Chinese-speaking Immigrants' Experience Navigating Ireland's 2022 Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme

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Crosscare Migrant Project

Crosscare is the social support agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin, which was founded in 1941 to provide a wide range of social support to those most in need across the Dublin Diocese, which includes Wicklow and Kildare.

Crosscare's vision of a society where all people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and Crosscare's core values of love, respect, and excellence. Our mission is to help those most in need regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, beliefs, or sexual identity.

Crosscare Migrant Project works in the area of immigration in Ireland, focusing on residency, citizenship, family visas, and related issues. We aim to provide a quality information and advocacy service to enable people involved in a migration experience, especially those in vulnerable circumstances, to make informed choices and access their rights. We also aim, through our engagement with the people who use our service and in collaboration with others, to effect positive change in migration-related policy.

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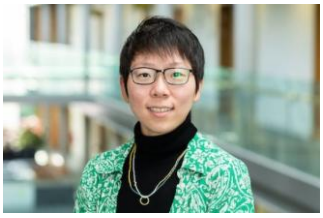
Preface from the Author



The 2022 Regularisation Scheme for Long-Term Undocumented Migrants in Ireland marked a turning point in the country's immigration policy, offering thousands of individuals a long-awaited opportunity to secure legal status. For Chinese-speaking migrants, the scheme has been life-changing, enabling them to reunite with their families, achieve greater financial stability, and regain a sense of security and belonging. However, as this report highlights, the path to full integration remains complex, requiring ongoing policy improvements and targeted support.

This study finds that while the Regularisation Scheme was greatly needed and appreciated, it has eased many of the immediate stresses associated with being undocumented; however, deeper challenges persist. Language barriers and limited digital literacy continue to restrict access to essential services, employment opportunities, and legal protections. Housing insecurity, restrictive family reunification rules, and gaps in healthcare access further complicate the lives of those who have secured legal status, underscoring the need for more inclusive policies. Additionally, a lack of awareness about rights and entitlements among newly regularised migrants underlines the importance for better information-sharing and community outreach.

The experiences of Chinese-speaking migrants navigating the scheme also highlight the essential role played by social networks, NGOs, and ethnic media. These support systems have been crucial in helping individuals understand the application process, access legal assistance, and overcome bureaucratic hurdles. At the same time, the reliance on these networks reveals a larger issue: the lack of linguistically and culturally accessible services within government institutions.

Looking ahead, this report outlines key recommendations to build on the successes of the Regularisation Scheme while addressing existing gaps. Simplifying application procedures, expanding language and digital literacy programs, and improving family reunification policies will help ensure a more welcoming and supportive environment for all migrants. Strengthening the role of NGOs and community organisations, particularly in underserved areas, will be essential in ensuring that no one is left behind. Meanwhile, greater oversight of commercial immigration agents and improved access to legal aid will help protect vulnerable individuals from misinformation and exploitation. It also calls for the establishment of a formal, transparent policy review mechanism to regularly assess and adapt immigration policies to evolving migrant needs.

Ultimately, the Regularisation Scheme is about more than just legal status—it is about restoring dignity, fostering inclusion, and enabling migrants to fully participate in Irish society. As Ireland continues to navigate the complexities of migration and integration, policymakers, service providers, and community organisations must work together to remove systemic barriers and ensure that the full promise of the Regularisation Scheme is realised.

In conclusion, the 2022 Regularisation Scheme represents a significant step toward justice and inclusion for undocumented migrants in Ireland. However, its long-term success will hinge on ongoing efforts to address structural inequalities and foster a society where all individuals, regardless of their background, can flourish and experience a true sense of belonging.

Dr. Meishan Zhang

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Preface from the Mentors

It is with great pleasure that we present to you today this report on *Chinese-speaking Immigrants' Experience Navigating Ireland's 2022 Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme*. As a Research Ireland Enterprise Partnership Postdoctoral Scholar, Dr. Meishan Zhang's makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the regularization scheme here in Ireland. At a time when immigration regimes are in flux, the report provides timely and important information on how Ireland can maintain its immigration advantage by listening to the voices of Chinese-speaking migrants, who contribute to a better Ireland.

Professor Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain

Maynooth University

Dr. Meishan Zhang's report provides a unique insight into the experiences of Chinese-speaking migrants in Ireland and is a valuable addition to research on migration and migrant communities. By exploring first-person experiences in conjunction with an in-depth analysis of Ireland's immigration policies and system, this work will contribute to informed dialogue on migration and inclusion. Migration is often presented in terms of figures and statistics; this research gives voice to the people who are at the heart of it.

