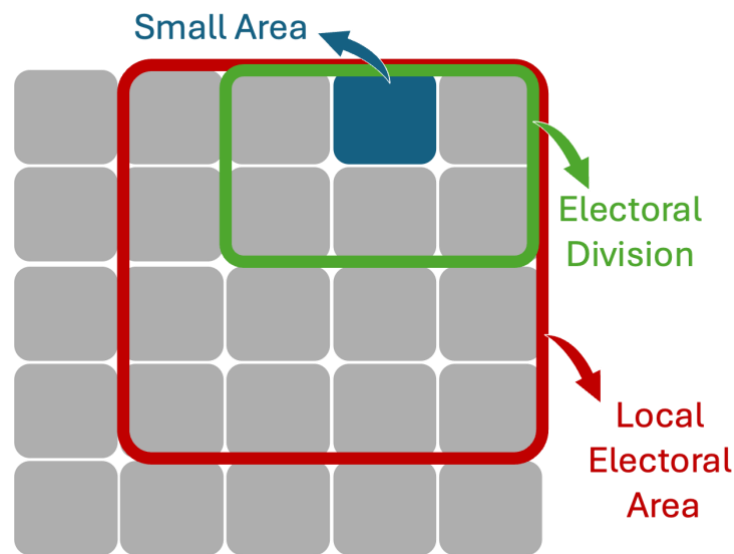
3.2.1 Dissimilarity index

Social researchers have developed several methods to measure spatial segregation (Yao et al., 2019), each with distinctive advantages and limitations. Among these, the dissimilarity index (Duncan and Duncan, 1955) is one of the most commonly used. It is both simple to calculate and to interpret (Piekut et al., 2019). In this section, we use the dissimilarity index to evaluate the extent to which migrants are clustered or spread across different areas. The dissimilarity index is calculated using data on how many migrants and Irish-born residents live in each Small Area (SA) within a Local Electoral Area (LEA) (see [Figure 3.1](#) for a visual depiction of these geographical units). The value of the dissimilarity index represents the proportion of the migrant population that would need to move to a different Small Area in order for the migrant and Irish-born groups to have the same spatial distribution across the LEA. For example, if the dissimilarity index for migrants in Maynooth is equal to 30, this means that 30 per cent of migrants in Maynooth would need to move to a different Small Area to match the spatial distribution of Irish-born residents. Therefore, higher values denote a higher segregation, and values closer to zero indicate lower segregation, i.e. a residential distribution similar to the distribution of the Irish-born population.

We chose to measure segregation at the LEA level because it represents a middle-ground between Electoral Districts (EDs), which are quite small, and other, larger boundaries available from the CSO such as counties. Segregation scores within EDs would likely have very high variance, because they are relatively few SAs per ED, and EDs also vary far more in population than LEAs or SAs (see Table 2.1 for median and range of population in each boundary). Levels higher than LEAs, such as counties would not capture the neighbourhood level variation we are interested in, and would instead capture variation at the regional level.

¹³ The online appendix can be accessed on the ESRI website, <https://www.esri.ie/publications/spatial-distribution-and-local-integration-of-migrants-in-Ireland>.

Figure 3.1: Diagram of geographical units used in the study



Source: Authors' own work.

In this report, we calculate the dissimilarity index at the LEA level, based on the distribution of populations across Small Areas. The examination of smaller units is more suitable for capturing segregation patterns at the community level (Fossett, 2017; Allen et al., 2015; Logan and Parman, 2025). However, the traditional method of calculating the dissimilarity index may overestimate segregation for smaller geographical units and for smaller minority populations. Therefore, we use a refined measure proposed by Allen et al. (2015): the density-corrected dissimilarity index. This measure accounts for population density and random allocation. In other words, this correction minimises the inflation of the index for LEAs that have low population densities or very small numbers of migrants.

For this reason, the values reported here for specific groups are not comparable to the values reported by Fahey et al. (2019), which used 2016 data and calculated segregation at the Electoral District level. In addition, when we calculate the dissimilarity index for all migrants (rather than specific country-of-birth groups), we use a multi-group index of dissimilarity (Reardon and Firebaugh, 2002) designed to assess the evenness of residential distribution across multiple groups simultaneously (instead of binary comparisons between all migrants combined and the Irish-born population).

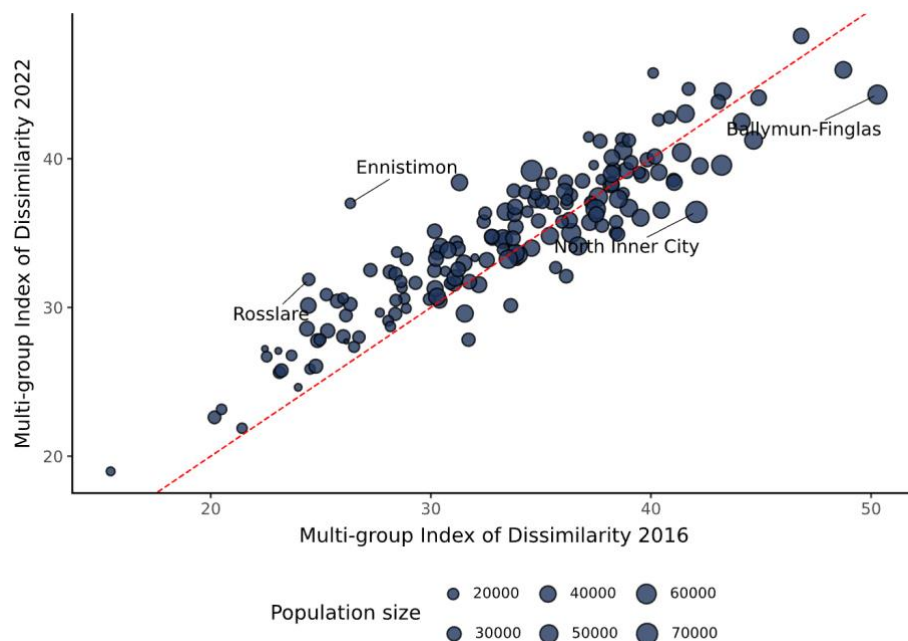
The most important reason to prefer the multi-group measure is to avoid aggregation bias. If every migrant group is concentrated in a

different neighbourhood, combining them into a ‘foreign-born’ single category would make these concentrations cancel each other out. For instance, consider a hypothetical scenario in which all Polish-born reside in Small Area A, all Chinese-born reside in Small Area B, all Indian-born reside in C, and all those born in Ireland are spread across A, B and C. Each migrant group may be highly segregated, but the combined foreign-born population may appear relatively evenly distributed. In this scenario, the grouped dissimilarity index would be low whereas the multi-group dissimilarity index would be high, identifying segregation patterns relevant to this study. In fact, based on the Census 2022 data, the mean value of the multi-group index of dissimilarity from each LEA was 34, whereas if we aggregate all migrant groups, the mean value of the single-group index of dissimilarity was 24.

3.3 Change over time

Comparing the Census in 2016 with 2022, the mean value of the index of dissimilarity across all LEAs remained similar, with a slight increase from 33 to 34. Although there is no overall agreement on thresholds for the index of dissimilarity, some studies suggest that values below 30 are indicative of low segregation and that values over 60 are indicative of high segregation (Massey and Tannen, 2016; Iceland et al., 2014). In Figure 3.2, we contrast each LEA’s index of dissimilarity between 2016 and 2022. LEAs which are higher on the plot have higher segregation scores in 2022; LEAs farther to the right of the plot have higher segregation scores in 2016. Therefore, LEAs which lie above the 45° diagonal line saw an increase in segregation from 2016 to 2022, and LEAs which lie below the line saw a decrease. There was an overall increase in the index of dissimilarity between 2016 and 2022, with most LEAs lying above the diagonal. The highest increases were observed in Ennistymon (Co. Clare, from 26 to 37) and Rosslare (Co. Wexford, from 24 to 32). On the other hand, significant decreases were observed in LEAs such as Ballymun–Finglas (Co. Dublin, from 50 to 44), North Inner City (Dublin City, from 42 to 36) and Galway City East (Co. Galway, from 36 to 32).

Figure 3.2: Index of dissimilarity across Local Electoral Areas in Ireland, all countries of birth, 2016–2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

3.4 Country of origin

We now turn our attention to individual country-of-birth groups. There is an important advantage to studying relationships at the country-of-birth level instead of more frequently used aggregated groups, such as EU-West or North America, Australia and Oceania.

Chain migration and any related segregation are likely to be structured around nationality groups, rather than arbitrary aggregated groups. Also, migrant communities which could support integration are also more likely to be structured around national groups. For this reason, when discussing differences within the migrant population, we focus on the top country-of-birth groups by population size in 2022. We also move away from analysing the increase in segregation between 2016 and 2022, and instead simply focus on the dissimilarity index in 2022. This is for two main reasons: first, the top 15 countries by population size changed over that period, and second, unobservable changes in the composition of each country-of-birth group would likely influence differences in the results between countries (for instance, from our data, we cannot know if 'turnover' in the Spanish population was a lot higher than turnover in the Polish population, but if it were, this would likely drive differences in results between countries).

Finally, it is important to note that some country-of-birth groups have few observations in some LEAs. As mentioned previously, we use the density-corrected dissimilarity index to address the upward bias that can occur when the number of observations of the minority group is small. However, the values by country-of-birth group should be interpreted with caution as estimates may still be unstable and more sensitive to small population sizes in some LEAs.

