



PODCAST 3

HOW DOES MULTICULTURALISM AFFECT SOCIAL SOLIDARITY IN IRELAND?



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Welcome to today's podcast ! In this episode we will explore how multiculturalism affects social solidarity in Ireland. From small rural towns to the bustling streets of Dublin, Ireland has transformed into a multicultural society, but what does that mean for unity and social cohesion? Let's unpack it together.


Ireland has long been known for its rich cultural heritage, deeply rooted in Celtic traditions, Catholicism, and a strong sense of community. But in the past few decades, immigration has changed the face of the country. According to the 2022 Census, over 20% of the Irish population is now made up of people from diverse backgrounds, including Polish, Nigerian, Indian, Brazilian, and Syrian communities.

This diversity enriches Irish society, but how does it impact social solidarity?

Polish people form the largest immigrant group in Ireland. According to the 2016 Census, there were over 120,000 Polish nationals living in Ireland, making up approximately 2.5% of the total population. While the population has fluctuated somewhat, the Polish community remains the largest non-Irish nationality group in the country.

Poland's entry into the European Union in 2004 opened up opportunities for Polish citizens to freely move and work across EU member states.

Ireland, which had a booming economy at the time, was one of the countries that welcomed Polish migrants due to the demand for labor in various sectors.




The economic boom, alongside a shortage of workers in industries like construction, agriculture, hospitality, and healthcare, made Ireland an attractive destination for Polish people seeking employment and better living standards.

While new arrivals continue, many Polish migrants who came during the EU enlargement have settled in Ireland long-term, contributing to a vibrant community. Second-generation Polish Irish children are increasingly a part of Irish society, creating lasting cultural ties.

Polish entrepreneurs have also established businesses, such as grocery stores, cafes, and restaurants, often serving the local Polish community but also contributing to the multicultural fabric of Ireland. Polish-owned businesses are now a common sight in many towns and cities which strengthens multiculturalism across Ireland.

Migrants from all cultures have contributed to Ireland's cultural diversity. New food, music, and art have found their place in Irish culture, with many cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and performances being part of the broader Irish cultural landscape.

Multiculturalism has brought a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and traditions to Ireland. This has contributed to a broader understanding and appreciation of different ways of life, helping to promote greater tolerance and inclusivity.




Immigration, especially from other EU countries, has contributed significantly to the Irish economy, filling important gaps in the labor market, particularly in sectors such as construction, hospitality, healthcare, and technology. This economic benefit can contribute to social solidarity by reinforcing a sense of shared prosperity and common interest.

As Ireland becomes more multicultural, the country is more connected to global issues and movements. This can increase empathy and solidarity not just among people in Ireland but also with communities around the world, as citizens may feel more connected to global human rights issues, migration, and international collaboration.

New communities often bring new perspectives to political and social issues. In some cases, multiculturalism has led to greater civic engagement and participation, with minority groups becoming active in social activism, local governance, and advocacy for rights, thus strengthening social cohesion in certain areas.

While Ireland has generally been a welcoming country, migrants have sometimes faced discrimination and prejudice. Instances of racism and xenophobia, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, have been reported.



Those who migrate to Ireland may face discrimination, racism, and exclusion from the wider society. These experiences can undermine trust in social institutions and alienate marginalized communities. Discrimination in employment, housing, and education can contribute to the perception of inequality, thereby weakening social solidarity and cohesion.

Polish people, along with other migrant groups, have been subjected to stereotypes and negative media portrayals, which can affect their sense of belonging. The 2008 recession saw an uptick in anti-immigrant rhetoric, with Polish workers occasionally being scapegoated for the country's economic difficulties.

A report by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission found that racism remains an issue in Ireland, with some immigrants experiencing bias in housing, employment, and policing.

Multiculturalism can encourage greater understanding however, it can also lead to social fragmentation. As new groups settle in Ireland, they may face challenges in integrating into the broader society.

This can sometimes lead to the development of ethnic enclaves, where people of similar backgrounds live and socialize with little interaction with the majority population. Such segregation can undermine social solidarity by fostering a sense of "us vs. them."

Multiculturalism can sometimes challenge national identity and cultural norms, leading to tensions between those who feel that Irish culture is being diluted and those who advocate for a more inclusive, globalized identity. In some cases, this has given rise to nationalist sentiments or anti-immigrant rhetoric, which can threaten social cohesion.

Ireland's infrastructure and social services, such as healthcare, housing, and education, have sometimes struggled to keep up with the demands of a growing and more diverse population. If immigrants feel excluded from access to these services or face barriers in integrating into Irish society, it can lead to feelings of alienation and frustration, eroding solidarity between different groups in society.

So, how do we ensure that multiculturalism strengthens rather than weakens social solidarity?

One of the major steps that Ireland is taking is through introducing the Migrant Integration Strategy 2021-2027 which is a key governmental initiative designed to promote the integration of migrants into Irish society. It focuses on enhancing opportunities for migrants to participate fully in social, cultural, economic, and political life, while also addressing challenges that they may face in areas such as language barriers, employment, and social inclusion.



The Migrant Integration Strategy includes mechanisms for monitoring progress and assessing the effectiveness of the actions taken. The implementation of the strategy is overseen by a Monitoring and Coordination Committee, chaired by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This committee includes senior officials from government departments and agencies, as well as representatives from civil society organizations. It meets three times a year to examine and report on issues concerning integration.

The strategy sets out several high-level objectives aimed at improving migrant integration across various aspects of life in Ireland. These include:

- Encouraging equal access to services and opportunities for migrants, fostering a sense of belonging and participation.
- Ensuring migrants, especially those who may have limited proficiency in English or Irish, can access language support and develop the necessary skills to engage effectively with society.
- Facilitating migrants' entry into the workforce, promoting equal opportunities in employment, and combating discrimination in the labor market.
- Encouraging greater interaction between migrant and host communities to reduce social isolation and foster cohesion.
- Supporting migrants' participation in civic life, including political participation and involvement in decision-making processes.
- Ensuring that migrant children and adults have access to quality education, as this is a key factor in their long-term integration into society.

The long-term vision of the Migrant Integration Strategy is to make Ireland a welcoming society where migrants feel empowered to contribute to all aspects of community life. This includes the creation of a positive public narrative around migration, as well as encouraging mutual respect and understanding between migrant and non-migrant populations. Through this strategy, Ireland aims to foster a more inclusive, diverse, and cohesive society where everyone, regardless of their background, can contribute and feel valued.

The strategy emphasizes that migrant integration is not the responsibility of any single department or agency. Instead, it encourages a whole-of-government approach, with multiple sectors including education, employment, housing, health, justice and other departments to work together to ensure that migrants are supported in every aspect of their lives.

Recognizing the diversity of migrants in Ireland, the strategy considers the specific needs of various groups, including:

- Refugees and asylum seekers
- EU and non-EU migrants
- Children of migrant parents
- Migrants with disabilities or those facing other social disadvantages

Overall, the effect of multiculturalism on social solidarity in Ireland is complex. It brings many opportunities for cultural enrichment and economic development, but also presents challenges in terms of integration, social cohesion, and national identity.

The key to maintaining social solidarity in a multicultural Ireland lies in policies that promote equality, inclusivity, and mutual respect, as well as efforts to combat discrimination and racism. The capacity of Irish society to embrace multiculturalism while maintaining a sense of shared values and belonging will ultimately determine the strength of its social solidarity in the future.

Thank you for tuning into today's podcast. If you would like to learn more about social solidarity please like and subscribe !

See you next time !



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