

Migration Narratives in Europe

A Social Media Intelligence Study

Country report for the Republic of Ireland



A Bakamo Public  **Project for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**

- 2019 -

Context of the Irish migration discourse

- The Republic of Ireland has been a member of the European Community since 1973, with a population of 4,628,949 in 2015. At its peak, official **asylum seekers in the country made up 0.13% of the population**.^{*} Such a figure reflects that, compared to other EU countries, Ireland does not have a pressing migration problem.
- Public social media conversation in Ireland around migration in one year consists of ~525,600 posts. Compared to population size, **the conversation on migration in Ireland is the 6th largest in the EU**.
- The Irish government aims to increase domestic population by 1 million through migration, and launched “**Project Ireland 2040**” to prepare local infrastructure to meet elevated needs.
- Overall, Irish people are welcoming to refugees and migrants and tend to express **sympathy toward migrants** on public social media platforms.



^{*}Source: europarl.europa.eu



Introduction | IE

Sympathy Towards Migrants with Few Naysayers

Ireland hosts a very small number of refugees and does not face a pressing migration problem. Most people express pro-migrant sentiment in the public social media space, reflecting refugees' hardships and the potential methods to support them once they arrive in Ireland.

The historical heritage of Irish immigration plays a key part in this sympathy, as many Irish take pride in reciprocating the help their compatriots received when fleeing from the Great Famine. Culturally, while Muslim influx is feared by some to deteriorate European and Catholic values, many Irish oppose and claim that openness is part of the local identity.

Although it appears that immigration can be an effective tool to boost local economy, the government's goal to sooth the country's approaching demographic crisis, manifested in 'Project Ireland 2040', triggers fear that the strategy favours immigrants instead of locals.

Sympathy rooted in the history of Irish emigration



Campaigns to integrate refugees to the Irish labour market



All images represented in this report appeared as attachments to posts on public social media platforms, and are used here as illustrations of the public online conversation.



Key Findings | IE

How and where do Irish discuss migration in the social media space?

Size of Pan-European Narratives

Humanitarianism is the biggest narrative in Ireland, with a dominantly pro-migrant approach. Security and long-term integration are also widely discussed, often in a pro-migrant context.

Local Issues

Consequences of **Brexit**, increased openness to migrants due to **Irish emigration** history and changing approach to **abortion** are topics unique to the Irish discussion around migration.

EU & Domestic Politics

Irish tend to perceive **migration-related security risks as an EU responsibility, and less of a domestic obligation**. Domestic issues are mainly discussed in relation to local politics.

Discussion Tone

Although majority of the discourse on migration in Ireland takes place in a **reserved** manner, certain issues trigger vigorous conversations in each narrative.

Conversation Channels

The majority of the discussion takes place on **Twitter**. Within a sea of voices, content triggering highest engagement comes from journalists.

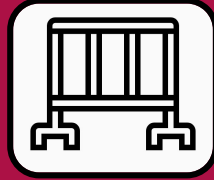


Key Findings | IE

Pan-European Narratives in the Irish Context



Many Irish are open to **actively supporting** refugees and migrants, a position heavily influenced by a sense of empathy rooted in the country's emigrant heritage.



Concern about **crimes** committed by migrants is present, but people also point out that Irish are not innocent of such crimes either. Pro-migrant voices also emphasize the **security issues faced by migrants**.



Ireland aims to sooth demographic issues by actively supporting long-term integration at the governmental and institutional level alike, and celebrates **successful integration of migrants**.



While Muslim influx is feared to deteriorate European and Catholic values, many Irish claim that **openness to others is part of their local culture**.



Some are outraged that the migrant issue is managed before local homelessness, while others find **no economic drawbacks in the presence of migrants**. Some even call out the hypocrisy of blaming local economic problems on migration.

+ *Pan-European Narratives in Ireland*

1.



Pan-European Narratives | IE

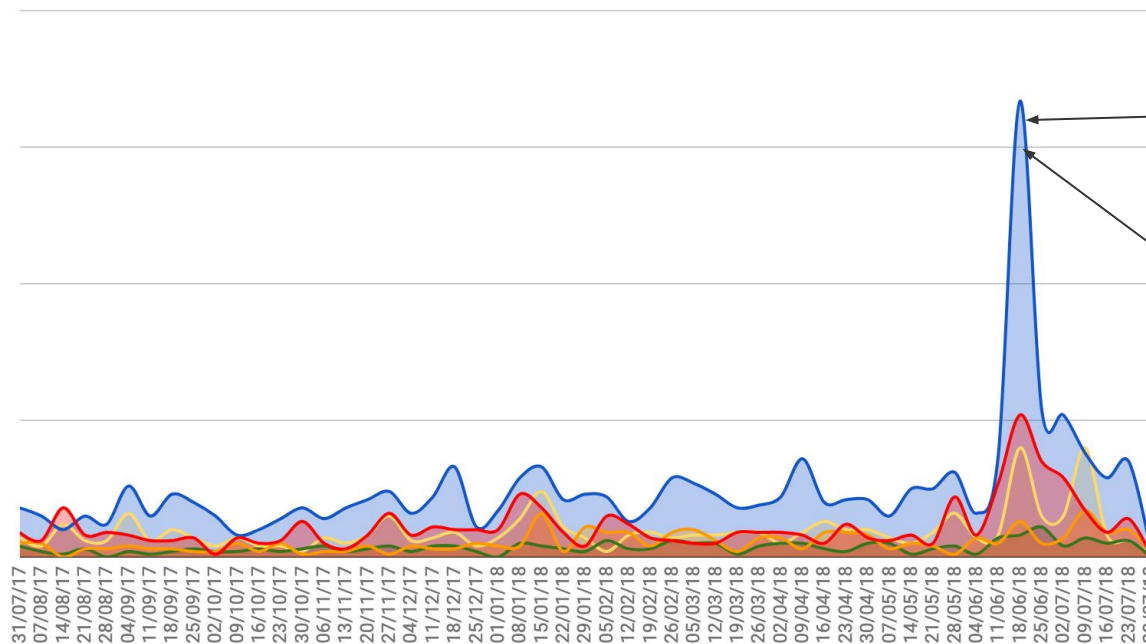
The shape of the migration discourse

People posting on Irish public social media platforms express an overall **pro-migrant** stance. This approach is particularly evident on occasions like the World Refugee Day, when people express their support and openness towards migrants in Ireland.

Family is a key value in Irish culture. Consequently, media reporting on the Trump administration's child separation practices appear to be a strong trigger for Irish people – pushing them to engage in conversations around migration.