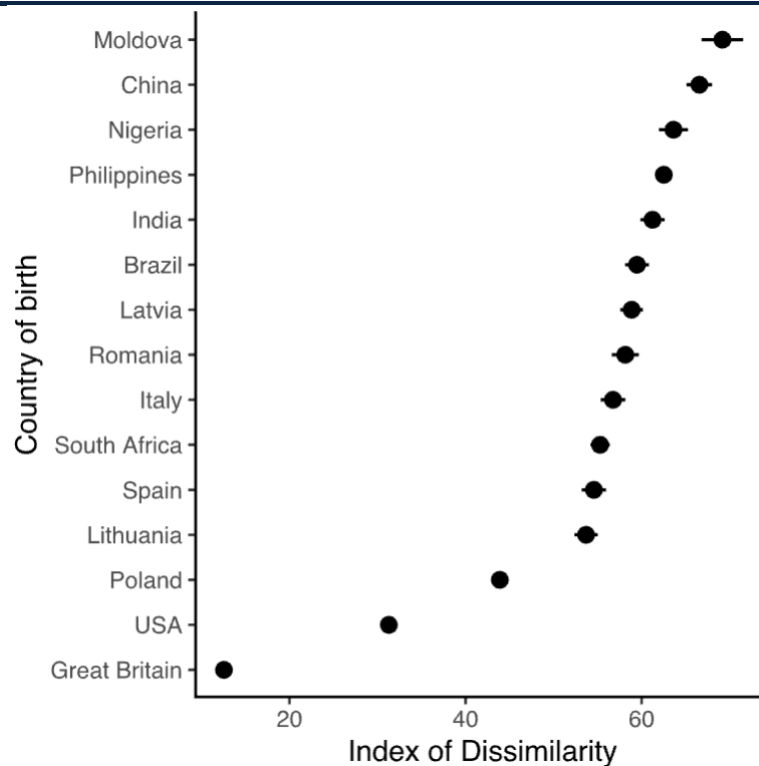
Figure 3.3 shows the mean value of the dissimilarity index and respective 95 per cent confidence interval across all LEAs by country of birth. There is a substantial variation in levels of segregation depending on the country of origin. The lowest average level of segregation is found among those born in Great Britain (12.6). This means that their residential distribution is similar to that of residents born on the island of Ireland.

The second-lowest index of dissimilarity is found in the group born in the US (31.3). Similar to those born in Great Britain, this group is also composed of many residents who were born abroad to Irish parents, which can explain the largely similar residential pattern compared to those born in Ireland.

The third-lowest level of segregation is found among those born in Poland (43.9), followed by those born in Lithuania (53.7). As discussed in Chapter 2, Ireland received a substantial migrant influx from both of these countries since EU enlargement in the early 2000s.

Finally, in addition to Moldova, which shows the highest average index of dissimilarity (69.2), substantial levels of segregations are found particularly among non-European countries such as China, Nigeria, Philippines, India and Brazil.

Figure 3.3: Average index of dissimilarity across Local Electoral Areas by countries of birth, 2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

3.5 Area-level characteristics

We now turn to the analysis of the relationship between area-level characteristics and segregation. Our framework for relating these variables to insights about integration is outlined in section 2.3. First, we consider employment and English language fluency, which are key enablers of integration – we call these ‘integration resources’. We then consider two housing variables: the proportion of households in the private rental sector and the proportion of recently built dwellings. These variables are foundational for understanding residential distribution. Rental and recently built housing is more accessible to migrants, so we expect its location to strongly influence migrant proportion and segregation. Finally, we consider three variables which capture the socio-economic status of an area: the Deprivation Index, unskilled/semiskilled labour and tertiary education.

Below, we present two different kinds of statistics. First, we present the correlation between migrant segregation score and the variable, at LEA level. Then we consider individual countries of birth, presenting the correlation between the variable and the segregation score for the local Spanish, Indian or British population, again at LEA level. We do so for the 15 most populous countries in our dataset. It is crucial to note

that the reference population differs between these two statistics. The overall segregation score compares the distribution of all foreign-born residents to the reference population of all Irish-born residents. However, the country-of-birth group segregation scores compare all members of that country-of-birth group to all non-members, including other migrants, e.g. Spaniards compared to all non-Spaniards. This means our findings for individual countries can differ substantially from the overall segregation score, which calculates the dissimilarity index for all foreign-born residents as compared to Irish-born residents.

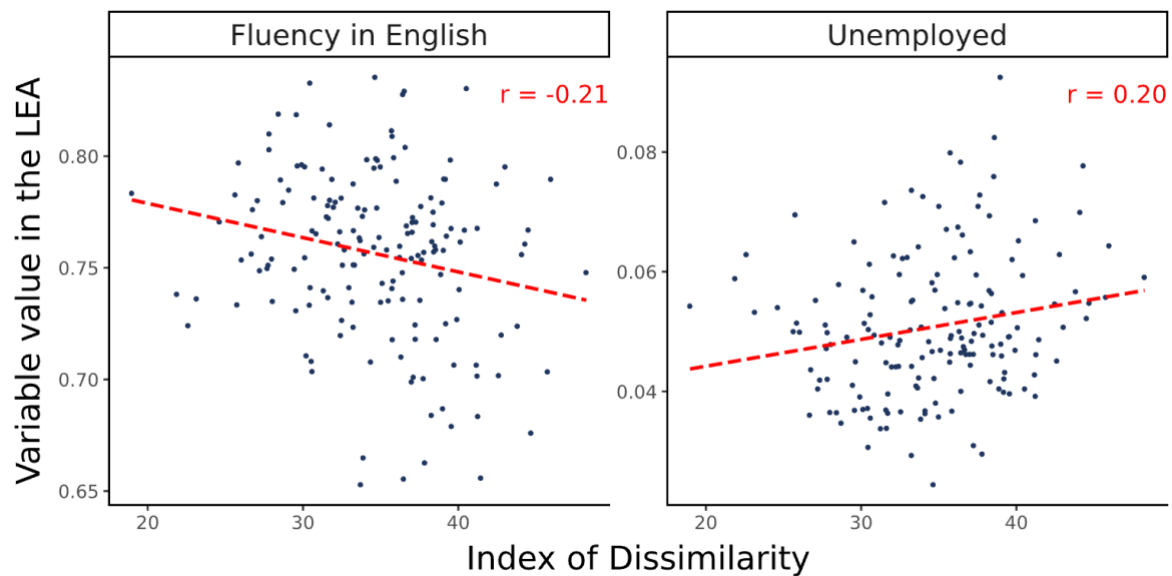
It is also worth noting that a group having a high segregation score in a given LEA does not indicate that more of that group live in that LEA. Instead, segregation scores are calculated at the LEA level, so it simply means that the members of that group who do live in that LEA have a substantially different distribution across the SAs of that LEA compared to the reference population (i.e. they are highly segregated within their LEA). For instance, if Spaniards have high segregation scores in Artane–Whitehall, we know that the Spaniards who live in this LEA are more concentrated in a small number of SAs than the non-Spanish population in Artane–Whitehall.

3.5.1 Integration resources

Overall, as shown in Figure 3.4, there is a positive correlation between unemployment and migrant segregation in Ireland. This means that migrant segregation is higher in LEAs where unemployment is higher; in other words, foreign-born and Irish-born residents are distributed more unevenly within LEAs that have higher unemployment.

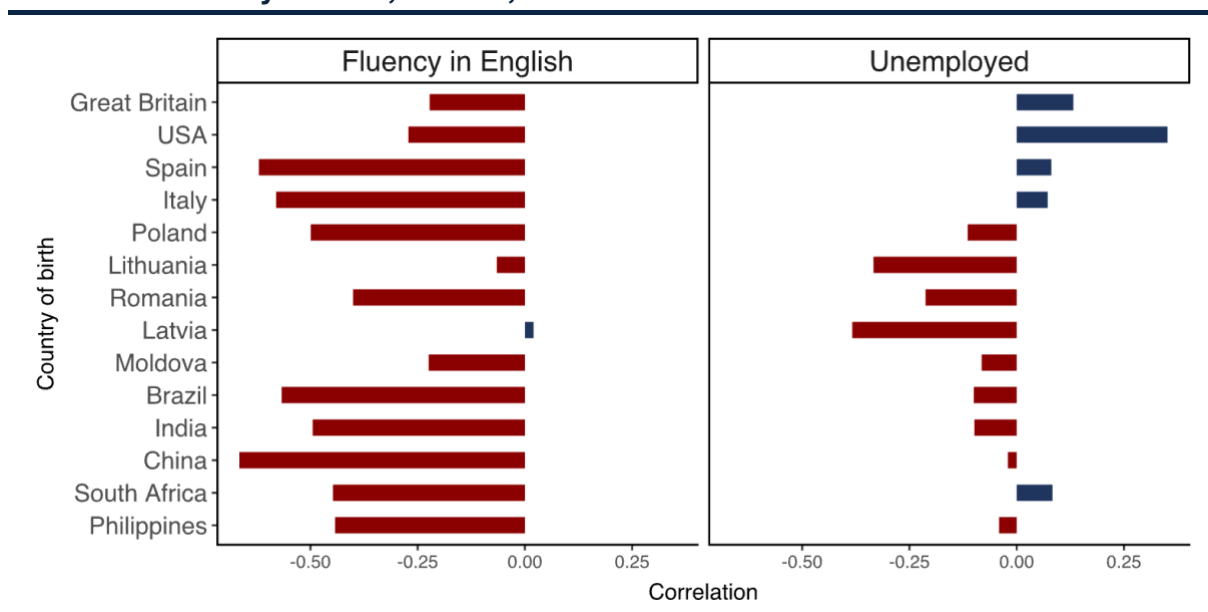
Area-level English fluency has a negative correlation with the dissimilarity index overall, indicating that LEAs with lower English fluency have higher segregation.