Richard King

Crosscare Migrant Project

Acknowledgements

Undertaking this research and writing this report has been both a deeply humbling and profoundly illuminating experience. *Chinese-speaking Immigrants' Experience Navigating Ireland's 2022 Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme* is the result of sustained engagement with communities, individuals, institutions, and legal frameworks. It would not have been possible without the contributions, support, and trust of many people and organisations. With deep respect and heartfelt appreciation, I would like to acknowledge those who made this work possible.

First and foremost, I wish to express my profound gratitude to the Chinese-speaking immigrants who participated in this study. Your willingness to share your personal journeys, challenges, and hopes provided invaluable insight into the lived realities of Ireland's 2022 Regularisation Scheme. Your stories of resilience, determination, and courage form the foundation of this research. Thank you for your trust and for helping to bring visibility to a community often left out of mainstream migration narratives in Ireland.

This two-year project would not have been possible without institutional and financial support. I am especially grateful to Research Ireland (formerly the Irish Research Council) and Crosscare Migrant Project for funding this research through the Research Ireland Enterprise Partnership Scheme Postdoctoral Fellowship. I also wish to acknowledge the generous support of the Maynooth University Impact Through Dissemination Support Fund, which provided additional funding for the publication of this work. I am sincerely thankful for all of this support.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Maynooth University, my host institution, for providing the academic environment, resources, and encouragement that enabled me to carry out this research with intellectual freedom and professional support. A special thank you to Professor Jane Gray, Professor Honor Fagan, Professor Pauline Cullen, Dr Eoin Flaherty, and Professor Aphra Kerr for welcoming me into your classes and allowing me to engage in discussions and deepen my understanding of sociology—as a former PhD student in history, this interdisciplinary exposure was both enriching and inspiring. I would also like to thank the Maynooth University Research Development Office, especially Dr Martin O'Donoghue and Marie Carr, for their support during the application and management phases of the project. My sincere thanks also go to Fiona Morley and Fran Callaghan at Maynooth University Library for their practical advice and guidance in preparing this report for publication.

I am equally thankful to my enterprise partner, Crosscare Migrant Project, for their generous collaboration, ongoing guidance, and commitment to migrant welfare and inclusion. I am also deeply grateful to Crosscare Migrant Project for providing a safe and trusted space for conducting interviews and for hosting my placement. The opportunity to stay engaged with the most up-to-date knowledge in the field and to contribute directly to the information and advocacy services for Chinese-speaking clients was an invaluable aspect of this research.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my academic supervisor, Professor Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain, whose unwavering support, insightful mentorship, and thoughtful guidance have shaped this journey in profound ways. Your encouragement and belief in this work sustained me through its many stages. I am also sincerely grateful to my enterprise supervisors, Ms Amy Tyndall and Mr Richard King, for your practical wisdom, steady encouragement, and deep commitment to the goals of this project. Your perspectives were invaluable in grounding the research in real-world impact. I am equally thankful to my colleagues and peers at Maynooth University and Crosscare, whose camaraderie, critical reflections, and everyday solidarity made this process both intellectually rewarding and personally meaningful.

I also wish to thank the grassroots organisations, community leaders, and advocacy groups who have tirelessly worked as migrant justice advocates fighting for changes such as the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. Your ongoing dedication laid the foundation for this research and was a source of motivation throughout.

A special thank you goes to the reviewers of this report, Professor Mary Corcoran and Dr Clíodhna Murphy, for their critical and constructive feedback. Your careful reviews enriched the final outcome of this work.

Finally, on a more personal note, I want to thank my friends, family, and teammates at North Kildare Sports Club for helping me maintain a sense of balance, joy, and community throughout this demanding process. A very special thank you to Yile Lyu for your constant belief in me, your reminders not to become a complete workaholic, and for keeping my perfectionism in check. Without you, I might have rewritten this report a hundred more times.

Meishan Zhang

May 2025

Glossary

An Garda Síochána The national police and security service of Ireland

AWS Atypical Working Scheme

CEFR Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CMP Crosscare Migrant Project

CSO Central Statistics Office

CTA Common Travel Area

DETE Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

DOJ Department of Justice

EEA European Economic Area, consisting of the Member States of the European Union (EU) and three countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway; excluding Switzerland)

EMN European Migration Network

ESRI Economic and Social Research Institute

EU Europe

Garda An individual police officer

GNIB The Garda National Immigration Bureau

ICI Immigrant Council of Ireland

INIS Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service

IPO International Protection Office

IRP Irish Residence Permit

ISD Immigration Service Delivery (formerly INIS)