■ Demographics ■ Economy ■ Humanitarianism ■ Identity ■ Security

Results:
~525,000



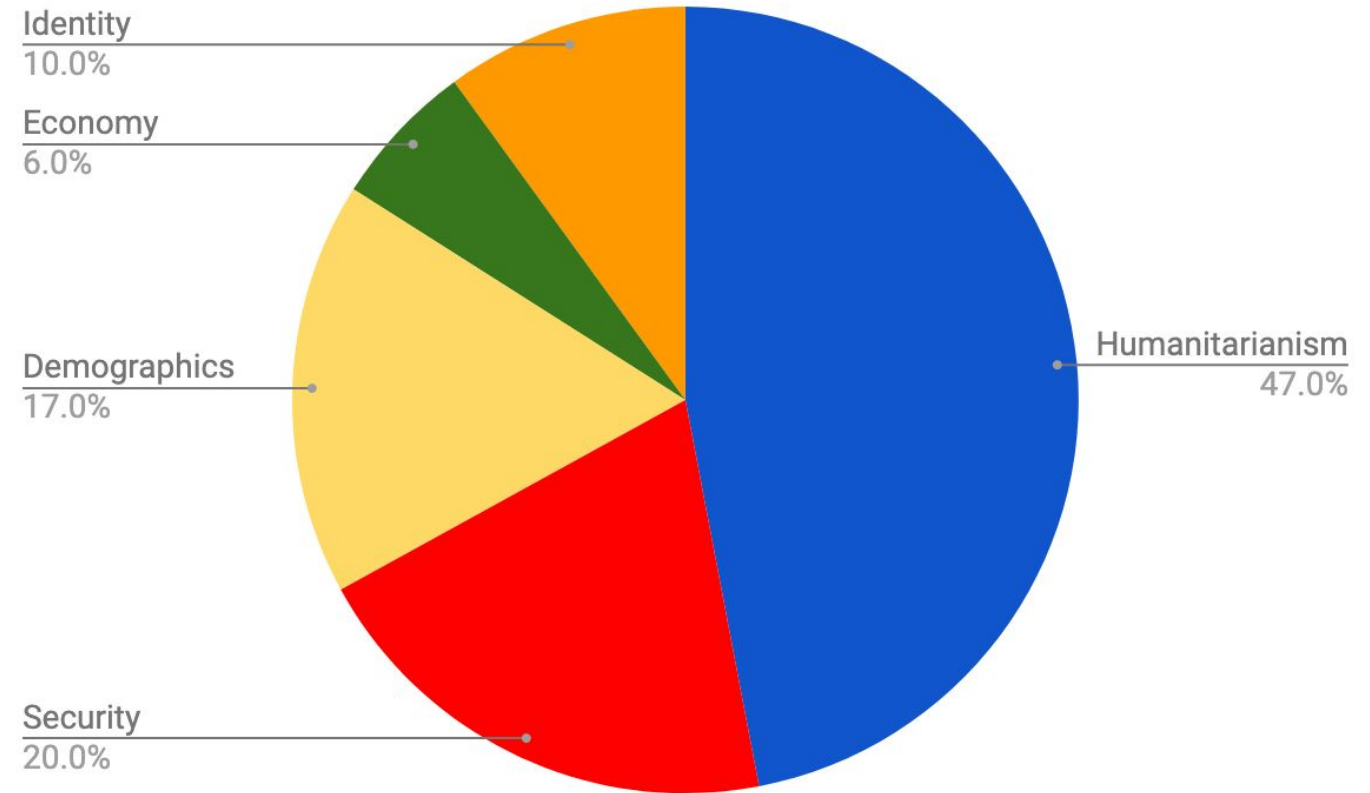
#RefugeeWeek2018
#**WorldRefugeeDay**
#StandWithRefugees

Irish people condemn **Trump** and his government for **separating immigrant children** from their families

Pan-European Narratives | IE

Calls for More Humanity Around Migration

Humanitarianism is the strongest narrative in the migration discussion, followed by **security** and **demographics**.



Pan-European Narratives | IE

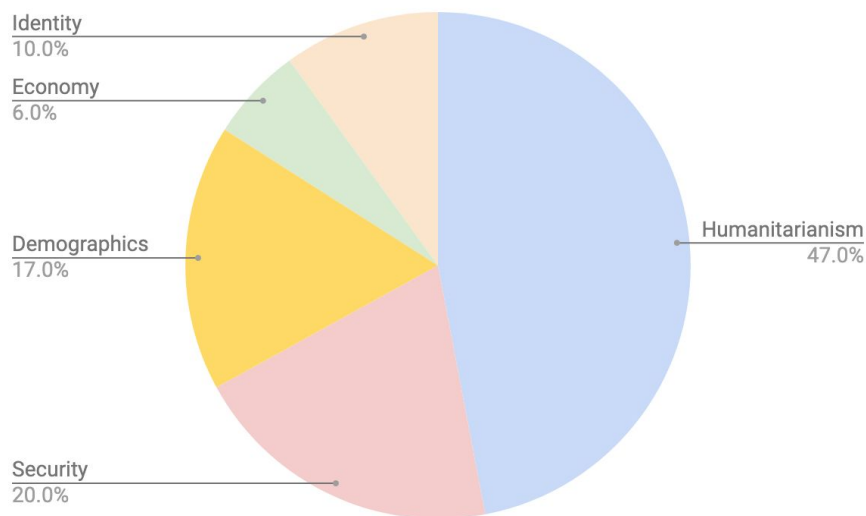
Demographics (1)

As a proof of feasible long-term integration, Irish people proudly share **migrant success stories**. Furthermore, many Irish argue that immigration is key to a prospering local economy.

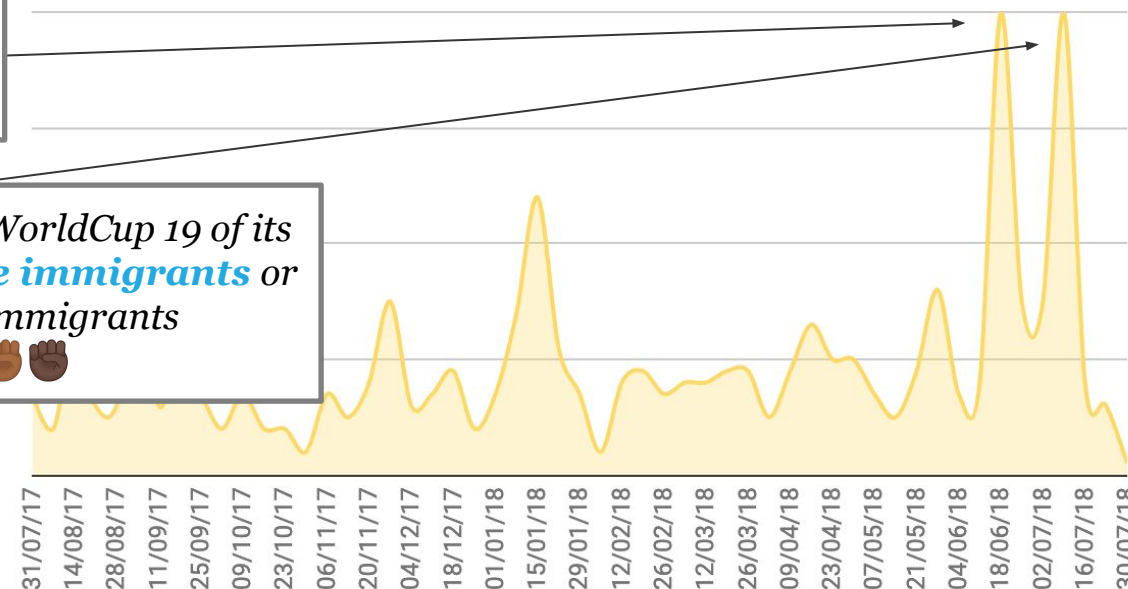
However, the government's "**Ireland 2040**" strategy triggers a slight anti-immigrant sentiment: while the program aims to soothe Ireland's approaching demographic crisis, some people argue that the strategy supports immigrants more than locals.

Results:
~90,000 (17%)

Success stories of integration shared on
#WorldRefugeeDay



France just won the #WorldCup 19 of its
team's **23 players are immigrants** or
the children of immigrants



Demographics

Pan-European Narratives | IE

Demographics (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Scepticism for the government strategy 'Ireland 2040' to accommodate 1 million population growth

RT @GenIdentityIrl: According to unelected Neale Richmond, immigrants will soon make up 1/5 of the country. Currently the figure is 810,000 or 17.3%. One of the highest percentages in the E.U. **Project Ireland 2040 seems to be taking shape sooner than we think** #ireland2040

Those new **classrooms will be built to the highest standards for the children of the million migrants coming to Ireland up to 2040!** **not for us**

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Success stories of integration are widely discussed

Today we're marking #WorldRefugeeDay by looking back at some of the @newtotheparish **stories of the impressive women and men who have come to Ireland as refugees.** First up is Malak Bouod from Libya who came here in 2014 to train as a pilot

Migrants are the backbone of a **functioning economy**

RT @devex: "If you're concerned about **migration it's really a good investment to make countries work** so that people can eat."