Figure 3.4: Correlation between index of dissimilarity and local resources by LEA, Ireland, 2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

When we consider the relationship at the level of individual country-of-birth groups (Figure 3.5), we find a more mixed picture for both variables. In relation to unemployment rates, those born in the US, Great Britain, South Africa, Spain and Italy are more segregated in LEAs with higher unemployment. Other country-of-birth groups are more likely to have high segregation scores in LEAs where unemployment is lower, particularly those born in Lithuania, Latvia or Romania. In general, however, the strength of correlation with this variable is relatively low when compared with other country-of-birth-level associations presented in this section.

Figure 3.5: Correlation between index of dissimilarity and local resources by country of birth, Ireland, 2022

Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

We also find that for almost all groups there is a negative relationship between segregation and English fluency, indicating that members of the group living in LEAs with low English fluency are more segregated.

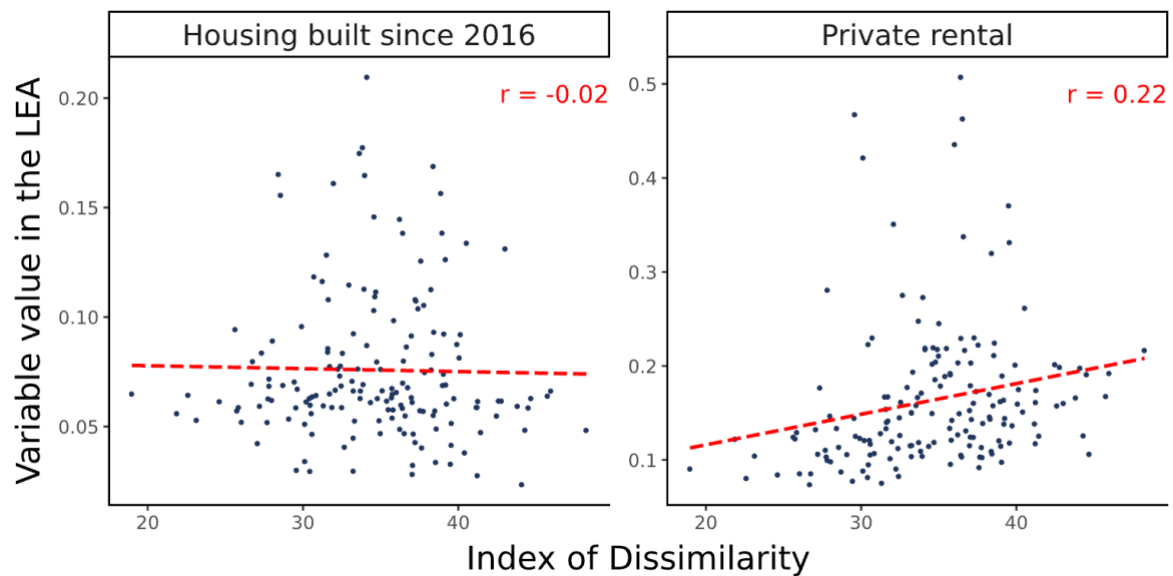
3.5.2 Housing

We now consider the relationship between segregation and two housing variables: the proportion of newly built housing in an LEA and the proportion of rented housing in an LEA. These variables were chosen because they relate to the accessibility of housing for migrants. Migrants are far more likely to rely on private rental accommodation than Irish residents, and newly built housing by definition must either have been made available for purchase or letting recently.

Figure 3.6 shows that migrant segregation is higher in LEAs with more private rental housing.

Figure 3.6 also shows that there is no substantial correlation between segregation and the proportion of newly built housing in an LEA. This runs counter to our expectation that newly built housing would act as a similarly to private rental housing as an indicator of housing availability. However, there is much less variation in this variable compared to private rental proportion.

Figure 3.6: Correlation between index of dissimilarity and housing by LEA, Ireland, 2022



Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

We find substantially different results when we analyse these relationships for country-of-birth groups, however. We find that most groups have strong negative relationships between segregation and private rental housing. While this may appear contradictory, it is important to note that these two statistics use different reference groups. As we note above, overall migrant segregation compares the distribution of all groups of migrants to all non-migrants, whereas the segregation score for a country-of-birth group compares the distribution of group members to all non-members, including other migrants, e.g. Indians compared to all non-Indians.

Figure 3.7 shows that the countries with the strongest negative correlations between segregation and private rentals are Brazil and India, while Great Britain is the only country-of-birth group with a positive correlation. The strength of correlation is relatively weak, though, suggesting that private rental accommodation does not have a large influence on their spatial distribution. All other groups in Figure 3.7 have higher segregation in areas with a lower proportion of rentals. In this case, the higher segregation might be a result of reliance on country-of-origin social networks. There is extensive evidence on how migrants rely on social networks for information sharing and direct assistance to find accommodation (Ryan, 2024) generating higher segregation of specific ethnic groups (Skifter Andersen, 2015) including through overcrowding (Coulter, 2025). This would lead specific

country-of-birth groups to be segregated compared to the rest of the LEA population, even when overall migrant segregation is low.

Figure 3.7: Correlation between index of dissimilarity and housing by country, Ireland, 2022



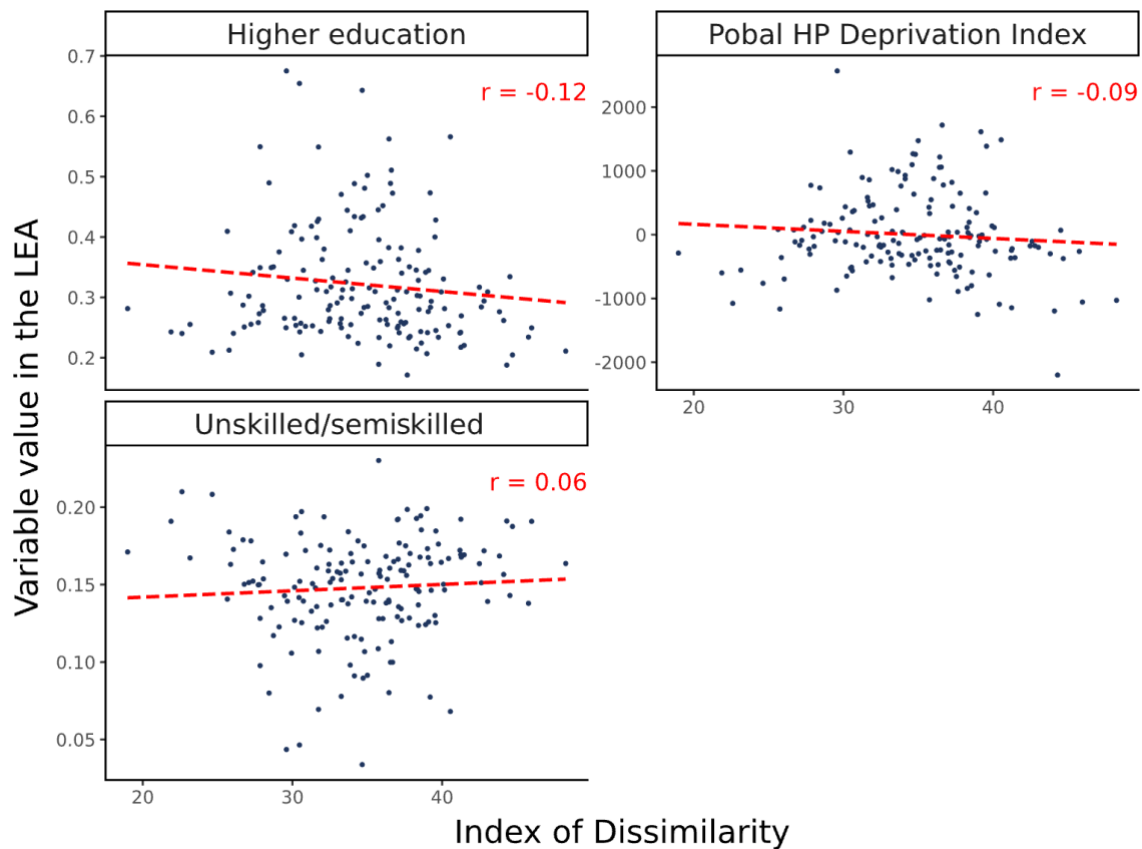
Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

Almost all groups have lower segregation in LEAs with more new builds, except for Great Britain. The groups with the strongest negative correlations are a mix of non-EU (South Africa, China), Western EU (Italy) and Central and Eastern EU states (Lithuania, Romania).

3.5.3 Socio-economic status

Figure 3.8 presents the relationship between migrant segregation and three variables relating to area-level socio-economic status: unskilled/semiskilled labour, tertiary education, and deprivation. There is a slight negative relationship between segregation and tertiary education, indicating higher segregation in areas with lower tertiary education and vice versa. However, there is no correlation between segregation and the other two variables.

