

EMN IRELAND MIGRATION MEMO #2: What caused the large increase in international protection applications in Ireland in 2022?

This EMN Ireland Migration Memo summarises findings from the [ESRI Report 'Explaining Trends in International Protection Applications in Ireland \(2022\)](#) which examined potential drivers behind the increase in international protection applications in Ireland between January and June 2022. This Migration Memo was prepared by Keire Murphy and Dervla Potter. For more information on EMN publications visit www.emn.ie or email emn.ireland@esri.ie.

[EMN Ireland](#) is the Irish National Contact Point of the [European Migration Network](#) and is located in the [Economic and Social Research Institute \(ESRI\)](#).

THE ISSUE

In 2022, after Ireland emerged from COVID-related restrictions, 13,651 [international protection](#) applications (also known as asylum applications) were lodged, representing a 186% increase from 2019 (the last comparable year before Covid-19). No single nationality dominated the increase, making it unclear why such an increase had occurred. The trend was unusual because, while applications also increased in the EU as a whole, the relative increase in Ireland was much larger, which is historically uncommon, with Ireland largely insulated from increases in Europe over the last decade (see figure 1). Applications remained close to this historically high rate in 2023, with a total of [13,277 applications](#). While Ireland has seen many arrivals from Ukraine following the Russian invasion, most of these people reside under the Temporary Protection Directive and are not counted in asylum statistics and are not included in the ESRI Report summarised in this Memo.

WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO THE INCREASE IN APPLICATIONS IN 2022?

The research identified seven factors likely to have contributed to the increase in applications. No individual factor can fully explain the increase in the first six months of 2022, instead the increase must be interpreted as resulting from a combination of the factors together. The research divides factors into those which likely explained the high number of applications, and those that led to Ireland seeing a greater proportional increase than the UK or the EU as a whole.

Factors explaining the absolute increase:

- **Post Covid-19 catch up migration:** Travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic suppressed migration. The increase in applications for international protection in Ireland, particularly from February 2022 onwards, may therefore be explained as a form of catch-up migration. In addition, the pandemic and the measures to combat it had significant economic and political impacts in many countries of origin and economic impacts in countries of first asylum were often worse for migrants due to a lack of social protection.
- **Conditions in countries of origin:** Among the top ten countries of origin for asylum applicants in Ireland in 2022, many have seen increased conflict in recent years. The takeover by the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine are the clearest examples. The international knock-on effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on socio-economic conditions in many other countries may be contributing to the increase.

Factors explaining the proportional increase in Ireland:

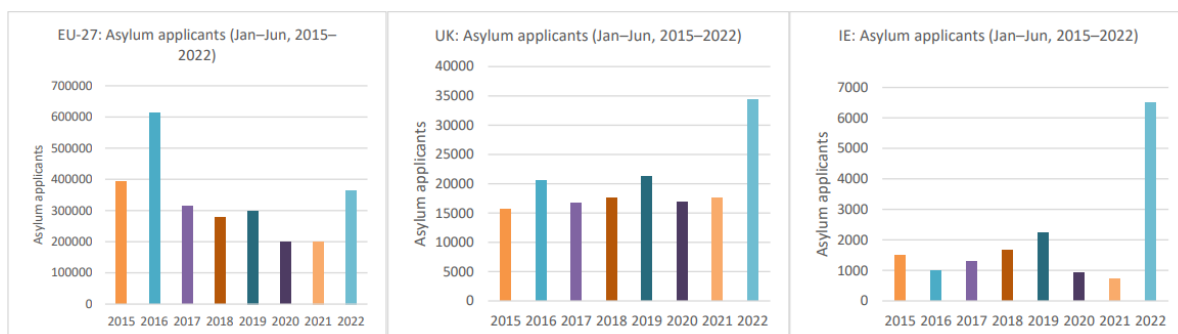
- **UK policy changes:** For some nationalities (which have traditionally applied in both Ireland and the UK) there does seem to be a deflection effect from the UK. However, asylum applications in the UK are largely driven by different nationalities and many nationalities increased both in the UK and in Ireland, indicating that this may not be a main or sole driver of the increase.
- **Secondary movements of beneficiaries of international protection from other EU Member States:** There has been an increase in beneficiaries of international protection in other EU Member States travelling to Ireland in recent years. While the reasons for this are under-researched, family connections and conditions in other countries are often cited as the reasons for secondary movements. In July 2022, the Department of Justice [introduced visa requirements for people with refugee status](#) travelling to

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Ireland, meaning that they can no longer travel visa-free to Ireland with their Convention Travel Document.

- **Social network effects:** Social networks have consistently been found to have the greatest impact on destination selection in other contexts. Growing communities of people from certain countries of origin in Ireland is therefore likely to have a long-term impact on destination choice and ability to travel.
- **Conditions in and perceptions of Ireland:** Labour market shortages in Ireland and a lack of flexibility in the Irish employment permits system was identified as a potential factor in the increase. In addition, a generally positive perception of Ireland as having a welcoming culture and being a safe country was found to be potentially influential on decision-making. The research concluded that it was very unlikely that specific reception or integration policies were a factor in the increase.
- **Intervening obstacles and routes to Ireland:** While intervening obstacles (e.g. distance and visa requirements) and routes are likely to be important factors given Ireland’s location, it is difficult to assess the impact that this has had on international protection application numbers given limited data.

FIGURE 1: ASYLUM APPLICANTS IN EU-27 MEMBER STATES, UK AND IRELAND FOR JANUARY TO JUNE 2015-2022)



Sources: Eurostat. Asylum applicants by type of applicant, citizenship, age and sex – monthly data (rounded) [MIGR_ASYAPPCTZM]. Data extracted 27 September 2022. Figures for first-time applicants used. Home Office, Immigration Statistics, year ending June 2022, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-statistics-year-ending-june-2022; IPO, ‘Statistics’, www.ipa.gov.ie/en/ipa/pages/statistics. Correspondence with the IPO, July 2022.

Note: UK figures include main applicant and dependants for purposes of comparability. The EU figures include Ireland. However, as Ireland has only made up less than 1 per cent of EU applications up to 2021 and just below 2 per cent in 2022, the general trend remains the same. Please also note different scales on the Y axes of charts.

To what extent do international protection applicants choose where to seek protection?

Migration, and particularly forced migration, is highly complex. Therefore, understanding the factors that cause fluctuations in international protection applications is difficult. Most refugees are hosted in low or middle income (often neighbouring) countries and not all people who migrate to seek protection do so with particular countries in mind, with many having little or no choice in where they end up. Multiple factors along the journey therefore determine where individuals seek protection. Some of those that emerged from the literature are: social networks (including chance encounters on the journey), opportunities to migrate, and perceptions of destination countries and information sources. For more on this, [read Chapter 3](#) of the report.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The **increase in 2022 was caused by a variety of factors** that affected both absolute numbers and the proportion of applications made in Ireland.
- While **some drivers identified were likely temporary, others are likely to be longer-term.** The research found that trends in asylum applications are largely dependent on conditions and actors outside of Ireland, which makes it difficult to predict trends in applications into the future. This also means that flexible reception systems are key to responding to this type of migration.

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