Pan-European Narratives | IE

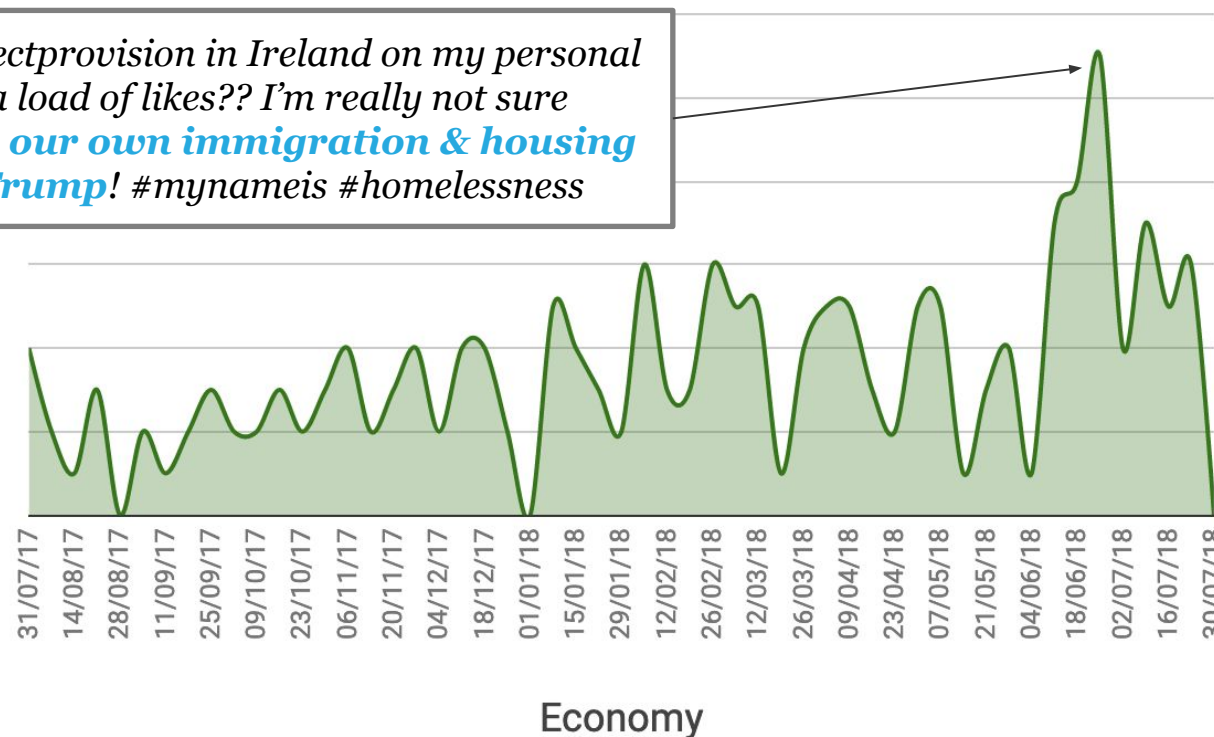
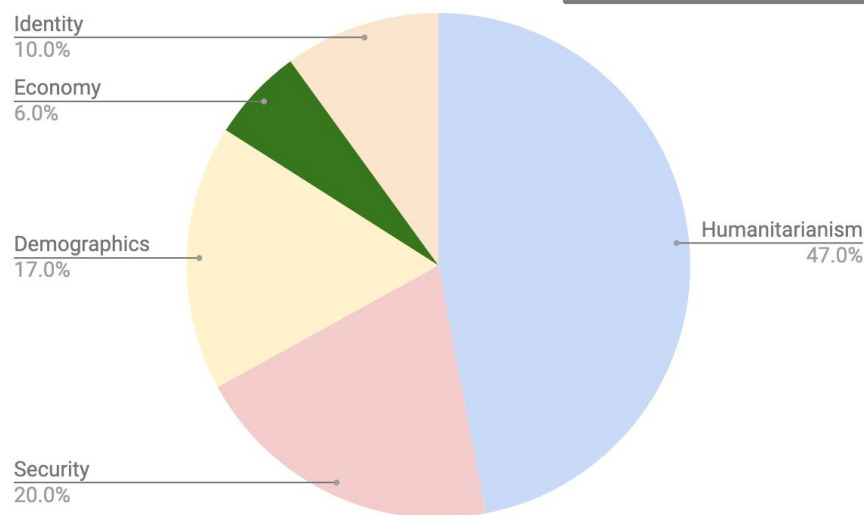
Economy (1)

Pro and anti-migrant opinions clash within the economy narrative in Ireland. While some claim that local economic problems should be dealt with first, others emphasize migrants' prospective contribution to the local economy.

Some people even point out the **elite's financial benefits** during the current migration crisis, and the **hypocrisy** in blaming economic problems of Ireland on the influx of non-EU immigrants.

Results:
~33,000 (6%)

*Just posted a load of articles on #directprovision in Ireland on my personal Facebook account..will they get a load of likes?? I'm really not sure ...probably not ..but **by not sorting our own immigration & housing problems..we are as bad as Trump!** #mynameis #homelessness*





ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

Some are **outraged** that the migrant issue is managed while local homelessness is not...

RT @TheLoneHurler: Across our land **we can house thousands of migrants yet we cannot look after our own** #Homeless in Ireland. It's terrible to see this happening to the beautiful town of #Westport - a gem along the #WildAtlanticWay

RT @brianmurphycllr: Irish politicians think its normal to pluck **migrants from the middle East/Africa** who have no connection/history with this country and **give them houses** here **while Irish people** whose ancestors slaved through famine and wars/revolutions **remain homeless**. It is not normal, its madness

RT @daly_june: this Irish counsellor being **crucified for saying Irish families should be housed before migrants** after an Irish family of 4 evicted from their rented house in Kilkenny and given to a family of 6 immigrants in his constituency 🙄 pic.twitter.com/t2fc6NFXyn

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

...while others find **no economic drawbacks** in the presence of migrants.

If a refugee with no possessions who can't speak the language manages to still **steal your job, you were probably rubbish at it** anyway.

RT @newscientist: Evidence suggests that **immigrants contribute more to an economy than they take out**. But our zero-sum bias can make us believe otherwise

RT @OliverNorgrove: (...) 2 years ago I was under the impression that **migration harmed poorer workers by depressing wages**, but upon reexamining the issue I found **no good evidence to back this up**.

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

People are frustrated that instead of real solutions, local economic problems are blamed on migration:

Some find it **hypocritical** to blame local economic problems are on migration.

RT @KarlreMarks: Ah, a totally original take on the reasons for the housing crisis, let's blame it on immigrants! Nobody thought of this before

Others express **anti-elite approach**, arguing that the elite profits from the migration crisis

*RT @SophieLongo1: Migrants are not blame. **If you want to know who's choking the welfare state - look up.***

***For Germany's rich the migrant crisis is a gold mine.** Several hotel owners will become millionaires.*

*RT @TechnicallyRon: imagine **how different peoples lives could be if rich people actually paid their taxes** but yes the problem is immigrants who work in tescos*

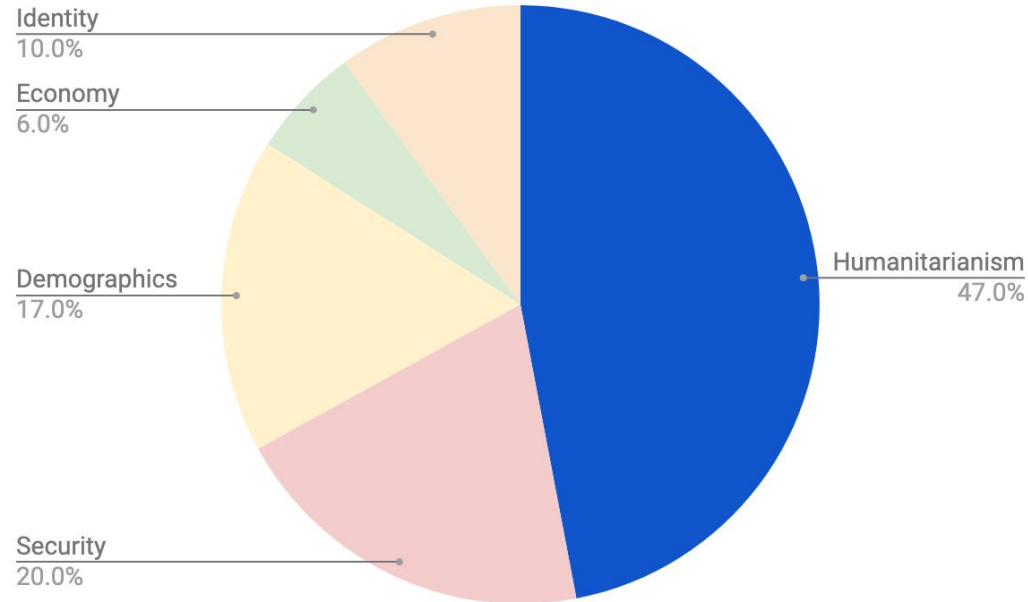
Pan-European Narratives | IE

Humanitarianism (1)

