

**10 MYTHS ABOUT...**

# **MIGRATION & REFUGEES**

Sorting **facts** from **fiction**.

**How much do you know about global migration?**

Explore 10 common myths about migration, refugees and people seeking asylum.

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# INTRODUCTION

By the end of 2020 more than **80 million** people were forcibly displaced across the world. Of these, 29.6 million were refugees and 45.7 million were internally displaced within their country of origin.

Today, **80%** of the world's refugees are living in countries neighbouring their country of origin. This is often in developing countries. People on the move continue to be influenced by major 'push' and 'pull' factors related to security issues, such as:

- **Conflict** – internal as well as external ones – fleeing war, violence, conflict or persecution
- **Extreme weather events** and **climate shocks** on a warming planet, effecting food, water, energy and housing security
- Safe access to **health services**

Migration is a topic that generates a lot of argument and debate. This is despite the research that states migration has happened worldwide for centuries and that it has, with few exceptions, been beneficial for societies. Every country has experienced migration either sending or receiving migrants.

Across the world there are large segments of any given population who believe that migration is inevitably negative, except in specific contexts. Public sentiment on the issue seldom takes account of the evidence but is a driving force in public judgement and decision making.

Confusion is widespread on terms such as asylum seeker, refugee and migrant. These words are often spoken about in popular conversation using 'legal' and 'illegal or informal' migration.

At the heart of the phenomenon of migration are human beings in search of security, a better and safer life for their families and decent work.

This booklet explores the debate and tackles some of the surrounding myths.

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# WHY THINKING ABOUT WORLD MIGRATION MATTERS

- 1. Many people who migrate have not necessarily chosen to do so.** Forced migration is increasing as a result of civil, political, sexual orientation and religious persecution and conflict and also that of economic underdevelopment.
- 2. Through circumstance,** anyone could potentially be forced to migrate or flee.
- 3. The negative portrayal of migration and migrants has fostered anti-immigrant sentiment and action, often at the highest level.** This results in policies that seek to reduce and control migration and do little to address the needs of either migrants or host communities such as access to education, housing, food, work and healthcare.
- 4. There is a growing need** to understand the important relationship between the various security, conflict, economic, social, cultural and environmental factors that fuel migration. There is also a need to recognise and understand the reality of people denied a nationality and are stateless.
- 5. Rich or affluent countries like Ireland** have a duty to provide leadership on migration, reflecting our own history and experience.
- 6. We need to recognise** that migration is and always has been a worldwide reality and that developing countries face very particular challenges, many that are global.

## Find out more:

- Irish Network Against Racism; Anti-Racism Election Protocols for candidates, Love Not Hate campaign for hate crime legislation, Responding to Racism Guide: How to Report Racism and Where to Find Help, and more. See <https://inar.ie>
- UN Refugee Agency with case studies, video materials and local updates <https://www.unhcr.org>
- Anti-Rumours campaign resources from Doras. See: <https://doras.org/anti-rumours-campaign>
- Human rights education, anti-racist education and sustainable development blogs, debates and education resources. See: [www.developmenteducation.ie](http://www.developmenteducation.ie)
- No Hate Speech Movement Ireland campaign group materials, activities and youth work activities, led by the National Youth Council of Ireland. See <https://www.youth.ie/programmes/equality-intercultural>
- Stop Funding Hate campaign; UK-based campaign group with creative examples for tackling hate in media outlets. See <https://twitter.com/StopFundingHate>
- Explore 'The Human Rights of Refugees' and how to defend them on this online course hosted by Amnesty International. See <https://www.edx.org/course/human-rights-the-rights-of-refugees>
- For more up to date information take a look at the Refugee Council of Ireland, see <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie> and Nasc Ireland, see <https://nascireland.org>



**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face today, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace and injustice. The Goals interconnect and in order to ‘leave no one behind’, it is critical to achieve each Goal and target by 2030.**

Refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people were not included directly in a specific SDG Goal. When the SDGs were agreed in 2015, only two of the 169 targets refer to migrants and none to refugees.