JFU Justice for the Undocumented

MRCI Migrant Rights Centre Ireland

NGO Non-governmental organisation

Oireachtas The national legislature of Ireland, comprising the President and two houses, a Lower House, Dáil Éireann, and an Upper House, Seanad Éireann

PPS Personal Public Service

PSC Public Services Card

Taoiseach Irish prime minister

UK United Kingdom

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WeChat An instant messaging, social media, and mobile payment app developed by Tencent

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Objectives of the Study

On January 31, 2022, the Irish Government launched the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme (the 2022 Regularisation Scheme), allowing eligible undocumented migrants to gain legal status.[1] However, how immigrants accessed relevant information and the impact of this process on their lives and society remained largely unknown. As a significant migrant group in Ireland, Chinese-speaking immigrants faced unique challenges and employed distinct strategies to acquire information and access support during the application process.

This report explores how Chinese-speaking immigrants accessed information about this historic policy change, their experiences in making the application, and the impact of this process on their lives and society. Rather than adopting a top-down policy analysis, this research takes a bottom-up approach, centring on the lived experiences and voices of the Chinese-speaking migrant community in Ireland.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse how Chinese-speaking immigrants obtained information about the Regularisation Scheme.
2. To identify the challenges they encountered in the application process.
3. To evaluate the role of government agencies, NGOs, profit-based services, and ethnic community media in facilitating or hindering access to information.
4. To assess the impact of the scheme on the social and economic integration of successful applicants.
5. To propose recommendations for improving future immigration policies, particularly regularisation policies and information dissemination practices.

This report forms part of the two-year project *Interpreting Justice: An Exploration of Chinese Immigrants' Experiences in the Immigration System in Ireland*. The project is funded by Research Ireland (formerly the Irish Research Council) under the Enterprise Partnership Scheme Postdoctoral Fellowship, with Maynooth University as the host institution and Crosscare Migrant Project (CMP) as the enterprise partner. CMP contributed one-third of the total funding for the award period, which runs from September 1, 2023, to August 31, 2025.

The project's Principal Investigator, Dr Meishan Zhang, is based at Maynooth University and is supervised by Dr Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain (Maynooth University), with additional mentorship from Ms Amy Tyndall and Mr Richard King at CMP. Dr Zhang works two to three days per week at CMP, where she conducts interviews, coordinates the Chinese clinic, provides professional support to clients, and organises online immigration and integration workshops for the Chinese-speaking community.

Her close engagement with the Chinese-speaking immigrant population through CMP has allowed her to remain attuned to evolving immigration policies and successfully recruit a significant number of participants for this study. In turn, clinic clients' active participation in her research has helped inform and enhance the quality of services provided at the CMP Chinese clinic.

1.2 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Chinese-speaking immigrants who engaged with Ireland's 2022 Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used, offering complementary insights into applicants' pathways, challenges, and post-regularisation lives.

Survey Design

This project aimed to investigate several key aspects of the experiences of Chinese-speaking migrants who engaged with the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. It explored their basic demographic characteristics, migration journeys, and integration processes, with particular attention to life as undocumented individuals and how they navigated regularisation policies. The study also gathered their suggestions for the development of a consultation app in their native language.

The **quantitative survey** was structured into six sections. The **first and last sections** served as consent forms. The **second section** gathered demographic information about the respondents, including age, gender identity, country of birth, civil status, occupation, and English proficiency. The **third section** focused on the migration process, exploring participants' motivations for leaving their home country, the reasons they chose Ireland as their destination, the information and resources they relied on during their journey, and their immigration status upon arrival. The **fourth section** addressed integration, examining respondents' experiences with the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, including the sources of information they used, the assistance they accessed, the challenges they faced, and the overall impact of the scheme on their lives. The **fifth section** collected suggestions for the design of the "Mi-Chat" consultation app.

Building on the quantitative research, the **qualitative study** further explored aspects of undocumented life, including employment, income, housing, healthcare access, leisure activities, community participation, and experiences of racial discrimination.

All survey and interview questions were conducted in Chinese and subsequently translated into English for reporting purposes.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative data were gathered through an online questionnaire in Mandarin, disseminated via email, LinkedIn, Facebook, WeChat, and in-person methods. WeChat, being the most commonly used social media platform among Chinese-speaking immigrants in Ireland, was instrumental in reaching a broad and diverse audience. A total of 100 responses were collected using a purposive convenience sample. While this sample provided rich insights into the experiences of participants, the findings are not generalisable to the entire migration population in Ireland.