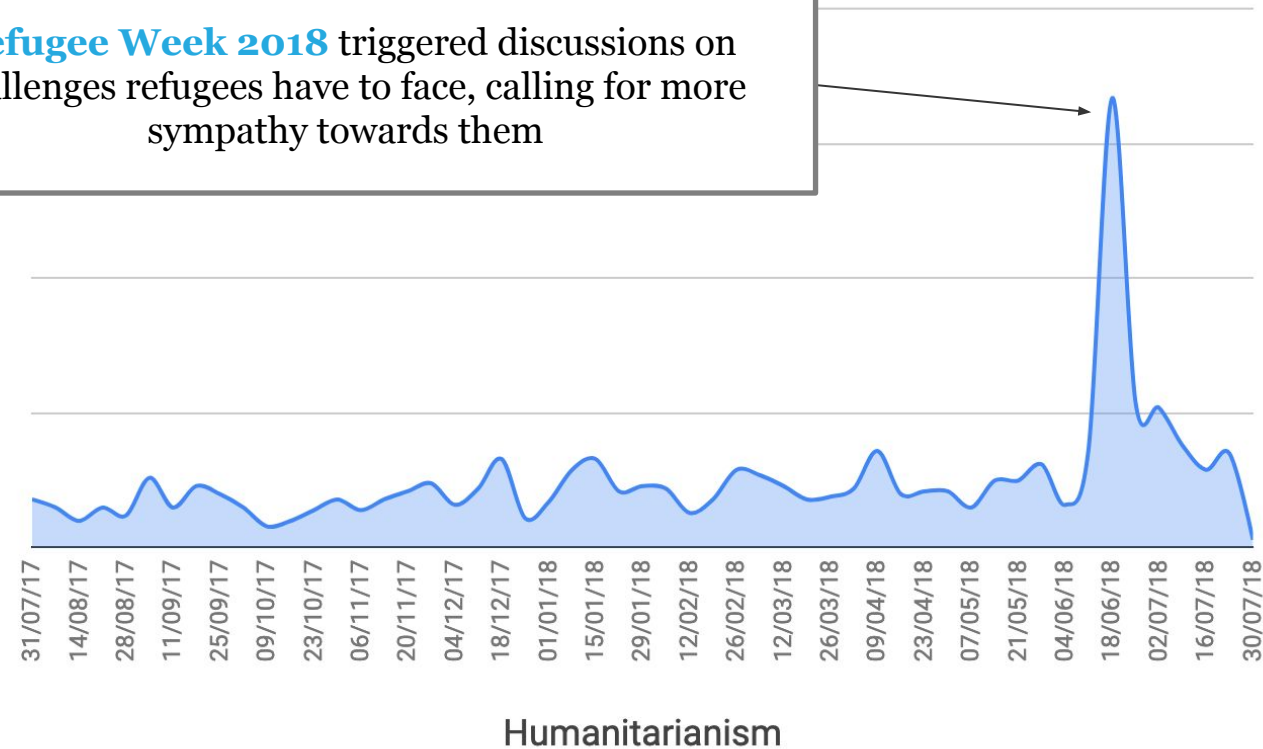
Humanitarianism is the most prevalent narrative in Ireland around migration. Many Irish actively seek opportunities to support refugees, and express sympathy and understanding towards migrants, often for historical reasons, remembering waves of major Irish emigration.

Almost all posts from Ireland in the humanitarianism narrative express **pro-migrant sentiment**.

Results:
~240,000 (47%)



Refugee Week 2018 triggered discussions on challenges refugees have to face, calling for more sympathy towards them



PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Active work to support migrants and refugees in Ireland

RT @vlinierland: @colinlenihan @BriKi @IrishRefugeeCo @immigrationIRL @changingaddress @NascIreland **We're actually just organising a musical event with refugees to create more awareness** of this project.

RT @Frank_Bee: Playing in Tengu tonight for an excellent cause with a superstar line-up! R.A.M.S.I. is **Refugee and Migrant Solidarity Ireland's Summer Camp for children** in Direct Provision. get tickets here - <https://t.co/wLlPmGz3W6> **if you can't make it, donate here.**

Sympathy towards migrants based on Irish history

President Higgins has **likened modern refugees to the millions of Irish people who left during and after the Famine**

RT @RTEBrainstorm: St Patrick the migrant for all migrants: @pmaceinri @UCC on **how our national saint's life as a migrant should make us think about human trafficking & migration today**

Pan-European Narratives | IE

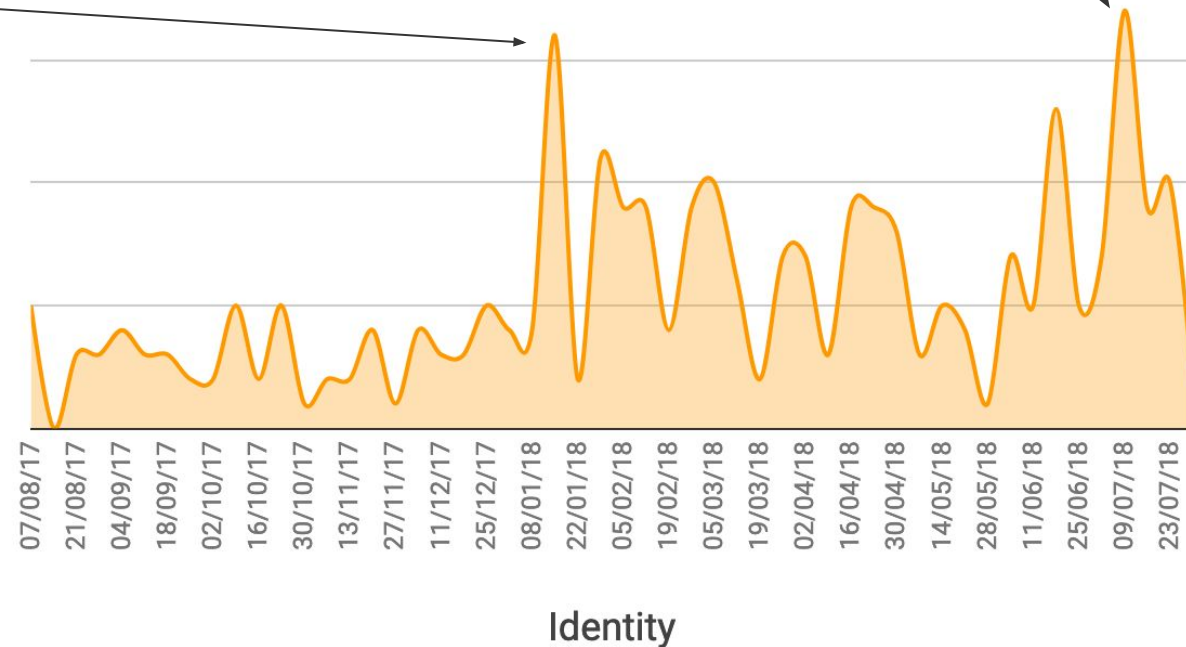
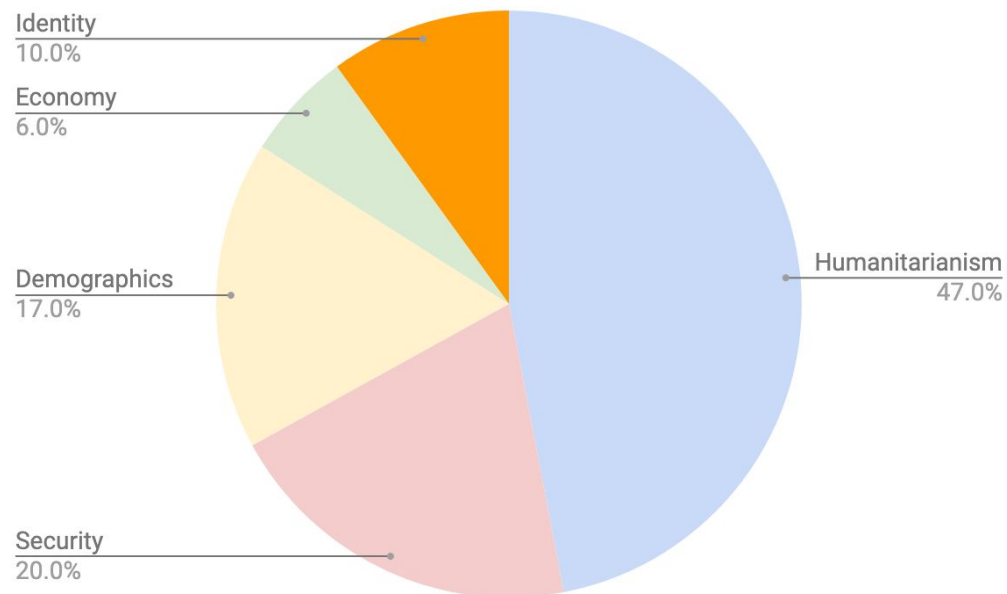
Identity & Customs (1)