Through the advocacy of individuals, civil society groups and the UN refugee agency, refugees and internally displaced people have become ‘visible’ through updating 10 separate Goals and 18 indicators. This includes:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
10. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

[MYTH 01]

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**A PERSON CAN APPLY  
FOR REFUGEE STATUS  
THROUGH **SAFE LEGAL**  
**CHANNELS****

# [FACT, BUT...]

**In the face of the most severe refugee and migration crisis since the Second World War, Europe has become one of the world's 'hotspots'.**

- In 2016 alone, the EU granted asylum to and resettled over 720,000 refugees – three times as much as Australia, Canada and the United States combined.
- Resettlement continues to offer a safe and legal pathway to those in need of international protection. Since 2015, two successful EU resettlement programmes have helped over 50,000 of the most vulnerable people find shelter in the EU.
- EU operations have saved close to 730,000 lives at sea for those looking to seek asylum.
- All vessels operating in the Mediterranean must respect applicable laws. No boats are allowed to enter Libyan territorial waters without authorisation of the Libyan authorities. That's why the EU thinks it's preferable to work with the Libyan Coast Guard to enhance their capacity to carry out search and rescue operations in their zone of responsibility, where most search and rescue incidents occur.

# [FICTION]

**Since 2014, with the ending of its agreed Mare Nostrum policy, the EU has come in for sustained criticism and the view that it is an increasingly hostile environment for migrants and asylum seekers.**

For example:

- By closing down legal routes (such as the ability to claim asylum at overseas embassies); by introducing penalties for transport companies that allow people to travel into the EU without the correct documents; and by signing treaties with its neighbours so they control migration on the EU's behalf.
- There has been no proactive state-operated sea and rescue operations (SAR) in the Central Mediterranean since 2014; 10 NGOs/ vessels/individuals are under criminal investigation for saving lives at sea; safe disembarkation has become a major concern as port closures by Italy and Malta since 2017 prompted a letter signed by several U.N. human rights rapporteurs, stating these decrees “further intensifies the climate of hostility and xenophobia against migrants.”
- The UN refugee agency takes the view that Libya does not meet the criteria for being designated as a place of safety for the purpose of disembarkation following rescue at sea. Despite this, people intercepted by the Libyan coast guard are transferred to detention centres where they are systematically exposed to random detention, inhumane conditions, torture and other ill-treatment (including rape) and random killing and exploitation.



- Many vulnerable people such as women and unaccompanied minors are among those trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean and many of these are at risk of trafficking and exploitation and are therefore entitled to immediate protection.

**Source:** Pathways to Protection and Inclusion (2017) by the Irish Refugee and Migrant Coalition. See: <http://www.irmcoalition.com>; European Parliament motion on search and rescue in the Mediterranean (2019/2755(RSP); Debunking Myths About Migration (March 2019) by European Commission.

[MYTH 02]

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**THE IRISH PUBLIC**  
**SUPPORT TAKING IN**  
**MORE REFUGEES**

# [FACT]

**Around 100 cities and municipalities across Europe have expressed their willingness to receive refugees beyond established national relocation quotas.**

This stands in contrast to a 2015 public opinion Irish Times/Ipsos MRBI poll in Ireland a number of years ago. People were asked if Ireland should offer to resettle migrants as part of an EU response to the problem in the Mediterranean 52 per cent of voters said Ireland should not offer, while 48 per cent said Ireland should.

A public opinion survey across Europe commissioned a year later by the International Rescue Committee in 2016 found that more than three quarters of Europeans sympathise with Syrian refugees arriving locally. This challenges stories gaining publicity of growing anti-immigration sentiment across the continent.

Ireland topped the poll of European countries that are most supportive of Syrian refugees with 87% of people interviewed expressing sympathy for them. The sanctuary movement is where towns, counties and cities show their support by actively welcoming and accompanying people who migrate into their communities, illustrates this wider trend.

[MYTH 03]

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**THEY ARE ONLY COMING  
HERE FOR THE SOCIAL  
PROTECTION SUPPORTS**

# [FICTION]

**This is one of the most widespread myths worldwide with frequent use of words such as ‘spongers’ and ‘freeloaders’. The myth presents a dominant image and idea of the migrant as ‘a taker’ rather than a ‘giver’.**

A two-year global study by The Lancet and University College London (UCL) in 2018 debunked many negative stereotypes of migrants and migration. It also found that myths such as the claim that migrants are an economic and health burden are actually harmful to society at large.

While the rate of international migrants almost doubled from 7.6% in 1990 to 13.4% in 2017 in high-income countries, those migrants were more likely to be students paying for education or labour migrants who made net contributions to their host’s economy.

In high-income economies, each 1% increase in migrants in the adult population was found to increase the gross domestic product per person by up to 2%.