- The questionnaire was hosted on https://www.jisc.ac.uk/.
- See Appendix 1 for the full questionnaire.

Qualitative Research

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 41 participants, selected through a combination of stratified and snowball sampling to ensure diversity in gender, immigration status, regional location, and interaction with support services. Of these, 22 were male and 19 female, and participants came from multiple counties across Ireland, providing a geographical spread beyond Dublin.

While some interviewees were existing Crosscare clients, particular effort was made to recruit individuals outside the organisation's network, including those who had not received NGO assistance and instead relied on alternative or informal sources of immigration information. This sampling strategy helped mitigate the risk of bias and allowed the inclusion of less visible narratives.

Interviews were conducted either in person at Crosscare's Dublin 7 office—considered a safe, confidential, and welcoming space by many migrants—or remotely via phone when participants lived outside Dublin or were unable to travel.

The power dynamics between the researcher and participants were taken into account. Since some participants recognised the researcher through Crosscare's services, they may have perceived her as representing the NGO, potentially influencing their responses. To minimise this, the researcher clearly explained the independence of the study and its academic purpose, and confirmed that participation was voluntary and confidential.

- See Appendix 2 for the interview questions.

A focus group with four Chinese-speaking applicants was also conducted in the Chinese language, held in person at Crosscare's Dublin 7 office. Tea and refreshments were provided to help create a relaxed and friendly environment. The group setting encouraged peer validation,

shared reflection, and dynamic discussion of common concerns, thereby enhancing the validity and richness of the data. While social desirability bias may have influenced some responses, the moderator encouraged diverse viewpoints to emerge.

- See Appendix 3 for the focus group questions.

Use of WeChat in Participant Recruitment and Outreach

Given its ubiquity among Chinese-speaking migrants, WeChat was a key tool for participant outreach and engagement. With agreement from Crosscare, Dr Zhang continued her role at CMP's Chinese Clinic (2–3 days per week) and maintained a professional WeChat account (*ID: crosscarechinese*, *Profile: Meishan Crosscare*) to support clients and distribute research recruitment materials.

Key outreach activities first included posting the survey link in multiple WeChat groups, including:

- The '爱尔兰签证信息 1 群 (Irish Visa/Permission Information 1st Group)', created in March 2022 with 500 members.
- The '爱尔兰签证信息 2 群 (Irish Visa/Permission Information 2nd Group)', with 100+ members.
- Three other groups co-managed with CMP and MRCI volunteers.

These platforms gave the researcher direct access to a wide pool of applicants. To complement this, a WeChat Channel—'Guidance for Living in Ireland'—was created on December 31, 2023, as part of the research project. This channel functioned as both an information dissemination platform and a foundation for developing a future Chinese-language consultation app. Articles published addressed topics such as family reunification, visa procedures, and citizenship, responding directly to needs identified in the survey and interviews. Each article concluded with a recruitment advertisement inviting readers to participate in the study.

Ethical Considerations in Using WeChat

The strategic use of WeChat offered significant advantages in reaching the target population, particularly due to its widespread use among Chinese-speaking migrants in Ireland. As a familiar, low-threshold communication tool, WeChat facilitated real-time engagement, culturally and linguistically accessible content delivery, and rapid dissemination of research updates. However, this approach also raised important ethical considerations, especially regarding data protection and potential power imbalances stemming from the researcher's dual role as a service provider and academic.

To address these concerns:

- No personal data was collected via WeChat; instead, interested individuals were asked to contact the researcher through secure external channels, such as Maynooth University email and an encrypted Crosscare phone number.
- Participants were informed that their decision to participate or not would have no impact on their access to Crosscare services or academic resources from Maynooth University.
- The independent academic nature of the research was clearly communicated, along with the transparency of its partnership with Crosscare.

This careful approach ensured that while WeChat served as an effective outreach and communication tool, ethical standards of voluntary participation and confidentiality were upheld throughout the project.

Participants

According to official records from the Department of Justice dated November 7, 2022, of the 8,328 applicants to the long-term undocumented strand of the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, 1,159 were Chinese nationals, 233 were Malaysian nationals, and 6 were from Taiwan. Within the International Protection strand, which had a total of 3,108 applicants, 28 Chinese nationals and 9 Malaysian nationals applied. [2]

This research primarily focused on Chinese-speaking individuals within these cohorts but also included those who were aware of the policy yet chose not to apply.

Participants comprised:

- Individuals who obtained legal status through the 2022 Regularisation Scheme;
- Individuals who subsequently obtained legal status through other means;
- Those whose applications were refused or withdrawn;
- And individuals who remained undocumented and intentionally did not apply.