Figure 3.8: Correlation between index of dissimilarity and socio-economic status by LEA, Ireland, 2022

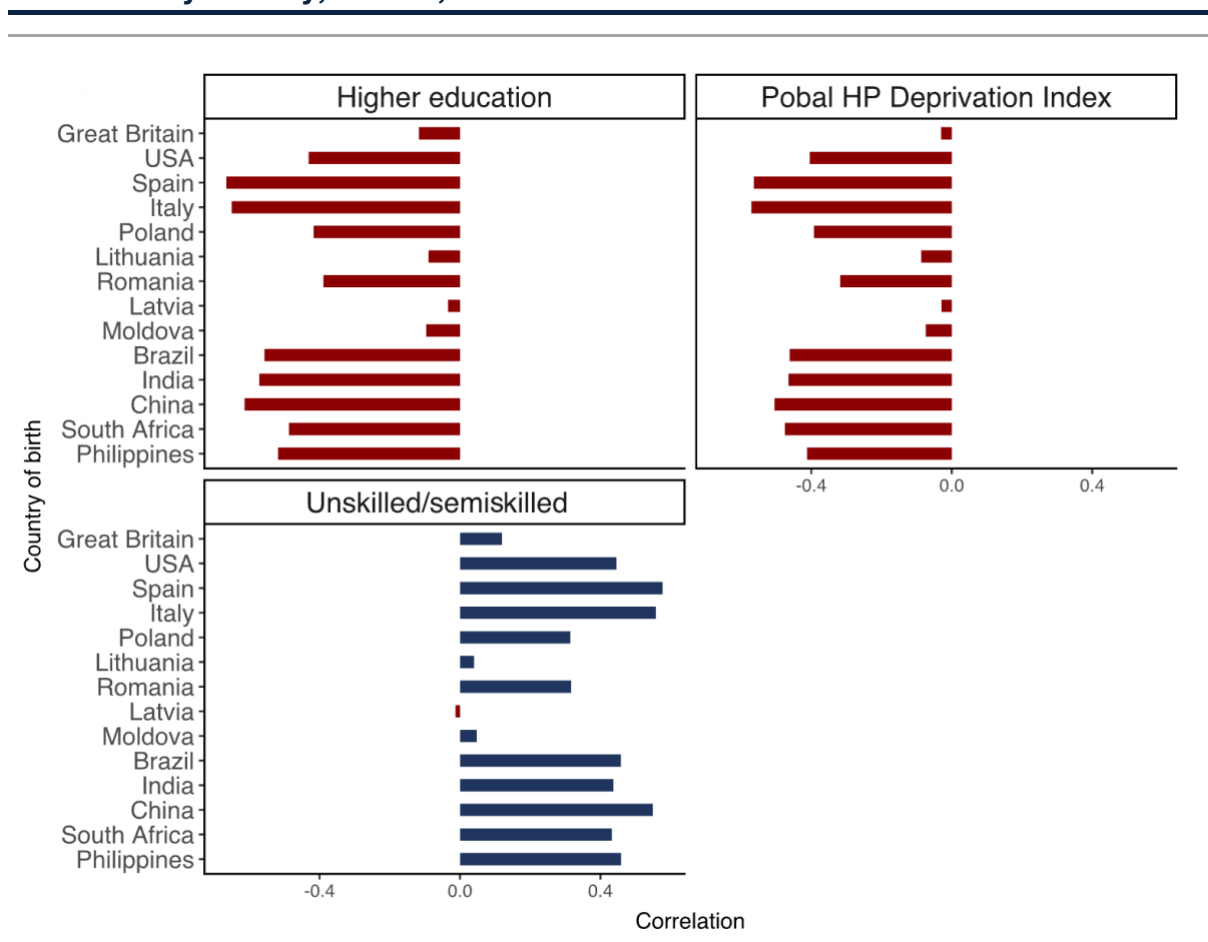


Source: Authors' own analysis using data from the CSO Small Area Population Statistics.

Figure 3.9 shows that there are some strong correlations between country-of-birth group segregation and these variables, however. The results are relatively consistent across each variable: despite weak or no correlations between overall migrant segregation and socio-economic status, country-of-birth group segregation is generally higher in areas of low socio-economic status. Most migrant groups are more segregated in areas with high levels of unskilled or semiskilled labour, low tertiary education, and more deprivation.¹⁴ Across all three variables, this relationship is particularly strong for those born in Spain, Italy, Brazil, India and China.

¹⁴ Note that higher values of the Pobal HP Deprivation Index indicate greater affluence, and lower values indicate greater deprivation.

Figure 3.9: Correlation between index of dissimilarity and socio-economic status by country, Ireland, 2022



3.6 Summary

In this chapter, we used the dissimilarity index to study the spatial distribution of migrants in Ireland. Overall, the level of spatial segregation, as measured by the dissimilarity index, is moderate in Ireland, and did not change substantially between 2016 to 2022. Focusing on country-of-birth groups, we find the highest levels of segregation among those born in non-EU countries, and the lowest among migrants from Great Britain and the US.

We then analyse how segregation relates to key area-level characteristics. Segregation is higher in LEAs with less English language fluency and in areas with more unemployment. However, the relationship between segregation and unemployment is mixed for individual country-of-birth groups, with some having higher segregation in areas of low unemployment. Segregation is positively correlated with rental housing stock and not correlated at all with new housing stock. However, when we analyse country-of-birth group segregation, we find most groups are more segregated in areas with less private rental

housing and less newly built housing. Finally, we consider area-level socio-economic status of the area, as captured by the amount of unskilled or semiskilled labour, tertiary education, and the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. We find very weak correlations between segregation and these variables. However, at the country-of-birth group level, several groups have quite strong correlations. In general, we find higher segregation in areas with lower socio-economic status, especially for those born in Spain, Italy, Brazil, India and China.

Further research is needed to fully understand these patterns and their implications for migrant integration. However, the high levels of segregation among non-EU migrants, and the strong relationship between migrant segregation and both English fluency and private rental housing are notable.

Chapter 4

Local integration

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we present findings from a number of qualitative interviews carried out with stakeholders working in migrant integration, both in local government and in civil society. We present findings relating to two key research questions. First, how are governance structures in local integration performing, and what changes may be needed to enhance the ability of stakeholders to support integration? Second, what insights can stakeholders provide about migrant integration in Ireland today?

Below, we provide an overview of local integration governance in Ireland, outline previous literature on the topic, and describe the methods used in this analysis. Then, we present our findings in two sections, focusing first on governance and then on integration.

4.2 Methods

Based on early analysis of the quantitative data presented in Chapters 2 and 3, we selected five areas of interest: Dublin, two mainly rural counties in Ulster, and two mainly rural counties in Munster. We used two statistical measures for this task: the change in the proportion of foreign-born residents, and results relating to the index of dissimilarity – a measure of residential segregation. We identified several areas with particularly high increases in the proportion of foreign-born residents, and particularly high levels of residential segregation. We then selected a small number of these areas to focus on. We carried out 1–2 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from these areas. Three of these stakeholders were local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), two were from local authorities (one Local Authority Integration Team (LAIT), one director of services), and one was from a local development company (LDC). We also conducted two interviews with national stakeholders: one with a national NGO, and the other with a national government agency. In total, eight interviews were conducted, covering 11 individuals.

Local interviewees were asked about the migration dynamics and actors in their local areas, co-ordination structures at the local and

local–national level, challenges and good practices. In addition, where there were interesting local dynamics in their area based on the quantitative research (e.g. particularly high proportions of specific country-of-birth groups, high segregation index scores, or large changes in these variables between 2016 and 2022), they were asked for insight into the change and how it affected their work and local integration.

National interviewees were asked about the national framework for local integration, local–national co-ordination structures, challenges, and good practices.

These findings are necessarily limited by the small number of interviews, which do not necessarily represent the experiences of all areas or all stakeholders in these areas. They should be seen as initial exploratory insights on local integration governance from stakeholders working in local areas with particularly interesting or challenging migration dynamics. It is also important to note that while the scope of this research is limited to interviews with stakeholders, a comprehensive picture of local integration governance should also include the perspectives of migrants, including those who are not engaged with stakeholders. As Gilmartin (2023) notes, if we consider integration to be a two-way process, then research on local integration should also seek to ‘better understand how migrants in local areas experience the attitudes and practices of their local authorities, and how this impacts their potential for integration’.

4.3 Governance

4.3.1 Insights into migration dynamics

The qualitative interviews provided some insight into both the drivers behind residential segregation and how this played out on the ground. Two key drivers of inward migration into local areas came through in the interviews: labour opportunities and the placement of forced migrants. Several stakeholders mentioned meat factories as drivers of inward migration, but other sectors were also mentioned such as healthcare and engineering.¹⁵ In terms of forced migration, most stakeholders mentioned both Ukrainians and International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) centres as new populations. One stakeholder also mentioned landlords operating outside the IPAS

¹⁵ Interviews with local NGO 2 (Leinster), local development company, local authority 1 (Ulster).

system picking up unaccommodated asylum seekers in Dublin and bringing them to accommodation in their rural county.

Two stakeholders mentioned how strongly housing mediated the settlement patterns of migrants, reflecting the quantitative findings.¹⁶

One stakeholder mentioned that they believe there to be less segregation now than in the past because a lack of supply of housing means that people have little choice about where to settle.¹⁷

Border counties have a unique experience of both settlement and integration challenges, as the common travel area applies only to Irish and British citizens (see also McGinnity et al., 2023).¹⁸ One stakeholder discussed how population increase was putting pressure on housing supply and quality (particularly in the rental market), and that as a result some Irish citizens were moving north of the border for more affordable housing, because the migrant population couldn't do the same. They believed that this was affecting the residential segregation in the area.¹⁹

4.3.2 Integration structures and co-ordination

Stakeholders were asked about integration structures and co-ordination. Many comments related to the new Local Authority Integration Teams (LAITs) and Community Integration Forums (CIFs) which are discussed in the sub-sections below.

Several stakeholders commented on the challenge of working in the space without an integration strategy, especially as the last strategy had no or very limited focus on forced migrants, while the mandate of the new LAITs is exclusively on forced migrants.²⁰ However, one stakeholder mentioned that there is direction coming from the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (DoJ) in relation to the new structures (LAITs/CIFs) and that the teams now working on the ground are providing consistency in the absence of a strategy.²¹ Other issues were mentioned that may be resolved through the strategy, like the challenge of developing metrics to identify what successful integration is and when it is working well, which requires a clear

¹⁶ Interviews with national NGO, local development company.

¹⁷ Interview with national NGO.

¹⁸ Interviews with local development company, local authority 1 (Ulster).

¹⁹ Interview with local development company.