Many Irish are **proud of the country's openness to migrants and the consequent cultural diversity**. They applaud success stories of migrants in Ireland, and condemn Trump for speaking from a white supremacist perspective in the debate on host countries' changing identity.

Results:
~52,000 (10%)

RT @rtenews: A **Syrian refugee** who came to Ireland in 2015 has **opened a bakery business in Cork**.

Uproar on **Trump's comment** " **immigration** is not good for Europe as it **changes European culture**," claiming Trump is ignorant of European diversity





Pan-European Narratives | IE

Identity & Customs (2)

ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

European & Catholic culture is being lost through **replacement migration**

RT @MarkACollett: This is not the Middle East, this is FRANCE!
This is **replacement migration** in action & **it is the European people & European culture that is being replaced.**

RT @KatiaB333: Bishop: Mass **migration part of plan to water down Europe's Christian identity**

Anti-Muslim comments on **religious customs**

RT @V_of_Europe: Tens of Thousands of Syrian '**Refugees**'
Temporarily Return Home For Religious Holiday

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

Openness to others is part of Irish identity

*I find that there is a high correlation between people who hate the Irish language and people with problematic opinions on race and immigration. **Most Irish speakers I know want to send their children to pluralistic, diverse schools***

Pro-migrant voices rooted in **shame over British colonialism**

*Centuries of colonialism: 'Get over it, it was character-building'
A few decades of immigration: 'You're ruining our culture and destroying our societies!'*

RT @timsquirrell: @PriyamvadaGopal @LgmSam I show my sociology undergrads a video from a few years back in which a British retiree living in Spain says "**a Briton is never a foreigner, wherever he goes**". **We're ex patriates, never immigrants.** Colonialism never ended.

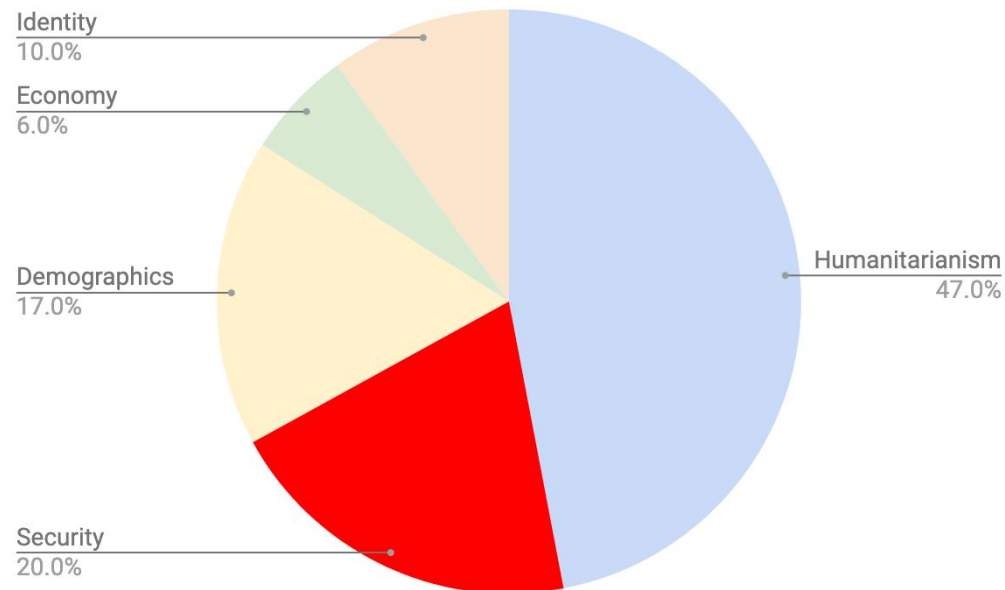
Pan-European Narratives | IE

Security (1)

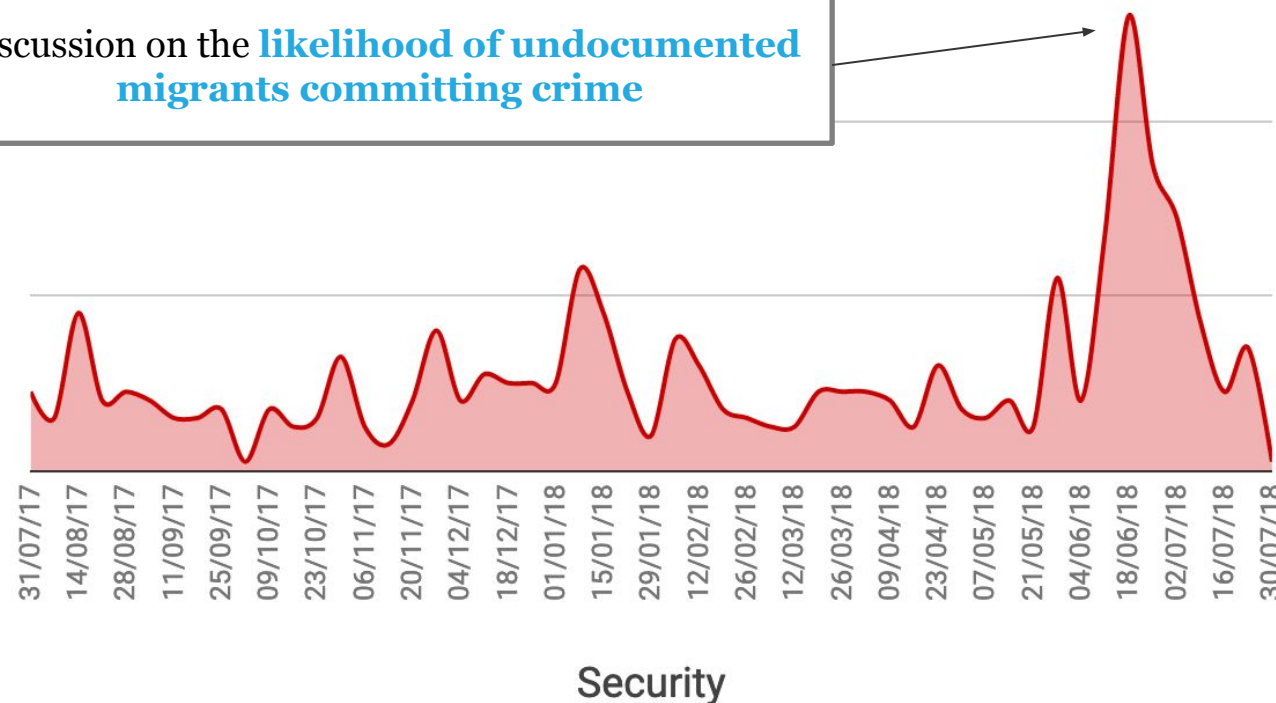
People discuss **whether crime rates are rising in Ireland due to openness to migration**, emphasizing the risk in the media's pro-migrant reports that lessen citizens' perception of risk. In the meantime, many people argue that migrants are, in fact, less likely to engage in violent action than locals.

