

Ireland

The sharp increase in migration inflows over the past decade (from 27 800 in 2000 to over 42 400 in 2003 and 88 900 in 2006) appears to have largely stabilised, with a slight increase registered in 2007, to 89 500. The recession in the Irish economy resulted in severe deterioration of the labour market conditions in the first half of 2008, which further lowered immigration. According to national reports, the migration inflow decreased to 84 000 in April 2008, and further decreased by 2 700 in April 2009. At the same time, the number of emigrants rose more than 40% to 65 100, leading to the first negative net migration in Ireland since 1995.

Most (60%) immigrants in 2007 came from new EU member states, about 12% from the old EU excluding the United Kingdom, 7% from the United Kingdom, 3% from the USA. The economic crisis reduced the inflow of labor migrants from the new EU member states in 2008 (to 34 000 from 53 000 in 2007). Inflows in 2009 were even lower; the number of new social security numbers issued to citizens of the 8 new EU countries fell 61% in the first 9 months of 2009 compared to the same period in 2008.

While Ireland fully opened its labor market for immigrants from all ten new EU member countries in 2004, the large inflow of migrants from the EU-10 has caused the government to maintain restrictions of access to the labor market for Romanian and Bulgarian workers.

Irish policy has been to meet labor needs from primarily within the EU, but flows continued, with 2007 seeing the highest inflows of non-EU nationals. Non-EU nationals account for almost half of the foreign workforce in Ireland, and are overrepresented in lower skilled sectors.

The largest group among the 65 100 people leaving Ireland from 2008 to 2009 were nationals from the EU-10 (30 100), followed by 18 400 Irish nationals.

The system of labor migration was altered in 2007. The new system provides a 'Green Card' for positions with an annual salary of EUR 60 000 or more in any sector or for positions with an annual salary ranging from EUR 30-60 000 in occupations with skill shortage; this grants permanent residence after 2 years. A limited work permit scheme and a revised intra-company transfer scheme were also implemented.

However, the economic crisis led the government to impose restrictions in June 2009. Employers must advertise the vacancy for longer than in the past; renewals are also subject to a labour market test; and permits for most low-paid jobs (salaries under EUR 30 000) and for domestic workers and truck drivers will no longer be issued. Dozens of occupations, particularly in healthcare and financial services, have been removed from the shortage list. Spouses of work permit holders are now required to apply for their own employment permits if they wish to work.

A revised Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill passed in 2008. 'Long-term resident' status can be granted after 5 years, conferring the same public benefits and services as those for Irish citizens. The bill streamlines the deportation process and restricts access to public services for irregular migrants. The bill also transposes the EU asylum procedures directive.

Ireland appointed a new Minister of State for Integration policy issues. This new Junior Ministry spans the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and was allocated EUR 9 million for 2008.

The rapid growth of asylum seekers in the early 2000s has ceased. In 2007, 4 000 asylum seekers were registered, mainly from Nigeria (25% in 2007), Iraq, China and Pakistan.

The number of irregular immigrants is estimated to be around 30 000. A new scheme was announced in September 2009 for non-EEA migrant workers who have lost legal status for reasons beyond their control, such as the non-renewal of their working permits or deception by their employers. They have four months to prove a legitimate job. Several thousand workers are expected to benefit from this scheme.

Further information:

<http://www.inis.gov.ie/>

<http://www.entemp.ie/labour/workpermits/>

<http://www.ria.gov.ie/>