The study revealed that international migrants constituted a “substantial proportion” of the healthcare workforce in many high-income countries.

Rather than being a burden, the report found that international migrants were more likely to bolster services by providing medical care, caring for the elderly and supporting understaffed services.

**Source:** UCL-Lancet Commission on Migration and Health: the Health of a world on the move. See [www.thelancet.com/commissions/migration-health](http://www.thelancet.com/commissions/migration-health) or for another in-depth study on the impact on the economy of migration see the OECD Migration Policy Debate series [www.oecd.org/migration/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%202.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/migration/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%202.pdf)

## [MYTH 04]

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# ASYLUM SEEKERS LIVE IN LUXURY

### OUR DUTY TO PROTECT ASYLUM SEEKERS

Internationally, people seeking asylum are known as ‘international protection applicants’. In an Irish context, the system of accommodation in place for people applying for refugee status is known as Direct Provision:

*“Direct provision is a means of meeting the basic needs of food and shelter for asylum seekers directly while their claims for refugee status are being processed rather than through full cash payments.”*

Direct provision (DP) commenced on 10 April, 2000 from which time asylum seekers have received full board accommodation and currently receive personal allowances of €38.80 for an adult and €29.80 for a child each week.

# [FICTION]

This is one of the most common myths in the UK, Italy, the US and Australia about asylum seekers. Ireland is no exception.

In Ireland, people waiting for an interview, application review or who have been granted refugee status but are unable to move out of Direct Provision are provided with basic subsistence supports such as accommodation, food, a daily expenses allowance for adults of €38.80 and €29.80 for children, education for children up to secondary level and a medical card covering prescriptions, dental and optician care, pregnancy services and children's health. Personal sanitary products are not included.

However, a Joint Committee on Justice and Equality report in 2019 noted:

- The quality of the accommodation is substandard or not fit-for-purpose. Only three of Ireland's DP centres are purpose-built, with all other premises provided by private providers, originally designed and used for other purposes, such as hostels.
- DP is not suitable for family life and children. Families often remain in centres for more than two years, spending a substantial portion of their childhood in an institutional setting which does not adequately meet their needs, development and well-being. This amounts to what has been described as "institutional poverty".
- Many people will have experienced trauma, exploitation or be escaping war or violence. In most privately-run centres, staff are often not adequately trained or qualified to manage the issues which may present.
- These findings pre-date the risks to centre residents face due to overcrowding, the inability to safely social distance and access to affordable housing during COVID-19.

## [MYTH 05]

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**DEVELOPED COUNTRIES LIKE  
IRELAND AND THE UK **ARE**  
**BEING SWAMPED** BY MIGRANTS  
FROM POOR COUNTRIES IN THE  
GLOBAL SOUTH**



**[FICTION]**

**80% of the world's refugees are living in countries neighbouring their country of origin, often in developing countries.**

At the end of 2018 around 70.8 million people were forcibly displaced across the world. Of these, 25.9 million were refugees and 41.3 million were internally displaced within their country of origin.

Over 6.7 million people have fled conflict in Syria, and many more are displaced inside the country. Turkey is the biggest refugee hosting country in the world. At the end of 2018 Turkey was providing safety to 3.6 million Syrian refugees. By December 2019 Ireland had resettled 3,788 people in five years. The UK had resettled 13,961 Syrian refugees by 2018.

It is worth noting that, on average, 3% of 'mobile' residents across 28 EU member states of working age migrate and reside in other EU member states – roughly 17 million people.

**Source:** UN Refugee Agency. See: <https://www.unhcr.org/data.html>; Eurostat. See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained>

[MYTH 06]

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**MIGRANTS ERODE  
NATIONAL IDENTITY,  
POTENTIALLY LEADING TO  
CULTURAL REPLACEMENT**

# [FICTION]

The ‘migration myth’, that cultures are automatically put under threat, is one of the most frequent myths stoking fear of ‘the other’, in particular people of other ethnic or cultural groups.

‘The Great Replacement’ is a theory that the white race and ‘western civilisation’ are under attack from non-white migration and dwindling white birth-rates, orchestrated by multicultural international elites in an attempt to undermine the integrity of ‘white life’. This is sometimes referred to by extremists as ‘white genocide’.

This conspiracy theory can now be found in much mainstream conservative politics, radio and TV shows, which can include references such as ‘coming here to take us over’, ‘demographic replacement,’ with a ‘flood of illegals’.