The security narrative in Ireland consists of several comments on the current North American illegal immigration issues.

Results:
~110,000 (20%)



Discussion on the **likelihood of undocumented migrants committing crime**



ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

People fear **crime committed by migrants...**

RT @irelandaboveall: **Sex offenders & radical Islamists among illegal immigrants** who used Irish-based marriage scam to obtain EU residency #Ireland #ImmigrantCrime #ShamMarriage #IllegalImmigrants #Undocumented #ISIS Investigate all marriages between migrants & #EU citizens

Some locals point out the **hypocrisy of the media** as it tries to minimize the threat migrants pose on a country...

AHAHAHA IDIOTS According to media reports, his surge towards the chancellor and shouting “Allahu Akbar” was “not political.” **Afghan refugee shouting "Allah Akhbar" tries to attack Angela Merkel** According to media reports, <https://t.co/VNcdytrBA9>

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

...although some argue that **Irish might commit similar crimes.**

RT @chandIer_bong: irish men love to attack immigrants for assaulting women **but when some rich irish rugby players do it it's “not all men!!”** and “women are opportunistic liars who destroy mens careers!!”

...while others claim that **undocumented immigrants have nowhere to turn to** when they are attacked.

Ireland's **undocumented migrants: 'Our flat was broken into.** We couldn't report it to the garda'

RT @CarolineLucas: Last year a **pregnant woman went to the police to report being repeatedly raped. She was then arrested under immigration offences** at the rape crisis centre. My amendment seeks to stop this kind of horrendous thing happening. #DataProtectionBill

+ *Local Issues in Ireland Around Migration*



2.

Local Issues | IE

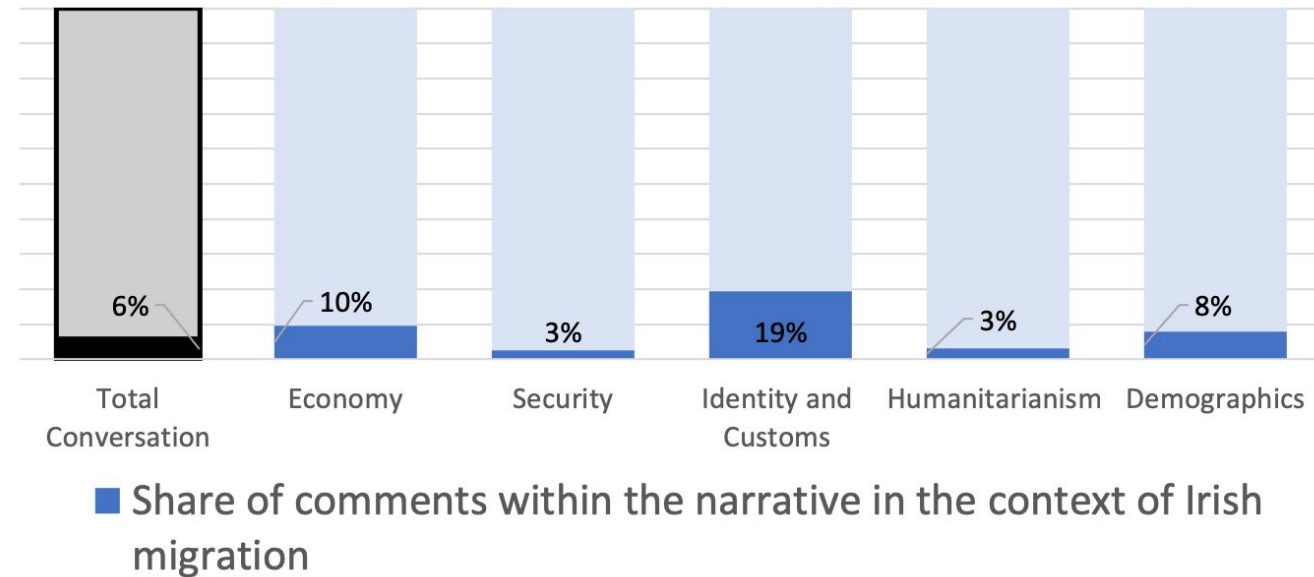
Irish Migration

Irish people demonstrate more sympathy towards refugees involved in the current migrant crisis due to their own historical experiences of migration.

They are open to others, reciting the help they received upon arrival to other countries during the Great Famine and other occasions.

Irish migration is mainly discussed in the context of **identity and customs**: Irish perceive openness to migrants as part of their national identity, shaped by previous hardships.

*Bono said **Ireland's experience of colonialism, conflict, famine, mass migration** "give us kind of a **hard-earned expertise** in these problems, and empathy and I hope humility."*

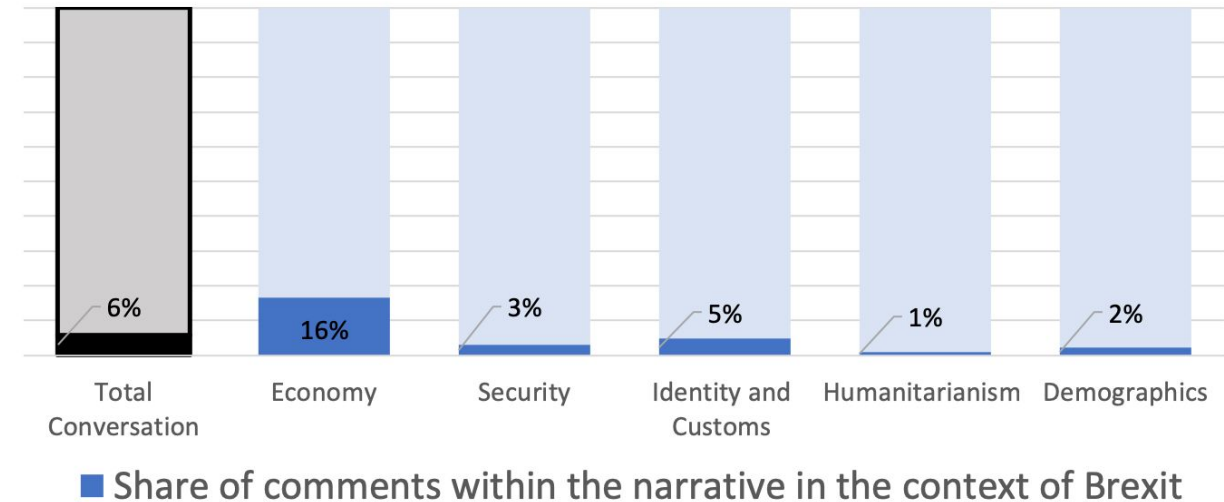


Brexit and its consequences for Ireland are discussed in the conversation around migration.

However, Irish are mainly concerned about the relationship of Ireland and the United Kingdom – immigration from third countries to Ireland is a less prominent topic in this context.

Economic aspects of Brexit are discussed most often in relation to migration.

*Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has said he remains very confident
**there will be no need for passport controls on the Irish
border post Brexit.***



Local Issues | IE

Abortion

Abortion and the 8th amendment vote is a divisive topic in Ireland: anti-migrant voices claim that Irish population growth should be supported with the birth of Irish babies instead of immigrants' influx, while pro-migrant people argue that refugee women are at an even higher risk of complications due to unwanted pregnancy.