By adopting this inclusive approach, the study was able to capture a wide spectrum of decision-making processes, motivations, and post-policy outcomes among Chinese-speaking migrants.

Ethics Approval and Data Security

The study adhered to Maynooth University's ethical guidelines and received approval from the Maynooth University Ethics Committee (approval number: SRESC-2023-37111).

Key ethical practices included:

- Informed consent was obtained through a written information sheet and a signed consent form.
- Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any time.
- Audio recordings were securely transferred to a password-protected laptop and deleted from devices immediately after.
- No data was stored using non-MU cloud services.
- All data was anonymised after September 30, 2024.
- Participants experiencing emotional distress were provided with referrals to culturally appropriate counselling services.

Scope and Focus of This Report:

This report specifically focuses on participants' responses related to the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, providing a comprehensive and detailed analysis of their experiences with this policy change. Findings related to undocumented life and the design of the consultation app will be discussed in separate publications.

The 2022 Scheme consisted of two distinct strands: one for long-term undocumented migrants and another for individuals with a pending International Protection (IP) application. This report provides an overview of both strands of the policy. However, given the very low number of Chinese-speaking applicants to the IP strand, the research findings primarily focus on the long-term undocumented migrant strand, where the policy's design and impact were more directly relevant to the Chinese-language community in Ireland.

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[1] Department of Justice, "Regularisation of Long Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme," last updated October 24, 2024, https://www.irishimmigration.ie/regularisation-of-long-term-undocumented-migrant-scheme/.

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Chapter 2

Legal and Policy Context

2.1 Historical Development of Regularisation Policies in Ireland

The 2022 Regularisation Scheme for undocumented migrants in Ireland represents the culmination of decades of evolving policy approaches and advocacy. This policy evolution reflects Ireland's changing position - from a country primarily concerned with its own emigrants abroad to one grappling with its new role as a destination for immigrants.

Early Context: Pre-2000s

Before the 2000s, the Irish government primarily focused on advocating for its undocumented citizens abroad, particularly in the United States, due to the country's long history of emigration.[1] In 1985, the Taoiseach called for amnesty for 70,000 illegal Irish immigrants in the U.S.[2] The government also worked closely with U.S. lawmakers, supporting initiatives such as the *2005 Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act*, which aimed to improve the situation of undocumented Irish immigrants in the U.S.[3]

However, when it came to addressing undocumented immigration within Ireland, the government's approach was more cautious. In 1999, the Minister for Justice, Equality, and Law Reform opposed granting a general right to work for individuals who entered Ireland illegally and lacked a valid refugee status. He argued that such a policy would undermine immigration controls and would not address labour shortages, as it was uncertain whether those 'illegal immigrants' possessed the necessary skills. Furthermore, the Minister warned that allowing 'illegal immigrants' to work by claiming refugee status could lead to an increase in 'bogus claims'.[4]

Emerging Domestic Focus: 2000-2010

Ireland's immigration trends shifted notably in the mid-1990s when, for the first time in decades, immigration began to exceed emigration. This change was largely driven by the rapid economic growth during the 'Celtic Tiger' period, which created a significant demand for labour.[5] The enlargement of the European Union in 2004 further accelerated this trend, particularly with the influx of migrants from new EU Member States such as Poland and Lithuania.[6] This significant demographic change marked a pivotal moment in Ireland's relationship with migration, prompting widespread discussions on the country's immigration policies and how to adapt to the growing diversity of its population.

The evolution of Ireland's migration policies in the early 2000s intersected with shifting legal and constitutional interpretations of citizenship, family rights, and the status of undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers. The landmark 1987 High Court decision in *Fajujonu v Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform* established that an Irish-born child of non-national parents had a constitutional right to the care, company, and upbringing of their parents within the family unit. The Court held that the deportation of such parents could only be justified by an overriding concern for the common good.[7] This judgment formed the legal basis for granting leave to remain to many asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants with Irish-born children, effectively enabling the regularisation of their status in Ireland.

