

Migrant Population

**Sr Stanislaus Kennedy is
co-founder of Focus Ireland**

Ireland is a nation that understands migration. For decades, we as a people have sought new lives outside Ireland that would offer us the potential to grow and prosper. Every family in Ireland knows this process. We all have a brother, sister, uncle, aunt or indeed a child who has made a life in many other locations around the world. This Irish experience is the lens through which we must view the phenomena of migration as it impacts Ireland.

The aims of those who have recently come to Ireland are the same as those of every Irish generation. Those in tents in Dublin city centre, refused accommodation by the government and left to fend for themselves, are no different than generations of the young Irish who arrived in Liverpool, Boston or Sydney in search of a fresh start. But the men, women and children who arrive in Ireland now are often fleeing active, violent and suffocating conflict and human rights abuses. They are coming from Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Palestine, Ukraine and other locations around the globe without safety and peace.

That we have reached a crossroads is undeniable, but it is not the crossroads that many would have



you believe. It is not a time of saying, 'That's it, we can't do any more', and it is definitely not a time for intimidation, abuse, protesting outside where people are living or spreading lies and misinformation about those who come here. The crossroads we are at as a country is in how we go forward in our response to migration. Do we bury our heads in the sand and hope it will go away, or do we set out some truths for the future?

1) Migration, not just in Ireland but in Europe and globally, is a fact of life. It may ebb and flow depending on global issues, but overall it is part of the fabric of life in our countries and communities.



Tents pitched by migrant asylum seekers or people seeking international protection along banks of Grand Canal, May 2024

2) Those who migrate to Ireland, in whatever way, are net contributors to this country. Viewing things through the narrow lens of economics may feel coarse to some, but it is often the language of policy makers and politicians, and they must adhere to the fact that migration is an essential and net positive reality.

3) We have for too long reacted to migration in Ireland as opposed to planning for it. We have failed to build the necessary infrastructure to respond to migration, leading then to instances where our emergency responses become exhausted and tensions rise in communities. We must build an infrastructure of welcome in

Irish communities that recognises that we cannot just place people in local communities and hope for the best but must guide that process so that community tensions can be avoided.

4) The landscape of public attitudes to migration in Ireland is under attack from some who seek to divide communities and vilify migrants as a handy scapegoat for all of society's challenges. These voices do not have the best interests of Irish communities at heart and are to be resisted within communities.

5) Political voices and representatives too must resist the temptation to delve into populism in the hope of winning an extra few votes. Polling shows that while migration is a significant topic of interest among voters in Ireland, attitudes to migration on the most part remain incredibly positive. Politicians would do well to not underestimate the desire for positive approaches to migration that exists in the Irish voting public, as well as the public's ability to see a cynical shift to anti-immigration sentiment as elections loom for what it is.

I have had the privilege of working alongside both Ireland's homeless and migrant populations with Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland for decades now. I believe that we make progress not by dividing into 'us' and 'them', but by making the conscious choice to progress as 'we'. We share a common and wonderful connection that transcends borders, religions and skin colour. This shared humanity is the star we must follow to guide our way in any difficulty.