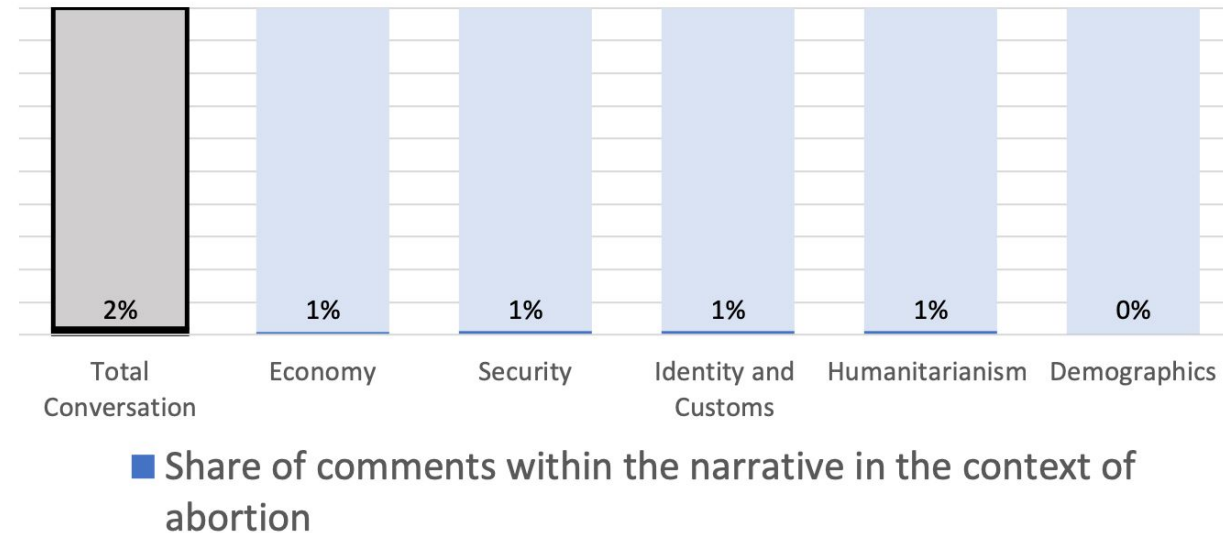
ANTI-MIGRANT VOICES

*Sinn Féin are not a nationalist party. Sinn Féin support rule by Brussels. Sinn Féin support mass immigration. Sinn Féin support building more mosques. **Sinn Féin support the abortion of healthy Irish babies. Sinn Féin support making the Irish a minority in our own country***

PRO-MIGRANT VOICES

*A young woman was sectioned under the Mental Health Act only last year for seeking an abortion. In 2014, **Ms Y, a refugee and a rape victim, was denied an abortion and kept alive so she could be carved open by c-section.***

People on public social media emphasize the **humanitarian** aspects of abortion in the context of migration.



+ *Migration in the Context of European- and Domestic Politics*



3.

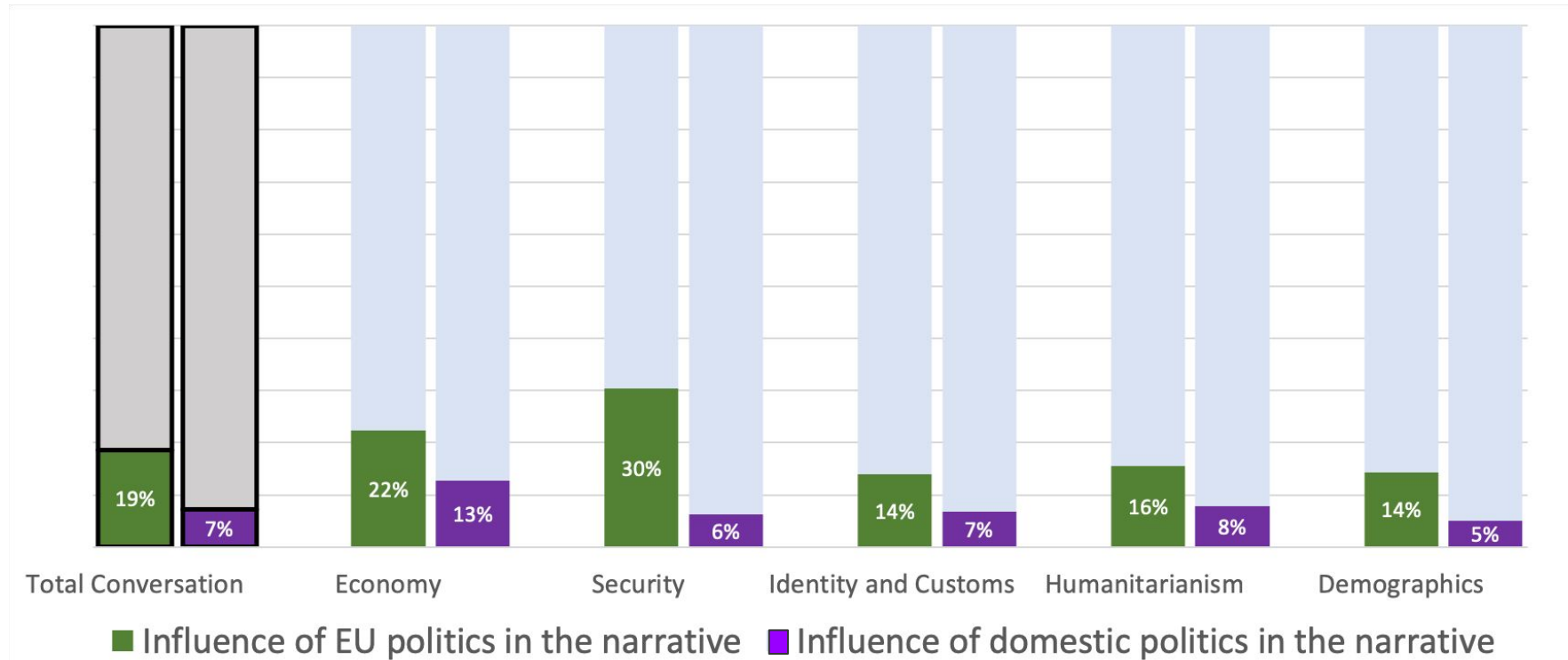


European and Domestic Politics Context within Narratives | IE

European References are Strongest in Security

The security narrative contains significantly more references to European, rather than local politics. This reflects how **Irish tend to perceive migration-related security risks as an EU responsibility** and less of a domestic obligation.

Pan-European narratives are significantly more infused with the context of European politics, while local issues trigger slightly more reference to domestic politics.