²⁰ Interview with national NGO, local authority 1 (Ulster), local NGO 3 (Ulster).

²¹ Interview with national agency.

definition of integration and goals to work towards.²² One stakeholder also mentioned that local-level strategies are working quite well to provide guidance in the absence of a national strategy.²³

Several stakeholders mentioned mainstream structures that were crucial for integration or that could be better utilised to improve integration. Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were identified as potential avenues for the integration of migrant voices into public life and co-ordination around integration.²⁴ However, these may not be realising their full potential. One stakeholder mentioned that most migrants or migrant groups in many areas don't know that they can join the PPNs, although local-level initiatives may be improving this awareness.²⁵ Community Safety Forums were also mentioned as successful examples of local integration governance.²⁶

Other stakeholders, particularly at the local level, mentioned volunteer centres, libraries, community organisations, sports clubs and mainstream community development initiatives as important integration spaces.²⁷ However, it is not clear how coherently these various organisations are working towards migrant integration, with one stakeholder saying that the approach tended to be quite ad hoc and based on a community themselves identifying the needs and deciding to apply for funding.²⁸

Several stakeholders raised issues with the functioning of IPAS.²⁹ Issues raised included a lack of resources proactively allocated to the community for services and supports upon the opening of a new centre, the fact that IPAS requires no training of centre managers, and transfers that move people away from where they have begun to integrate. One stakeholder also raised the physical infrastructure of the centres, and how poorly many of them were tailored to integration,

²² Interview with national agency.

²³ Interview with local authority 2 (Dublin).

²⁴ Interview with national NGO, local NGO 2 (Ulster), national agency, local authority 1 (Ulster).

²⁵ Interview with national NGO, local authority 1 (Ulster).

²⁶ Interview with national NGO.

²⁷ Interviews with local NGO 1 (Munster), local NGO 2 (Leinster), local NGO 3 (Ulster), local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company.

²⁸ Interview with local NGO 2 (Leinster).

²⁹ Interviews with local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company, national NGO, national agency.

with no common spaces, or spaces to play, which means that people don't engage and stay in their rooms.³⁰

The most common issue raised with the management of IPAS was a lack of communication and consultation when a new centre opens, particularly with local authorities. Stakeholders indicated that this created a lack of joined-up thinking and led to centres being opened in communities with existing tensions which the local authorities may have been aware of or a lack of services, with potential integration and social cohesion issues as a result.³¹ While the work of the DoJ community engagement team was acknowledged in communicating with local areas, there were clear frustrations from the local level that this only happened after a contract was already signed, and that the engagement was 'one way', in the sense that the role of the community engagement team was to provide information on a decision that had already been made.³² Some stakeholders felt that this was a missed opportunity to benefit from local knowledge and expertise that could preclude problems from arising.³³

Stakeholders also raised issues with communication with the local authority once people are accommodated in the county (both IPAS and Ukrainians), as the local authority and other stakeholders have no information on where people are to ensure that they have supports.³⁴ One stakeholder raised this in relation to the Accommodation Recognition Payment, which the local authorities have no oversight of, with cases cited of exploitation, very low standards of housing, and fraud.³⁵ The lack of data-sharing for some groups may be partially resolved by the joint controller arrangement reached between all 31 local authorities and DoJ for more structured sharing of data to support local authorities' integration functions in 2025.

Several stakeholders highlighted that the main barriers to integration were structural (see section 4.6), such as housing or healthcare. Ireland's highly centralised system makes this particularly challenging

³⁰ Interview with local authority 2 (Dublin).

³¹ Interviews with local authority 1 (Ulster), national agency, national NGO, local development company.

³² Interviews with national agency, national NGO, local authority 1 (Ulster).

³³ Interviews with national agency, local authority 1 (Ulster).

³⁴ Interviews with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company.

³⁵ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster).

for local actors who have limited control or power over these structural issues.

One stakeholder mentioned the relatively poor formal consultation mechanisms with migrant communities that exist in Ireland compared with other countries.³⁶ While Ireland scores relatively well on policy indices in relation to migrant political participation, it scores more poorly on formal consultation mechanisms and having a national policy on stakeholder representation (Yavçan, Yılmaz and Gorgerino, 2024).

4.3.3 Local Authority Integration Teams (LAITs)

One of the goals of the qualitative part of the research was to gain an initial understanding of how new integration structures were working. Generally, almost all stakeholders saw the introduction of the LAITs as a positive step, as they provide some consistency across the country, a direct point of contact for migrants, and a clear mandate for local authorities in migrant integration.³⁷

However, most LAITs are still relatively new, and initial challenges were raised including a lack of local understanding or awareness of the teams, a lack of handover from teams previously working on integration to the new teams, and initial fears of overlap or duplication of the work.³⁸ However, all stakeholders indicated that these overlap fears have not materialised as there is good co-ordination between the LAITs and other local stakeholders.³⁹ Many stakeholders indicated that good relationships and informal communication between workers were crucial for this co-ordination.⁴⁰ Stakeholders indicated that the co-ordination worked best when the staff recruited onto LAITs had already worked in the space and had pre-existing relationships, but that some teams had to develop these relationships and local expertise.⁴¹

³⁶ Interview with national NGO.

³⁷ Interviews with local NGO 1 (Munster), local NGO 2 (Leinster), local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), national agency, national NGO, local development company.

³⁸ Interview with local NGO 1 (Munster), national agency, national NGO, local development company.

³⁹ Interview with local NGO 1 (Munster), local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), national agency, national NGO, local development company.

⁴⁰ Interview with local NGO 1 (Munster), local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company, national agency.

⁴¹ Interview with national NGO, local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin).

Stakeholders who had experienced cross-county issues also indicated that there was good co-ordination between LAITs in different counties.⁴² An example was given of two LAIT teams working together when a new centre opened at the border of their two counties.⁴³ The important role of the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) was flagged both for the training they provide as well as the connections and co-ordination structures they create between teams.⁴⁴

Several stakeholders indicated that the limited scope and mandate of the LAITs poses a challenge to achieving good integration outcomes.⁴⁵ Specifically, this related to the limitation of LAITs to ‘signposting’ services, and to certain groups of migrants only. Specifically, LAITs are limited to supporting migrants who arrive as international protection (IP) applicants, who are resettled in Ireland through government programmes. For brevity in the rest of this report, we refer to this group of migrants as ‘forced migrants’. Some stakeholders felt that this was overly constrained and not always what was needed on the ground, and indicated that it would be better if the teams had a mandate to work on migrant integration more generally.⁴⁶ One stakeholder described this as contrary to the goal of integration itself; by imposing a division between groups of migrants, it limits the extent to which LAITs can foster connections between forced migrants, non-forced migrants, and the native community.⁴⁷ However, it is clear from the interviews that some LAITs do work with other migrant groups, responding to the needs on the ground. For some LAITs, this is informal, but the example was given of Limerick, where an integration strategy has been developed that gives the LAITs the remit of working with all migrant groups.⁴⁸

Some tensions emerged in relation to the development of the LAITs, particularly with the LDCs, many of whom were already working in this

⁴² Interview with local authority 2 (Dublin), local NGO 1 (Munster).

⁴³ Interview with local authority 2 (Dublin).

⁴⁴ Interview with national NGO.

⁴⁵ Interviews with national NGO, national agency, local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company, local NGO 2 (Leinster).

⁴⁶ Interviews with national NGO, national agency, local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company.

⁴⁷ Interview with national NGO.

⁴⁸ Interview with local authority 2 (Dublin).

space.⁴⁹ However, pre-existing relationships and tensions seemed to be key mediators of the relationship between the teams and good co-ordination seems to have developed between the organisations in many areas.⁵⁰ One stakeholder raised the potential for overlap with the Connecting Communities Project, a project funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development that involves hiring LDC staff for 18 months across various local authority areas to work with local communities where issues are arising in relation to attitudes and anti-migrant sentiment in particular.⁵¹ The stakeholder indicated the need for guidance about the relative roles, although the two projects/teams have different mandates (support for forced migrants versus working with local communities) and most stakeholders indicated that there were good relationships and co-ordination between LDCs and LAITs on the ground. One stakeholder indicated that the Connecting Communities Project fills an important gap in engaging the local community and keeping tensions to a minimum.⁵²

Where LAITs were placed in the local authorities was mentioned by some stakeholders as an important mediator of their approach to the work. One stakeholder indicated that the teams could work better on integration when they were placed into pre-existing community development or social inclusion teams rather than the housing areas of the local authority, as integration requires a community development approach and they believed that integration should not be separated from other community activities.⁵³ This reflects the above findings about the key role of mainstream structures and activities for integration outcomes.

4.3.4 Community Integration Forums

Less feedback was received about Community Integration Forums, and it seems that the forums are working differently across different counties, depending on their leadership and approach. Two stakeholders indicated that they were effective for local-level co-

⁴⁹ Interview with national NGO, local development company.

⁵⁰ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company, national NGO, national agency.

⁵¹ Interview with national NGO.

⁵² Interview with national agency.

⁵³ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster).

ordination, but that it was too early for a thorough evaluation of their performance.⁵⁴

In one county, the issue was raised that local stakeholders like the LDC cannot influence the agenda and that there is limited concrete co-ordination happening at the CIF.⁵⁵ Many stakeholders indicated that informal co-ordination and good relationships between staff are still key to co-ordination on the ground.⁵⁶ The CIFs may support the development of these relationships, although it wasn't clear from the research if this was the case.