Attempts by nationalist groups to use the fear of cultural ‘replacement’ in recent years is about feelings more than facts. In *The New Statesman*, Eleanor Penny noted:

*“The conspiracy is less about levelling a statistically robust world picture, and more about telegraphing a sense of global white victimhood around which to arrange a sense of political outrage. It’s about mobilising an age-old panic to build a case for extreme racial violence.”*

Countries have experienced many benefits from migration across continents and countries for centuries. This is illustrated by the Irish in the US and how successful companies such as Google, Intel, PayPal, eBay and Yahoo! were co-founded by migrants. Yet culture ‘replacement’ myths survive, fuelled by rising local and international inequalities, by protest votes against traditional party politics and by extremist nationalist sentiment crossing into mainstream politics.

**Source:** The deadly myth of the “Great Replacement” by Eleanor Penny *New Statesman*, August 9, 2019; Southern Poverty Law Center, US; International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

[MYTH 07]

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**FORCEFUL  
RESTRICTIONS ON  
MIGRATION HAVE  
ACTUALLY WORKED**

# [FICTION]

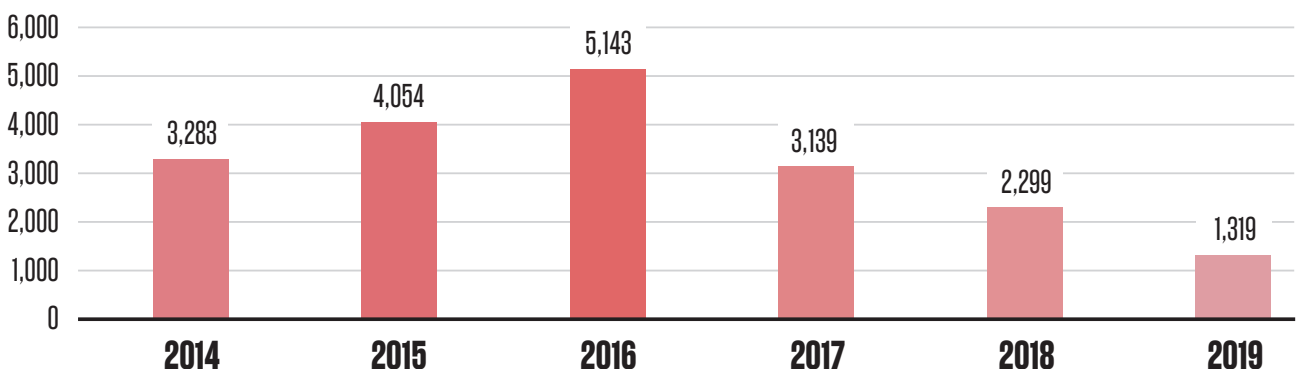
Migration policies do not stop people leaving their home towns, cities or countries. Instead, these policies often force people to take more precarious and dangerous routes. The construction of walls, the development of military measures to control borders and attempts to block migrants before they have left their country create serious humanitarian issues. For example, according to the UN Refugee Agency, in 2018 2,299 people have drowned or disappeared while trying to cross the Mediterranean and a further 1,319 in 2019.

The Mediterranean has claimed the lives of at least 19,164 migrants since 2014.

The majority of these people flee conflict zones or countries where rights are violated in one way or another (for example, Eritrea, Syria, or Libya). Despite this, many European states focus on their main objective: preventing people from accessing their territory. The rescue and protection of migrants appear to be a secondary concern in this scenario.

## Number of Dead or Missing Migrants in the Mediterranean Sea

(on January 27th 2020)



**Source:** Desperate Journeys (2019) UNHCR/IOM; Frontexit: Europe is at War Against an Imaginary Enemy (2015) by Migreurop Network.

See <https://missingmigrants.iom.int>

[MYTH 08]

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**THE HOUSING AND HEALTH  
CRISIS IN EUROPE IS  
EXACERBATED BY MIGRANTS  
AND ASYLUM SEEKERS**

# [FICTION]

## **In recent years, housing costs have risen faster than incomes.**

Between June 2014 and June 2019, house prices and rents on new tenancies both increased by over 40 per cent. The price growth reflects a growth in demand for housing services, which has not been met by growth in supply. Despite the increase in house prices, the supply response has been muted. According to the Central Bank, “while supply is beginning to increase, fewer units were produced in 2018 than in 1995, when real house prices were less than 40 per cent of their current level.”