+ *Discussion Tone in Ireland*



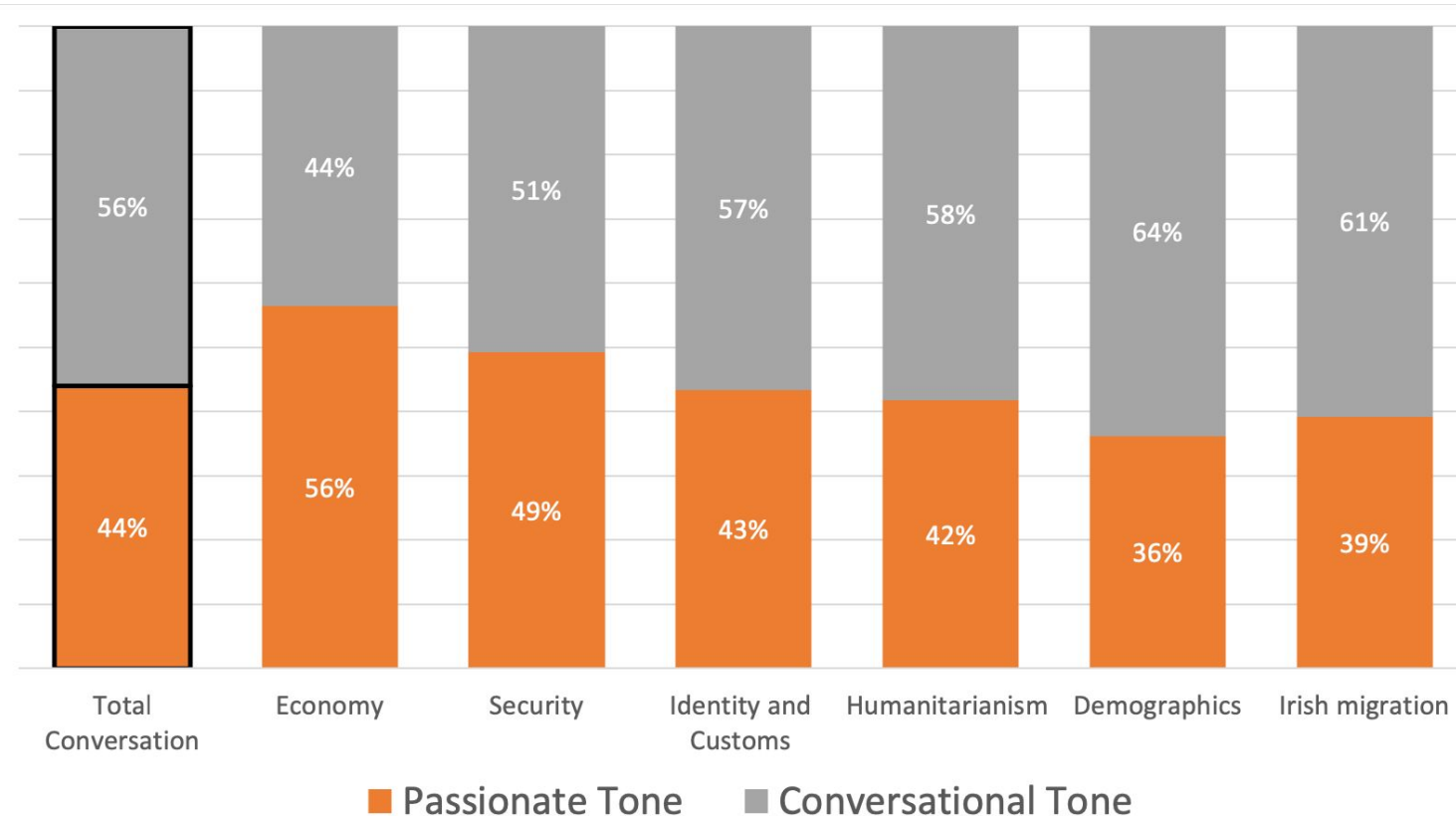
4.



Discussion Tone | IE

Mainly Conversational Tone Throughout The Discussion

Although majority of the discourse on migration in Ireland takes place in a reserved manner, certain issues trigger vigorous conversations in each narrative. While it comes up relatively rarely in public social media conversations, **economic** consequences of migration is the topic that Irish people are the most passionate about.



+ *Conversation Channels*



5.

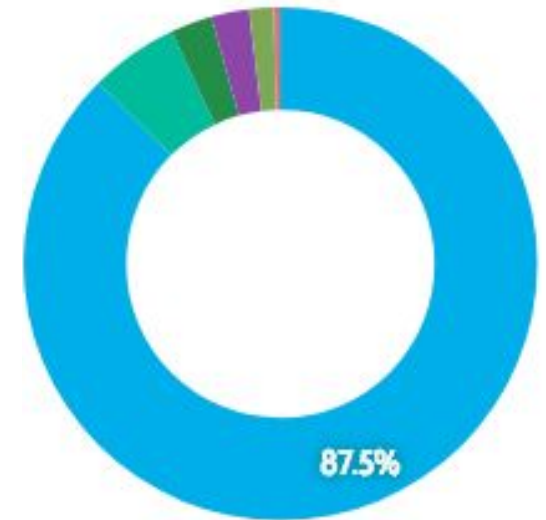
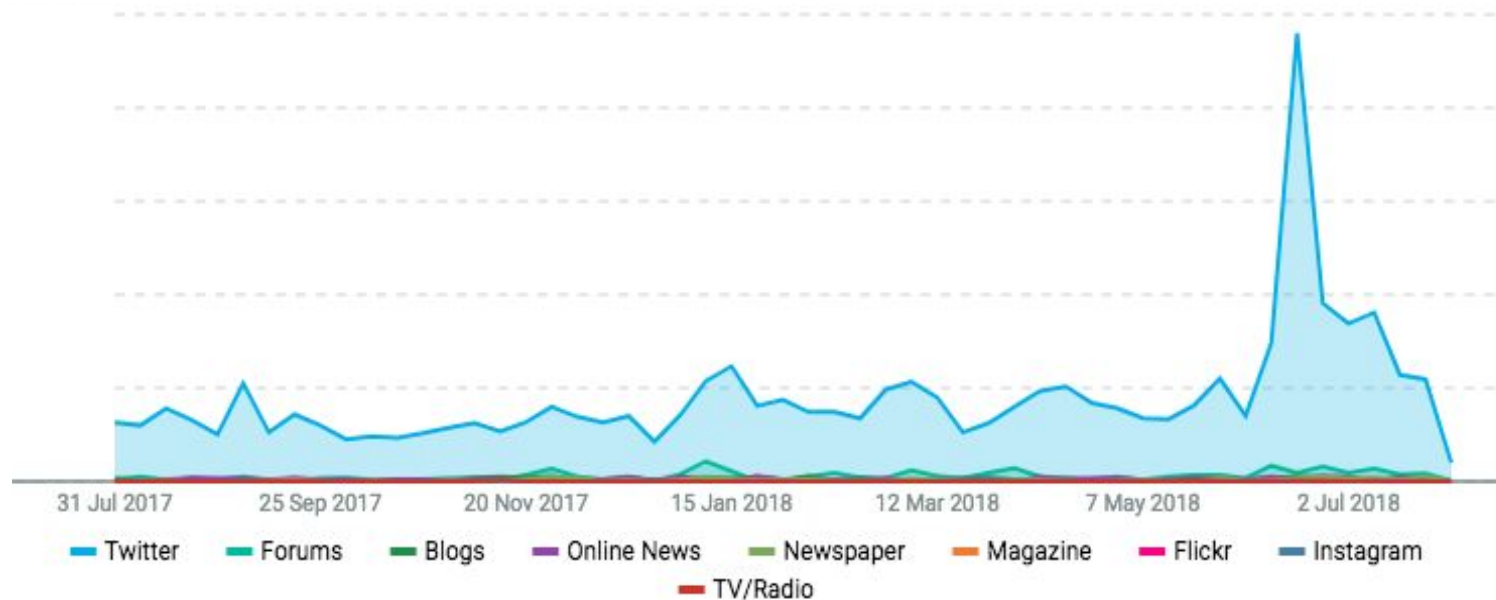


Channel Distribution | IE

Twitter Dominates the Conversation

When it comes to addressing migration in the public online sphere, Irish people most often use **Twitter** to share their views. This platform **captures almost 90% of the public conversation**. The remaining discussions can be found on forums, blogs and online news sites.

Results:
~525,600



- Twitter
- Forums
- Blogs
- Online News
- Newspaper
- Magazine
- Flickr
- Instagram
- TV/Radio

Most Influential Authors | IE

Journalists' Posts Trigger The Highest Engagement

The highest number of shares, retweets, comments and likes are triggered by journalists' posts.

However, single posts can reach high engagement, just like in case of blogger and academic Catherine Kelly.

The subject of immigration is also actively discussed on online messaging boards outside of social media.

Catherine Kelly @ckellymla shared a video



In 1962, this Irish man was asked about immigration. 56 years later, we all need to hear his answer. [#WorldRefugeeDay pic.twitter.com/XZH7iv1Yfz](https://twitter.com/XZH7iv1Yfz)

1.3K Retweets, 2.7K Twitter Likes,
1.3K Twitter Followers

Most Influential Authors on Twitter	Description
Catherine Kelly (@ckellymla)	Blogger and academic
Fintan O'Toole	Journalist, irishtimes.com
Sorcha Pollack	Journalist, irishtimes.com

Most Influential Websites	Description
irishtimes.com	News site, rank: 31
thejournal.ie	News site,, rank: 39
irishexaminer.com	News site, rank: 96
politics.ie	Most active political forum in Ireland