There appears to be some tension about the role of the CIFs. While their main role is local co-ordination, many stakeholders would clearly like to see them have the ability to feed issues back to the national level that can only be solved through central departments.⁵⁷ This ties back into the issue that many of the most pressing issues experienced by local communities cannot be solved by local actors, due to Ireland's highly centralised governance structure. Strengthening the role of the CIFs could therefore support national-level policymaking to better respond to the needs and issues identified on the ground and enhance the credibility of the CIFs. One stakeholder mentioned that Department staff sometimes attended CIFs and that this was very important for the credibility of the structures, and meant that local stakeholders felt that they were being listened to.⁵⁸ One stakeholder identified the need for training, guidance and funding to support the CIFs to reach their full potential in co-ordination and in resolving issues that are arising at local level.⁵⁹

4.3.5 Challenges in governance

Multiple challenges were raised by stakeholders who were working on local integration, but three key themes emerged and are discussed in this section: funding uncertainty and quality, access to information, and centralisation. This section explores these themes in more detail.

⁵⁴ Interview with local authority 2 (Dublin), national agency, local NGO 1 (Munster).

⁵⁵ Interview with local development company.

⁵⁶ Interview with local development agency, local authority 2 (Dublin), national NGO, local NGO 2 (Leinster), local NGO 3 (Ulster), local authority 1 (Ulster).

⁵⁷ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company, national agency.

⁵⁸ Interview with national agency.

⁵⁹ Interview with national agency.

4.3.5.1 Funding uncertainty and quality

Supporting integration at the local level requires both experienced and skilled individuals as well as well-run, small-scale institutions which can respond to the needs of migrants. Institutions may be independent NGOs, migrant representative associations, or even specific structures and cultures within local authorities that enable effective action. Building such institutions normally requires project funding, which is typically provided through grants from central government. However, several stakeholders described how the short-term nature of much integration funding impedes integration efforts.⁶⁰

Firstly, one-year or two-year contracts make it difficult to retain staff. As noted below, several stakeholders highlighted the importance of having staff with effective social networks in the integration and community development sector.⁶¹ These staff, and the networks which they bring to projects, are essential to building effective organisations or programmes, and avoid duplication. Staff turnover, which is driven by short-term contracts, impedes efforts at supporting local integration.

Secondly, short-term project-based funding is generally focused on delivering a specific project, and often does not allow groups to invest in capital equipment or pay fixed costs such as rent or bills. This limits the ability of stakeholders to develop long-term sustainable projects. To work around the challenges imposed by short-term or insecure funding, some stakeholders have developed strategies to ensure their projects can continue to have an impact even if they lose funding. One stakeholder gave the example of short-term funding being used to fund day-to-day transport to an activity, which stopped when the funding stopped, while another gave the example of using short-term funding to partner with the HSE to provide training to doctors and healthcare professionals, so that it had a long-term impact after the funding stopped.⁶²

⁶⁰ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company, national agency.

⁶¹ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), local development company, national NGO, local NGO 1 (Munster), local NGO 3 (Ulster).

⁶² Interview with local development company, local authority 1 (Ulster).

4.3.5.2 Access to information

Local stakeholders in migrant integration play a key role as ‘social links’ between migrant communities and the state at the national level. Stakeholders should be able to effectively pass information up to central government, as well as effectively receive information from central government. At the same time, central government must be able to integrate information from the local level into its decision-making processes. However, as noted in section 4.3.2, many stakeholders mentioned challenges related to information provision by central government, as well as being able to feed challenges back into central structures when they can’t be solved at the local level. Information provision by central government was raised as an issue in relation to new IPAS centres opening, the location of Ukrainians in the county, and the introduction of new structures like the LAITs. Broader issues were raised about a lack of consultation of local-level stakeholders, also addressed in section 4.3.2.

4.3.5.3 Centralisation

Housing and accommodation were some of the biggest integration barriers raised by stakeholders, and local stakeholders highlighted their inability to support migrants facing accommodation challenges.⁶³ Most aspects of mainstream housing policy are controlled at the national level. Local authorities do have responsibility for delivering, managing and maintaining social housing and inspecting properties for compliance with rental standards. However, social housing is a ‘residualised’ tenure in the Irish housing system, which serves those on the very lowest incomes, and which has low availability compared to the size of the eligible population (Byrne and Norris, 2022). It represents a very low proportion of the entire housing stock, at around 6 per cent of migrant households and 9 per cent of Irish households (McGinnity et al., 2025). This and the local authorities’ reliance on centralised funding means that there is relatively little autonomy to solve local housing issues locally. Issues were raised about local authorities’ lack of control, consultation or access to information in relation to other types of accommodation, too (see section 4.3.2).

4.3.6 Best practices in governance

Stakeholders identified several good practices in relation to local integration governance, some of which are mentioned above. The LAITs

⁶³ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company.

were broadly seen as a good practice and a welcome development in this space, as is the LGMA's support and cross-county co-ordination on integration. The expansion by some teams of their remit beyond forced migrants alone was also seen as a good practice, as was having a local strategy in place to provide clear guidance and legitimacy to the role of the teams in broader migrant integration governance at the local level.⁶⁴ Limerick and Fingal were both cited as particularly good case studies in migrant integration governance and work.

Several stakeholders indicated that it is a good practice to take a broader community development approach to integration, rather than managing it separately. This means both being flexible and working with people where they are, but also building the capacity of people and communities to stand on their own feet.⁶⁵ Examples of long-term projects that clearly reflect the community development approach are described in sections 4.4.4.1 and 4.4.4.3.

4.4 Integration

Local stakeholders have unique on-the-ground knowledge of migrant integration. In this section, we detail the key themes and issues that emerged from our interviews. We structure these insights using the Ager and Strang (2008) framework, addressing issues raised by stakeholders under the headings of facilitators, markers and means, foundations, and social connections.

4.4.1 Facilitators

4.4.1.1 English language skills

English language skills are a key facilitator of integration, enabling migrants to form key social connections, access opportunities, and use services. However, all stakeholders interviewed, bar one, described the provision of English language training as a serious barrier to integration.⁶⁶ However, the level of provision differs: the stakeholder based in Dublin noted that English language training is widely available from (the) voluntary sector as well as Education and Training Boards (ETBs); outside Dublin, stakeholders generally felt training was not sufficiently available. In a survey of service users carried out by one

⁶⁴ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local authority 2 (Dublin), national agency, national NGO.

⁶⁵ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company.

⁶⁶ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company, national NGO, local NGO 1 (Munster), local NGO 2 (Leinster), local NGO 3 (Ulster).

LAIT, forced migrants cited English language skills as the most important barrier to their integration.⁶⁷ Three stakeholders described how English language skills mediate all other pathways towards integration.⁶⁸ Some stakeholders cited issues with ETBs as a challenge for improved English language training. One stakeholder noted that links between LAITs and ETBs vary from area to area, depending on the networks and personal relationships between key staff members. Another stakeholder pointed out the fact that ETBs don't provide courses over the summer, which they felt was not appropriate to the integration needs of migrants. Several stakeholders highlighted the crucial role that informal language learning plays in the integration journey, through social events or other community-based events, which are needed to supplement formal language learning and also improve integration.⁶⁹ Fáilte Isteach or similar informal learning with local volunteers was mentioned by some stakeholders as enabling both language learning but also a pathway to developing social bridges with the community.⁷⁰

4.4.1.2 Housing and instability

While housing is included as a marker and means of integration in the Ager and Strang (2008) framework, the concerns raised by stakeholders more closely align with 'safety and stability', a facilitator of integration. Three interviewees highlighted the role of housing as a major barrier to integration given its impacts on migrants' ability to settle long term in their community.⁷¹ Ireland is undergoing a severe housing crisis, with many people facing both affordability and access challenges. These problems are particularly concentrated in the private rental sector, where rents are high by comparison to other European countries (Disch and Slaymaker, 2023). As noted previously, migrants face greater rates of housing affordability challenges than Irish-born residents, related to their higher dependence on the private rental sector (McGinnity et al., 2025). Stakeholders indicated how disruptive it is to the lives and integration prospects of migrants to not have stable housing.⁷² Some stakeholders also mentioned negative impacts on the local housing market due to migration and policies

⁶⁷ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster).

⁶⁸ Interview with local development company, local NGO 1 (Munster), local NGO 3 (Ulster).

⁶⁹ Interview with local development company, local NGO 1 (Munster), local NGO 2 (Leinster).

⁷⁰ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company, local NGO 2 (Leinster).

⁷¹ Interview with national NGO, local development company, local authority 1 (Ulster).

⁷² Interview with local development company, local authority 1 (Ulster).

relating to migration as well as the broader housing crisis, and the issues that it creates for social cohesion and integration.⁷³ Insights from section 4.3.2 regarding IPAS accommodation are also relevant here. Several stakeholders noted that IPAS residents could be moved at short notice, disrupting their integration. They also noted a lack of effective community consultation in some instances, impacting on migrants' integration in the host community.

4.4.2 Markers and means

Markers and means of integration encompass several domains, each of which can both indicate how integrated migrants are, and provide a means through which migrants can become more integrated. These are employment, education, housing and health.

4.4.2.1 Employment and recognition of qualifications

With regards to employment, two stakeholders identified qualification recognition as a primary challenge for migrants in their area.⁷⁴ One stakeholder indicated that this was an area that there was very little co-ordination or support with.⁷⁵ Lack of recognition of foreign qualifications prevents migrants from working in the fields they are trained to work in, potentially reducing wages and making it harder for migrants to form bridges in the community through work.

4.4.2.2 Healthcare

Health issues can prevent migrants from accessing employment, education, or living a full and active social life, thereby impacting integration in several ways. Several stakeholders also mentioned significant challenges in relation to accessing healthcare, particularly registering with a general practitioner (GP) doctor.⁷⁶ One stakeholder interviewed said that when IPAS residents are transferred, they are often advised to stay registered with their previous GP because they have no guarantee of being registered with a GP in their new location, which meant that people were travelling to different counties for GP access.⁷⁷ One stakeholder said that they anticipated that this would

⁷³ Interview with local development company, local authority 1 (Ulster).

