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Debate Pack

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The Irish diaspora in Britain

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1 Background

1.1 Ireland and the UK

Irish contribution to life in Britain

Irish people in Britain have contributed hugely to life here across a wide range of sectors, and the lives of Irish and British people have been intertwined for millennia.

Niall Gallagher, chairman of Irish Heritage, an organisation that celebrates the work of Irish writers, composers, singers and musicians who are trying to build careers in Britain and beyond, has described the contribution of the Irish to the cultural life of Britain as "incalculable".

For decades Irish labour was "indispensable" to the British construction industry, with Irish workers part of the teams that built the earliest tunnels for the London Underground network, as well as more modern works such as the Victoria Line.

Irish people have also contributed greatly to the National Health Service, and Irish President Michael Higgins paid tribute to their service during his 2014 State Visit to the UK. As of September 2021, 13,971 members of NHS staff in England reported their nationality as Irish, this includes just under 2,400 doctors, and over 4,500 nurses.[1]

Two British Prime Ministers, William Petty, 2nd Earl of Shelburne, and Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, were born in Ireland. Ireland was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland when both held office.

UK-Ireland relations

Relations between the UK and Ireland before the 2016 EU referendum were at their best since Irish independence, as evidenced by the historic state visits by the Queen to Ireland in May 2011 and President Higgins to the UK in April 2014.

Disagreements between the EU and the UK over how to prevent a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland post-Brexit raised tensions between the Irish and UK Governments. However, discussions between the Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, were seen as instrumental in breaking the deadlock between the EU and UK in October 2019, leading to a re-writing of the Northern Ireland Protocol. This enabled

[1] NHS Workforce Statistics, September 2021, underlying data. For more statistics on NHS England Staff from overseas see Library Briefing: NHS staff from overseas: statistics

the two sides to sign the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement that managed the UK's exit from the EU, and avoided a "no-deal" scenario.

Ongoing EU-UK disagreements on the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, including the UK's assertions that it may trigger the Protocol's Article 16 safeguarding mechanism, have added to tensions between the UK and Irish Governments. That notwithstanding, both London and Dublin continue to work closely on matters of shared interest, in particular Northern Ireland, and in a recent meeting on 12 March 2022 between the Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Boris Johnson, both leaders pledged to maintain unity in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine.

1.2 Immigration and Brexit

How many Irish people live in the UK?

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes estimates of the population by country of birth and nationality, based on the Annual Population Survey. Because the figures are based on a survey sample, they are subject to some uncertainty.

The ONS estimates that on average over the year to June 2021, there were **412,000** people living in the UK who were born in the Republic of Ireland. The true figure is likely to be between and 377,000 and 447,000.

The ONS also estimates that there were around **370,000** Irish nationals living in the UK. The true figure is likely to be between 336,000 and 404,000.[2]

The ONS' nationality estimate doesn't necessarily give a very clear picture of people who have, or are entitled to, Irish citizenship. The Annual Population Survey only records one nationality for individuals, which means that some people who are nationals of Ireland and another country (or countries) are likely to be missing from this figure.

The figure also doesn't include all UK residents who are entitled to Irish citizenship. Most people born in Northern Ireland can choose to claim Irish citizenship, as can people born elsewhere whose parents or grandparents were Irish or born in Ireland.[3]

Irish as a national identity: 2011 Census data

The 2011 Census provides more detail about people whose 'national identity' is Irish. The Census asked people how they would describe their national

2 ONS, Population of the UK by country of birth and nationality: individual country data, July 2020 to June 2021 dataset, 25 November 2021

3 Citizens Information, Entitlement to Irish citizenship, 10 March 2021.

identity, with the option to tick multiple boxes and/or write in an identity. In response:

- In England and Wales about 388,000 people (0.7% of the population) identified as Irish, either solely or in combination with other national identities. Around 349,000 people identified as solely Irish.[4]
- In Northern Ireland, 28% of the population gave Irish as at least one of their national identities (around 507,000 people), with 25% (around 457,000 people) identifying as Irish only. [5]

The number of people in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland whose national identity was Irish is considerably higher than the number of people born in Ireland. Scotland's census statistics do not break the data down in the same way.

It should be noted that the 2011 Census may not reflect the present situation; preliminary results from the 2021 Census of England and Wales are due for release later in 2022.

Constituency data

For constituency-level data on people born in Ireland, see the Commons Library's online dashboard on population by country of birth at the time of the 2011 Census.[6]

More up-to-date constituency data will be available when 2021 Census results are published (later this year for England and Wales, and in 2023 for Northern Ireland). Scotland's census will take place in 2022.