However, the legal protections established in *Fajujonu* were significantly undermined by subsequent judicial developments. In *Lobe v. Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform*, the Supreme Court ruled in January 2003 that Irish citizen children of non-citizen parents could be lawfully deported alongside their parents, unless the parents chose to leave the child behind in Ireland.[8] This marked a decisive shift away from the constitutional protections previously afforded to family unity based on the child's citizenship. The *Lobe* judgment directly contributed to the momentum for constitutional change, paving the way for the Twenty-seventh Amendment of the Constitution Act 2004, which was approved by public referendum on June 11, 2004. The 2004 Referendum ended automatic *jus soli* citizenship for children born in Ireland to non-national parents, unless one of the parents met a minimum residency requirement.[9] Framed by the government as a necessary measure to close perceived "loopholes" in the Constitution and the Good Friday Agreement, which defined all those born on the island of Ireland as Irish, the referendum passed with overwhelming support (79%), reflecting the growing influence of exclusionary nationalist discourses and the increasing racialisation of Irish political debate.[10] These developments had a profound impact on undocumented migrants, many of whom had previously sought regularisation through their Irish-born children. In the aftermath, they faced an increasingly hostile legal environment with significantly fewer avenues for securing legal status or challenging deportation.

In this new context, NGOs such as the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) intensified advocacy for undocumented migrants. In 2007, MRCI launched a campaign calling for the regularisation of individuals who had become undocumented after falling out of the employment permit system.[11] As part of its efforts to deepen understanding of irregular migration in Ireland, MRCI commissioned research that culminated in the publication of *Life in the Shadows*, the first comprehensive report on the situation of undocumented migrants in Ireland. The report was launched by former President Mary Robinson on International Migrants Day in 2008.[12]

In response to increasing awareness and advocacy, the Undocumented Workers Scheme, also known as the Bridging Visa Scheme, was introduced by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform from October 1 to December 31, 2009. It was designed to support individuals who had previously held valid employment permits but had become undocumented through no fault of their own, such as due to exploitation, abuse, fraud, or deception.[13] The scheme provided eligible migrant workers with temporary permission to remain in the State and an opportunity to regularise their status by securing new employment and applying for further

work permits.[14] In parallel, a separate provision extended the period for workers made redundant during the validity of their permits, from three to six months, within which they could seek and obtain alternative employment. This temporary initiative was formalised in 2014 with the introduction of the Reactivation Employment Permit, a permanent mechanism that remains in effect today.[15]

Growing Advocacy and Limited Schemes: 2010-2020

Between 2010 and 2020, Ireland witnessed a significant increase in advocacy efforts and structured proposals aimed at the regularisation of undocumented migrants, including children, international students, and non-EEA fishermen. These efforts were primarily driven by civil society organisations, supported increasingly by political figures and parliamentary committees. Influenced by the broader socio-economic context in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the advocacy discourse during this period drew on a combination of humanitarian, economic, and international arguments.

The rationale for regularisation can be summarised as follows:

1. **Humanitarian Considerations**
   Advocates emphasised the precarious living conditions and mental health challenges faced by undocumented migrants, many of whom were employed in essential but low-paid sectors such as hospitality, agriculture, care, and construction.[16] Particular attention was drawn to the plight of undocumented minors, who were denied legal recognition and access to basic rights—an issue highlighted in light of Ireland's international human rights obligations, particularly the recommendations of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*.[17]

2. **Economic Contributions**
   Undocumented migrants were shown to contribute significantly to the Irish economy through their labour and consumer spending. Proponents argued that a regularisation scheme would not only increase tax revenues but also promote broader economic inclusion by integrating undocumented workers into the formal labour market. In contrast, enforcement and deportation were characterised as disproportionately costly and inefficient.[18]

3. **Diplomatic and International Dimensions**
   Advocates also framed regularisation as a matter of international credibility. Introducing a scheme in Ireland would strengthen its diplomatic position in supporting the legalisation of undocumented Irish nationals abroad, particularly in the United States.[19] Moreover, such a policy would reinforce Ireland's commitment to its international human rights obligations, especially with regard to the rights and protection of children.[20] Ireland has long lagged behind most EU countries in providing regularisation pathways for undocumented children and basic rights for asylum seekers.

While such mechanisms are common across Europe, Ireland was notably out of step with these humanitarian standards.[21]

Despite growing advocacy and parliamentary support, the Irish government maintained a firm stance against introducing any form of mass regularisation during this period, and it is 'clearly against any form of process that would in any way legitimise the status of those unlawfully present without first examining the merits of their individual cases'.[22]

1. **Integrity of the Immigration System**
   The government expressed concerns that a regularisation scheme could potentially undermine public confidence in the country's immigration system. There was a fear that such a policy might inadvertently encourage further irregular migration by permitting people to 'simply ignore our immigration laws', as it could be perceived as an incentive for individuals to enter the country without proper documentation, with the expectation of future legalisation.[23]

2. **Strain on Public Services**
   Another consideration was the potential strain on public services such as healthcare, education, and housing. Regularising a significant number of undocumented migrants could lead to increased demand for these essential services. The government expressed caution about the long-term sustainability of this impact, particularly during a period of economic recovery, especially given concerns over the uncertainty of the number of undocumented migrants, as 'there is no reliable way of estimating the number of persons who could be involved.' [24]