⁷⁴ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local NGO 2 (Leinster).

⁷⁵ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster).

⁷⁶ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company, local NGO 1 (Munster), Donegal, Monaghan, Clare.

⁷⁷ Interview with local NGO 1 (Munster).

get significantly worse in their area in the near future, because many of the local GPs are due to retire.⁷⁸

4.4.2.3 Housing and isolation

Suitably located housing is essential for integration. Migrants who arrive as refugees or Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection are unlikely to have access to a car, and are more dependent on their relationship with local integration stakeholders. However, several stakeholders raised the challenge of transport and isolation, particularly in rural areas.⁷⁹ This was seen as a challenge both for residents to access integration services but also for service providers trying to support residents. The issue of isolation was also raised in relation to IPAS centres that don't have common spaces for people to gather.⁸⁰ One stakeholder also indicated that not all migrants are motivated to take part in activities or language classes, and that proactive engagement may be beneficial;⁸¹ however, this is hindered when vulnerable migrants are highly dispersed.

4.4.3 Foundations

The foundations of migrant integration are the essential rights that migrants have in a country. Where these rights are limited, migrants face fundamental barriers to integration.

4.4.3.1 Temporary permissions

Two stakeholders mentioned the integration challenges that arise when people are on temporary permissions. One stakeholder mentioned this in relation to the change that led to shorter student permissions, which led to worse working conditions for students as it was less attractive for employers to hire people on such short permissions. Another stakeholder mentioned the challenge for Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection who are on year-to-year permissions, and that in their experience people were not enrolling in courses or engaging in other integration activities as a result.⁸²

⁷⁸ Interview with local development company.

⁷⁹ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster), local development company, local NGO 2 (Leinster), local NGO 3 (Ulster), national agency.

⁸⁰ Interview with local authority 2 (Dublin).

⁸¹ Interview with local NGO 3 (Ulster).

⁸² Interview with national NGO, local authority 1 (Ulster).

4.4.3.2 Border communities

Stakeholders in border counties identified unique challenges relating to the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. For residents in border areas, crossing the border is often an essential part of their daily life. Many residents in Ireland work, shop, socialise or receive healthcare in Northern Ireland, especially if they live in the hinterland of a border town or city. However, migrants in Ireland do not automatically have the right to travel in or through Northern Ireland. EU citizens must apply for a visa waiver, for which they must pay a small administrative fee. Migrants from other countries, especially in less-developed countries, may face long and expensive visa application processes to enter the UK legally. One stakeholder described how in some cases migrant children are unable to join their classmates on school trips to the swimming pool, which is across the border.⁸³ Another noted that this also disrupts the housing market, particularly in the private rental sector: migrants are unable to access housing across the border, leaving them with fewer options for accommodation compared to Irish citizens, who were able to move across the border instead. This has the potential to drive segregation in the area.⁸⁴

4.4.4 Social connections

Social connections are essential to any understanding of integration. Migrant integration is fundamentally a social process that reflects and requires the formation of key social connections. In this section, we focus on social links: the vertical ties which enable migrants to access resources and services from the state. Below, we outline three examples.

4.4.4.1 Refugee advisory group

One stakeholder described how their local LAIT established an advisory group composed of representatives from the refugee community in the area. When their staff in the local authority require input from refugees, they can consult the advisory group. This group also builds the social capital of the refugee community in the area: one interviewee noted that membership of the advisory group helped refugees gain confidence and experience in public life. Members of the group have also become members of the local PPN and CIF, and it encourages refugees to apply for roles in the public sector, such as

⁸³ Interview with local authority 1 (Ulster).

⁸⁴ Interview with local development company.

ETBs or local authorities. Having refugees in such roles increases the resources available to the migrant and refugee community, by providing a valuable social link inside these state bodies.

4.4.4.2 IPAS managers training

Most IPAS centre managers have a background in hospitality, rather than integration, community development or social care. Despite being a key social link between vulnerable migrants and the state, they have no mandated training or qualifications. One interviewee described how their local authority began offering training to IPAS centre managers. While they reported that this has been successful, they noted that it depends completely on the interest from the centre manager. While some managers are motivated to undertake training and upskilling, many aren't, and, as mentioned above, there is no requirement for training for IPAS centre managers.

4.4.4.3 Cultural champions

One stakeholder described a programme which aimed to support established migrants to become 'cultural champions' and to act as bridges between state services and newer migrant communities. The need for this was identified by Tusla, who were receiving an increased number of referrals to their services and were struggling with cultural and linguistic differences. The local LDC supported established migrants to set up a social enterprise, and provided a variety of training courses. While the project ran into issues, it was nonetheless cited as an example of how the community development approach can create innovative solutions to problems that arise in relation to migrant integration.

In line with this approach, several stakeholders mentioned the good practice of working with existing mainstream structures to involve them in migrant integration rather than setting up new structures, and the key role that these structures can play in building social bridges and language skills in particular.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Interview with local development company, local NGO 2 (Leinster), national NGO.

4.5 Discussion

Qualitative findings indicate that many previous concerns about local integration governance have been addressed by the introduction of new local integration structures in recent years. These structures seem to be functioning well, although issues remain and how they will function long term remains to be seen.

However, some key gaps remain in local-level integration in Ireland. This includes the difficulty of working on local-level integration without an overarching national integration strategy, as well as in a highly centralised state where local actors have very limited power to address issues. The problem of communication and co-ordination with the local level was also consistently raised, in particular in relation to forced migrants. The limited ability for the local level (including new structures) to feed into national policy and decisions is a clear limitation of the new structures. The scope and mandate of the LAITs also seem to be a limitation, and continues the previously identified trend of siloing migrants into different categories and providing more supports to some than others (Arnold et al., 2019; Gilmartin and Dagg, 2022). While this may be justified as forced migrants may need more support, many stakeholders feel that it poses challenges to local-level integration overall. Other challenges highlighted included funding uncertainty, access to information, and centralisation. Barriers to integration flagged at the local level include language skills, and a lack of access to sufficient language services in many rural areas, housing, qualification recognition, transport and isolation, healthcare, temporary permissions, and the impact of the border on migrant communities and on segregation. Stakeholders also identified good practices, notably a community development approach to migrant integration that can lead to long-term, self-sustained change.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Summary

This report has drawn together a wide range of findings regarding the spatial distribution of migrants in Ireland. In Chapter 1, we outline the theoretical framework used to interpret the quantitative and qualitative findings about migrant spatial integration. Building on the work of Ager and Strang (2008), we outline how spatial factors – especially residential location – affect all aspects of integration. We then outline how this conceptual framework relates to both the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

In Chapter 2, we begin our analysis of the distribution of migrants across Ireland. First, we present some basic descriptive statistics, showing the distribution of migrants across the country and by the urban–rural divide. Migrants are most heavily concentrated in areas of Dublin, although there is a broadly equal distribution of migrants across the regions of the country. In general, migrants are most concentrated in urban areas. However, this differs substantially by country-of-birth group, and by type of urban area (city, satellite town or independent town), with those born in Great Britain and other anglophone countries most likely to live in rural areas compared to cities, and those from non-EU and Western EU countries most likely to live in cities. Focusing on Dublin, we find that the migrant population is most concentrated in the inner city and the outer suburbs. We then consider the relationship between migrant proportion and some key area-level characteristics. We find that migrant proportion is generally higher in more affluent areas, in areas with more private rental accommodation, and areas with higher rates of tertiary education. While there is almost no correlation between overall migrant proportion and the proportion of unskilled/semiskilled workers in an area, this masks substantial heterogeneity at the country-of-birth level. For instance, the proportion of residents born in the US, India, Spain and China are associated with lower levels of unskilled/semiskilled labour, whereas the proportion of residents born in Poland, Lithuania and Latvia are associated with higher levels of unskilled/semiskilled labour. Finally, we focus on IPAS residents. We find that EDs that have

an IPAS centre are no more or less disadvantaged (based on the HP Deprivation Index) than EDs which do not have an IPAS centre.

In Chapter 3, we analyse segregation, as captured by the multi-group dissimilarity index, which remained at a low to moderate level between 2016 and 2022. Segregation is particularly low among those born in Great Britain and Poland, the two largest country-of-birth groups. Segregation is relatively high for many other country-of-birth groups, especially those from outside the EU, such as Moldova, China, Nigeria and the Philippines. We then analyse the relationship between segregation and the key area-level characteristics which were used in Chapter 2.

First, we consider two important ‘integration resources’: English language fluency, and labour market access, as measured by the unemployment rate. Segregation is higher in areas with lower English fluency. Differences in English fluency, unlike the other variables we consider, is almost completely driven by the local migrant population. Migrants with low English fluency will face strong challenges in integration, and if they are more likely to be concentrated in the same areas, they may find it harder to form bridging ties and access essential resources, such as good jobs or accommodation. We find that segregation is also higher in areas with more unemployment, although there is substantial heterogeneity at the level of individual country-of-birth groups. Those born in Great Britain, the US, Spain, Italy and South Africa are all more likely to be segregated in areas of high unemployment, whereas those born in Lithuania, Latvia and Romania are most likely to be segregated in areas of low unemployment. This might be the result of high socio-economic status among migrants, with well-off migrants from the US or Western EU forming affluent enclaves in high-unemployment areas, and less well-off Eastern and Central EU groups doing the same in low unemployment areas. Unfortunately, it is not possible to present a full explanation of this pattern with our data. Although this pattern of segregation is concerning, the strength of correlation is not very high for most groups.