The Common Travel Area

The Common Travel Area (CTA) is a special travel zone between the Republic of Ireland and the UK, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. British and Irish citizens can travel freely within the CTA without being subject to passport controls.

CTA arrangements have existed (in various forms) since the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. Both the UK and Ireland maintain separate immigration policies but there is a significant degree of practical cooperation and policy coordination in order to ensure the security of the CTA.

4 2011 Census, Table KS202EW, via ONS Nomis

5 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Census 2011: Key statistics for Northern Ireland [PDF], Tables KS202NI and KS203NI, December 2012

6 commonslibrary.parliament.uk/constituency-statistics-country-of-birth

Irish nationals' special status in UK law

Irish nationals have a special status in UK law which is separate to and pre-dates the rights they had as EU citizens when both countries were members.

In short, the Republic of Ireland is not considered to be a 'foreign country' for the purpose of UK laws, and Irish citizens are not considered to be 'aliens'. Furthermore, Irish citizens are treated as if they have permanent immigration permission to remain in the UK from the date they take up 'ordinary residence' here.

This special status affects Irish nationals' rights across a number of areas, including eligibility for British citizenship, eligibility to vote and stand for election, and eligibility for certain welfare benefits.

Impact of Brexit

The UK and Irish Governments confirmed their intention that the Common Travel area would continue to operate without changes post-Brexit in a May 2019 Memorandum of Understanding. The commitment to continue to operate the CTA post-Brexit was also enshrined in the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, (part of the EU-UK October 2019 Withdrawal Agreement).

Irish citizens were advised by the Home Office that they did not need to apply for settled or pre-settled status to secure their residence rights in the UK. However, non-Irish and non-British family members of Irish citizens residing in the UK under EU free movement law will need to apply for status under the EU settlement scheme.

Irish people applying for settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme

Although Irish nationals did not need to apply to the EU settlement scheme to secure their residence right after the UK's withdrawal from the EU, a relatively small number applied nonetheless and were granted status.

According to quarterly statistics from the Home Office, there were **16,050** applications for settled status from Irish nationals between August 2018 and the end of December 2021. Applications from Irish nationals accounted for 3% of applications to the scheme.[7] The statistics do not distinguish between individuals, so the same person may be counted more than once if they make more than one application.

By the end of 2021, 15,420 applications from Irish nationals had been resolved. Of these:

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7 Home Office, EU Settlement Scheme quarterly statistics tables, December 2021, Statistics table EUSS_01

- 9,110 (59%) resulted in settled status
- 5,100 (33%) resulted in pre-settled status
- 490 (3%) were refused
- 720 (5%) were either withdrawn, void or invalid. [8]

These categories may double-count individuals. For example, a person's application may initially be resolved with pre-settled status being granted, and then later that person may apply for settled status and have this granted.

[8] Home Office, EU Settlement Scheme quarterly statistics tables, December 2021, Statistics table EUSS_03_UK

2 Materials

Organisations

Irish in Britain

London Irish Centre

Reports

Crosscare Migrant Project – New research report 'Ní neart go cur le chéile – Irish emigrant community experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic', 21 September 2021

Press releases

Irish in Britain

New report from Crosscare shows contribution of diaspora Irish community groups – 22 September 2021

Nothing but the same old story – racism and the GRT community. Irish in Britain Statement – 08 February 2022

Fréa – New report investigates digital technology and older Irish people in northern England – 06 May 2021

London Assembly – Mayor announces return of the capital's St Patrick's Day celebrations – 23 February 2022

Irish in Britain – Nothing but the same old story – racism and the GRT community. Irish in Britain Statement – 08 February 2022

Department for Education – British and Irish young people guaranteed continued access to education institutions – 14 July 2021

Media and Blogs

Irish in Britain

Round Table on issues facing young people in the Irish diaspora in Britain – 19 October 2021

Words matter: Jimmy Carr, public attitudes and a community maligned – 18 February 2022

Richmond Chambers – The Rights of Irish Citizens in the UK after Brexit – 27 April 2021

BBC – How the Irish shape Britain: A story of rejection and tolerance – 24 January 2021

Free Movement – How does Brexit affect Irish citizens in the UK? – 20 November 2020

Belfast Telegraph – White Irish top of wages league table: race report – 05 April 2021

RTÉ – Why do British people know so little about Ireland? – 05 Nov 2021

Telegraph – St Patrick's Day 2022: Shamrocks, snakes and how a British slave became Ireland's patron saint – 10 March 2022

London Gypsies and Travellers – Report calls for non-racist media coverage – 27 January 2022

Irish Times – Irish in Britain: 'Scotland is a home from home. London never was' – 23 January 2022

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