3. **International Legal Obligations**
   From an international perspective, the government pointed to the 2008 European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, which discourages the use of generalised amnesties or 'generalised regularisation'.[25] Additionally, there were concerns about the implications of a major policy shift on Ireland's relationship with the UK, particularly regarding the Common Travel Area (CTA) and immigration enforcement cooperation between the two countries.[26]

4. **Preference for Case-by-Case Discretion**
   The Minister of Justice stated multiple times 'when it comes to people living here illegally, the only option for regularisation is on a case-by-case basis'.[27] This allowed the Minister for Justice to decide on individual applications, including cases of undocumented minors seeking regularisation, ensuring a more tailored approach. However, critics noted that this system lacked transparency and consistency and was not well-equipped to address the broader issue of long-term undocumented residence.[28]

Amid ongoing debate and sustained lobbying efforts, a significant milestone was reached in February 2017 when the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality recommended

that the Minister for Justice and Equality "introduce a time-bound scheme, with transparent criteria, to regularise the position of undocumented migrants in Ireland."[29] This marked a growing political recognition of the need for a structured and humane response to the challenges faced by undocumented individuals.

Despite continued calls for a comprehensive regularisation programme, the Irish government pursued a cautious and incremental policy approach. In the 2010s, a series of smaller-scale initiatives and policy adjustments were introduced, reflecting efforts to strike a balance between immigration control and the promotion of social inclusion and integration. These gradual institutional and policy shifts laid the foundation for the eventual introduction of the 2022 Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme.

Atypical Working Scheme (AWS) for Non-EEA Crew in the Irish Fishing Fleet in 2015

In response to growing criticism over the exploitation of migrant workers in the Irish fishing sector, the Atypical Working Scheme (AWS) for non-EEA crew members was introduced in 2015.[30] Developed jointly by the Department of Justice and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), the AWS was originally designed to facilitate short-term, specialised employment (generally under 90 days) not covered by existing Employment Permit legislation. Its extension to the fishing industry followed the publication of the *Report of the Government Task Force on Non-EEA Workers in the Irish Fishing Fleet* in December 2015, which addressed serious concerns about trafficking and exploitation.[31]

From 2017 to 2022, migrant fishers—both documented and undocumented—remained a subject of ongoing scrutiny and debate in the Dáil, Oireachtas Joint Committees, and through Parliamentary Questions. Criticisms centred on the structure of the AWS itself: the scheme bound workers to individual employers and required regular renewal, which increased their vulnerability to exploitation. Furthermore, its reliance on a standardised model of the working week failed to reflect actual industry practices, often resulting in lower pay and longer hours compared to fishers on a share-based system.[32]

Following the publication of the *Review of the Atypical Scheme for Non-EEA Crew in the Irish Fishing Fleet* on October 11, 2022, the Department of Justice announced that the AWS would be discontinued as of December 31, 2022. Going forward, the employment of non-EEA migrant fishers has been brought under the Employment Permits system—one of the key recommendations from the review.[33]

Migrant Earned Regularisation Bill 2015

On December 19, 2012, MRCI presented to the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality, advocating for an earned regularisation scheme. They argued that undocumented migrants, many of whom had been living and working in Ireland for over four years, were already contributing significantly to the economy—spending around €180 million annually and

generating an estimated €75–€100 million in additional state revenue if regularised. It would bring the largest number of undocumented people into the immigration system and enhance governance. Residence would be earned over a five-year period. The proposal highlighted humanitarian and practical concerns, noting that deporting these individuals would cost up to €90 million and damage Ireland's international credibility, especially given its own advocacy for undocumented Irish citizens abroad.[34]

In 2015, the Migrant Earned Regularisation Bill proposed a five-year scheme that allowed applicants to earn credits through language proficiency, tax contributions, and other integration measures. Though this bill lapsed with the dissolution of Dáil, it represented growing political will to address the issue.[35]

Special Scheme for non-EEA Students (The Student Scheme) in 2018

Although the Migrant Earned Regularisation Bill did not pass, its emphasis on economic contribution as a key criterion for granting long-term residency had a lasting impact on the design and approach of subsequent regularisation schemes.