Second, we consider two housing variables: the proportion of households renting from a private landlord, and the proportion of people living in a dwelling built since 2016. Segregation is positively correlated with private rental accommodation, which might be a result of differences in the composition of the migrant population who live in low-rental LEAs compared to high-rental LEAs. The former are more

likely to be born in Great Britain or other English-speaking countries, and may be expected to have a similar distribution to the Irish residents of an LEA. On the other hand, high-rental LEAs are likely to be city areas with a more diverse population that likely differs substantially from the local Irish population. This relationship is reversed at the country-of-birth level, with all groups except for those born in Great Britain having higher segregation in LEAs with less rental housing. We suggest that this might be related to the dependence of these groups on the private rental sector. In low-rental LEAs, migrants other than those born in Great Britain may be more reliant on country-of-origin networks, and rental properties may be more unevenly distributed, leading to higher segregation. We find no overall correlation between segregation and newly built housing, but at the country-of-birth level we find negative correlations, with lower group segregation scores in areas with more newly built housing. Further research is needed to develop explanations for this pattern.

Finally, we consider three variables relating to socio-economic status: the Deprivation Index, higher education and unskilled/semiskilled workers. We find no strong correlations between overall segregation and any of these variables. However, when analysed at a country-of-birth level, most groups have higher segregation scores in areas with lower socio-economic status. The relationship is particularly strong for those born in Spain, Italy, Brazil, India and China. As our approach is focused on correlational analysis, we cannot offer a full explanation of this pattern. However, they may reflect some element of social segregation, where migrant groups with high incomes (e.g. Western EU) or high tertiary education rates (e.g. Asian countries) are segregated into well-off enclaves in more disadvantaged areas.

In Chapter 4, we turn our focus away from analysing patterns in migrant distribution and segregation, and towards the role of local stakeholders in migrant integration. Conceptually, we study the role of stakeholders in operating as social links between migrants and the resources and state services needed for their integration. The organisation and governance of integration has changed substantially in Ireland over recent years, motivating our focus on this aspect of integration. We carry out seven semi-structured interviews with people working in local integration across Ireland, including those in NGOs and in local authorities. Interviewees highlighted challenges around housing, noting that local stakeholders have limited scope to deal with low housing availability. Even where the state has control over migrant

housing (e.g. IPAS residents or accommodation schemes for Ukrainian refugees), power is concentrated at the national level, creating problems for local stakeholders aiming to improve integration. Stakeholders also highlighted issues regarding funding uncertainty, and communication both between local stakeholders and between local stakeholders and the state. On the other hand, stakeholders were very positive about the introduction of LAITs, noting the benefits of having staff dedicated to migrant integration embedded in the local authority. Several stakeholders suggested that the remit of LAITs should be expanded to the integration of all migrants, not just IP applicants, refugees, BoTPs, and those resettled through government programmes (collectively referred to as ‘forced migrants’ in this report for brevity). Other stakeholders reported success in supporting the development of migrant community resources and social capital, improving communication between the migrant community and stakeholders.

There are some important limitations to this research. The quantitative research is not intended to generate causal evidence, and the data does not provide information on trends past 2022, on individual outcomes, or on aspects of spatial life other than location of residence. The qualitative research interviews a small number of stakeholders in particularly interesting or challenging contexts, and is not intended to provide a representative overview of the opinions of local integration stakeholders across the country. Future research on this topic should also interview migrants, including those who use local integration services and those who do not.

5.2 Discussion and policy implications

We now present some key insights from the report, taking our quantitative and qualitative analyses together. We also discuss policy implications and future research directions.

First, housing is paramount. Private rental housing has the strongest association with both migrant proportion and segregation at the LEA level. Where there is more rental housing, both migrant proportion and overall migrant segregation is higher. At the same time, many individual country-of-birth groups have higher segregation where there is less private rental housing. Of course, we do not identify causal relationships in this research; there could be other factors, such as economic performance of an area which are related both to the

amount of new or rental housing and which independently attract migrants. However, the strength of the correlation between these variables does reveal how important housing availability is to understand the spatial distribution of migrants in Ireland. It is notable that the relationship is particularly strong for non-EU migrant groups, given that non-EU migration has risen in recent years. These findings suggest that migrants living in areas with little rental housing may find it difficult to form key social bridges with the rest of the community, especially if they have recently arrived in Ireland.

The importance of housing availability to integration is highlighted by several stakeholders in Chapter 4. Stakeholders note that housing availability is the most important barrier to integration in their area; it is also something which stakeholders identified that they had little or no control over. Even where housing is supported by the state, such as through IPAS centres or through Accommodation Recognition Payments (ARPs) (which support accommodation for Ukrainian forced migrants), stakeholders noted that control is centralised at the national level, with little room for local influence. Future research should focus on the relationship between housing developments, availability and migration, to identify causal patterns and provide a more nuanced understanding of segregation patterns. Researchers should also investigate how migrants are filtered into different segments of the private rental market, and how this affects their integration.

Policy implications of this finding may include expanding local influence over state-supported accommodation, such as ARPs and IPAS centres. Greater investment in social housing and wider action to tackle problems with housing availability and affordability will also help. Stakeholders also described a range of projects and initiatives they had undertaken to help migrants with housing challenges, such as providing training courses for IPAS centre managers or supporting refugees with practical advice and resources as they leave state accommodation. Initiatives like these could be spread to other areas.

Second, this report has raised several important issues regarding English language skills. Proficiency in the host country language is a key facilitator for integration; indeed, it is highlighted as such by Ager and Strang (2008) in their model of integration. Our interviews with stakeholders highlight the fundamental role that English language proficiency plays in integration. However, they also note several

challenges facing English language training for migrants. For instance, the availability of English language training is very limited outside Dublin, meaning migrants mostly rely on Education and Training Boards (ETBs). This raises some issues, such as term times: ETBs are academic institutions, and are closed over the summer.

Our quantitative results also highlight spatial issues regarding English language fluency. Segregation is higher in areas with low English fluency. Given that migrants will drive most of the variation in English language skills in an area, this finding is concerning for migrant integration. Drawing on the Ager and Strang (2008) framework, host country language skills are a key facilitator of migrant integration. They are required to form social bridges with the host community and many other migrant groups, to access better employment opportunities, and to engage with government services. There are potential benefits to living near other migrants for migrants with poor English skills, such as access to community resources and networks in a language with which they are more familiar. However, low English language skills are a fundamental barrier to building the social bridges and social links needed for integration as a whole. Low English language skills may also correlate with other characteristics, such as having low wages or being engaged in low-skilled work, which means that segregation in low English fluency areas may result in the concentration of disadvantage. Future research should focus on the relationship between English fluency and segregation, either through quantitative research aimed at identifying the extent of this issue across Ireland, or qualitative research focusing on how living in areas with lower average English fluency may be beneficial or detrimental to integration.

Migration policies should therefore aim to ensure the availability of English language courses outside Dublin, especially in areas where there is low average English language fluency. However, we should also not lose sight of the possible benefits of living near a strong linguistic community for migrants who arrive with low English fluency – such networks may help secure employment and accommodation, for instance.

Third, the findings presented in this report highlight the importance of investing in integration at the local level. We present the first analysis of segregation across several country-of-birth groups in Ireland, showing that several country-of-birth groups have particularly high segregation, such as some non-EU countries. Non-EU migration has

risen substantially in recent years, meaning these patterns have important implications for migrant integration across the country. We also show that while segregation is only moderately correlated with key variables like unemployment, private rental housing, and English language fluency, these correlations are often stronger for individual country-of-birth groups. There has also been an increase in forced migration, as shown by the rise in numbers living in IPAS accommodation presented in [Figure 2.9](#).

While these patterns are complex and their implications for integration are not always clear, they demonstrate that integration is highly spatially mediated. Integration faces different barriers and opportunities in different places, depending on area characteristics, the distribution of resources, and patterns in migration. Local stakeholders have the unique ability to account for these patterns and dynamics as they play out in their area. For instance, while we find high levels of segregation among some non-EU migrant groups, this is not necessarily a problem for integration. In the right context, this may provide migrants with an opportunity to form important social bonds to support integration. In other contexts, it may impede the formation of social bridges with the rest of the community and prevent migrants from accessing key resources. Locally based actors have the ability to interpret and respond to these situations appropriately. However, to do this effectively, they need the right kinds of supports. For instance, funding uncertainty is a serious issue. The success of local integration efforts is dependent on the social capital and networks which experienced and well-connected individuals bring to their organisation. To promote integration at the local level, experienced staff should be retained through more secure funding and contracts, and newcomers should be afforded the time and opportunity to build up these networks.

Annual project funding presents similar difficulties; project funding should be multi-annual where possible to allow projects the opportunity to invest in capital and pay fixed costs needed to facilitate the projects themselves. Local responses to integration can also be promoted by supporting migrants to develop their own community organisations and structures. Our stakeholder interviews revealed some successful initiatives which were aimed at enabling vulnerable migrants to represent their concerns to the local authority, or to improve mutual understanding with local staff in key state bodies like the HSE or Tusla.

Finally, the introduction of Local Authority Integration Team (LAIT) staff was identified by all stakeholders as an excellent development for local integration. However, there was general frustration with the limitation of the scope of LAITs to forced migrants only. One respondent described this as ‘against the spirit of integration’. Others noted that some LAITs had the flexibility to operate slightly beyond this scope at times, leading to more effective interventions. As Ireland’s migrant community diversifies and as new integration challenges appear, it may be necessary to expand the scope of LAITs to all migrants, with a focus on the most vulnerable, regardless of whether they are forced migrants.

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Appendix

Online appendix

The online version of this report includes an interactive demonstration of how the Index of Dissimilarity is calculated. The online appendix can be accessed on the ESRI website:

<https://www.esri.ie/publications/spatial-distribution-and-local-integration-of-migrants-in-Ireland>.



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