And yet up to 47,000 homes will need to be built each year to address the housing crisis in Ireland, according to 2020 report by property economist Ronan Lyons and Irish Institutional Property (IIP). In this context, migrants are also less likely than Irish nationals to have access to local authority housing: 11 per cent of Irish households are local authority tenants compared to 5 per cent of non-Irish households.

In terms of healthcare, rather than being a burden to healthcare systems, migrants were more likely to bolster services by providing medical care, caring for older people, teaching and supporting understaffed services, as reported in the 2018 UCL-Lancet Commission study. For example, Ireland’s dependence on foreign-trained doctors also happens to be the third highest among western countries after Israel and New Zealand, at 42.3 per cent, according to the *Health at a Glance* report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

## [MYTH 09]

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**ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE  
SUPPOSED TO SEEK ASYLUM  
IN THE **FIRST COUNTRY**  
**THEY ENTERED** (OTHERWISE  
THEY BECOME ECONOMIC  
MIGRANTS)**



# [FICTION]

Under the UN Refugee Convention, people can legitimately make a claim for asylum in Ireland after passing through other “safe” countries. The ‘Dublin III’ European Regulations prevent asylum seekers being sent from one country to another without any state taking responsibility for their application. Rather than penalise asylum-seekers when they cross borders, the Regulations set out a sliding scale of criteria that helps authorities establish which country is responsible for each individual asylum-seeker:

- **Family links.** If the applicant is not already in the country deemed responsible, the applicant can be transferred to that country. They also allow for discretionary transfers, where States agree, in order to unite family members.
- **Unaccompanied minors,** where they have no family members in the EU or associated States, may apply for asylum in the country in which they are at the time.
- **Legal and illegal entry.** Once an asylum-seeker crosses a border illegally into a country covered by the Regulations, that country will normally be deemed **responsible** if there are no family members in another country. If, however after 7 months they move to another country and live there for a minimum of 5 months before applying for asylum, then the second country will be the one responsible for the application.
- **Some countries are not deemed suitable for returnees** because of deficiencies in that country’s asylum system. States have an obligation not to transfer asylum-seekers to other member states where they would face inhuman or degrading treatment.

**Source:** FAQs, UN Refugee Agency Ireland. See, [www.unhcr.org/en-ie](http://www.unhcr.org/en-ie)

## [MYTH 10]

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**THE HIGH REFUSAL RATE  
SHOWS THAT MOST ASYLUM  
SEEKERS ARE “BOGUS”**

# [FICTION]

The legal situation is that anyone seeking asylum is not ‘bogus’ unless proven otherwise. There may be some confusion around the legal restrictions of what ‘refugee’ means and may feel themselves to be refugees until they get to the court of their destination country.

It is worth restating in an era where people who have a well-founded fear of being persecuted, are displaced from their country of origin and are seeking refuge are subjected to increasingly charged labels of being ‘bogus’ or ‘illegal’. Such labels are routinely used by some tabloid newspapers and by many politicians in the US, Europe and Australia, who like to present most refugees as fraudulent ‘economic migrants’.

In 2018, Ireland had the lowest rate of refusal to applications from asylum seekers of any of the EU’s 28 member states. Only 15% of first-time decisions on asylum applications in Ireland were rejected, compared to an EU average of 63%. This contrasts with Ireland’s record between 2008 and 2016, where 87% of applications were rejected and 13% were accepted.

1,275 asylum seekers in the Republic were granted protection in 2018, which included awarding of refugee status, subsidiary protection (which recognises that they face considerable risk if returned to their former country), permission to stay in Ireland on humanitarian grounds and individuals granted refugee status under a resettlement programme (the overwhelming majority were Syrians).

Immigration law solicitor Wendy Lyon takes suggestions of ‘bogus’ claims further: ‘whether these applicants were rightly or wrongly refused international protection, one can hardly doubt their reasons for seeking it’.

**Source:** Noel Grealish’s views of asylum seekers are based on myth by Wendy Lyon (Sept 18, 2019), The Irish Times. See [www.irishtimes.com/opinion/noel-grealish-s-views-of-asylum-seekers-are-based-on-myth-1.4021292](http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/noel-grealish-s-views-of-asylum-seekers-are-based-on-myth-1.4021292)



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# CREDITS

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