On October 15, 2018, the Irish Minister for Justice and Equality launched a special scheme to allow certain former international students (non-EEA nationals) who held valid student permission between January 2005 and December 2010 to apply for permission to remain in Ireland. The scheme, running until January 20, 2019, offered residence and work rights (stamp 4s), renewable after two years. Applicants had to demonstrate continuous residence, effort to gain employment, no criminal activity, and the ability to support themselves without burdening the State. The scheme was introduced following Supreme Court rulings on private and family life under the European Convention on Human Rights. A €700 application fee was required, with partial refunds for unsuccessful applications. Beneficiaries were expected to become self-sufficient and contribute to the economy after the two-year probation period.[36]

According to the Minister for Justice and Equality, 3,116 applications were received under the Student Scheme. Decisions have been finalised in 3,106 cases, with 2,253 applicants granted approval and 853 applications refused.[37] As Ireland's first structured regularisation policy targeting undocumented former international students, the scheme marked a significant step in acknowledging the presence and long-term residence of this migrant group.

The initiative also became a point of diplomatic reference, with the Irish government citing it when advocating for fair treatment of undocumented Irish migrants abroad. In November 2019, the Taoiseach referenced the Student Scheme while advocating for the fair treatment of undocumented Irish migrants in the United States, stating: *"We ask for no more from America than we do here already."* This remark underscored Ireland's diplomatic and moral consistency in its approach to undocumented migration, reinforcing its commitment to fair and humane regularisation policies both at home and abroad.

2.2 The Implementation of the 2022 Regularisation Scheme

Although there are no official figures on the number of undocumented persons in the State, MRCI estimated that there were between 20,000 and 26,000 undocumented migrant adults in Ireland in 2014. By 2020, this estimate had been revised to between 15,000 and 17,000.[38] These figures have been cited by the government and other stakeholders in policy discussions. While no specific data is available in the existing literature regarding the number of undocumented Chinese-speaking migrants in Ireland, a survey conducted by MRCI in October 2000 involving 1,000 undocumented individuals identified China as one of the main countries of origin, alongside the Philippines, Mongolia, Bangladesh, Brazil, and Malawi.[39]

Building on a more comprehensive understanding of the undocumented population, the Department of Justice moved from policy development to the formal implementation of a regularisation scheme for long-term undocumented migrants between 2021 and 2022. The scheme's framework was informed by international best practices, Ireland's obligations under the European Union and the Common Travel Area, as well as extensive consultation with civil society organisations and other stakeholders.[40] This commitment was clearly articulated in the Department of Justice's Statement of Strategy 2021–2023, which pledged to "create pathways for regularising the status of long-term undocumented people and their dependents."[41]

On December 3, 2021, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee TD announced the Government's approval of a once-off scheme to regularise the status of thousands of undocumented migrants and their families living in Ireland. In addition, a separate, fee-exempt strand was introduced for international protection applicants who had been in the asylum process for a minimum of two years.[42]

1. Application window

The Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme was implemented on an administrative basis under the executive authority of the Minister for Justice. It was open for applications for a six-month period, from January 31 to July 31, 2022.[43]

In parallel, the International Protection strand of the regularisation scheme for long-term undocumented migrants —designed specifically for individuals with pending international protection applications—was open from February 7 to August 7, 2022.[44]

2. Eligibility criteria

For all applicants under both the undocumented migrants and international protection strands, good character was a fundamental requirement. Applicants were expected to have no adverse criminal history in Ireland or any other jurisdiction, and all criminal convictions had to be declared truthfully—failure to do so would result in automatic refusal. Additionally, applicants were required to be physically present in the State and undocumented at the time of application.

There are four categories of applicants eligible under the undocumented migrants Strand, as well as a distinct category under the International Protection Strand. A summary of each application type is provided in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Eligibility Criteria under the Undocumented Migrant Strand and the International Protection Strand

Strand	Categories	Eligibility Criteria
Long-term undocumented migrants	Single application for an individual	• Be a non-EEA national. • Be over 18 years old. • Have lived undocumented in Ireland continuously for at least four years prior to January 31 2022 and still be undocumented and residing in the State on the date of application.
	Family application (couple only)	**The principal applicant must:** • Be a non-EEA national. • Be over 18 years old. • Have lived undocumented in Ireland continuously for at least four years prior to January 31 2022 and still be undocumented and residing in the State on the date of application. **The spouse/civil partner/de facto partner must:** • Be a non-EEA national. • Be over the age of 18. • Have been living undocumented in the State continuously for at least two years; Have been living with the principal applicant as part of a family unit for the two-year period prior to January 31 2022; and continue to reside in the State undocumented as part of the family unit on the date the application is submitted.
	Family application with at least one dependent minor child	**The principal applicant must:** • Be a non-EEA national. • Be over the age of 18. • Have been living undocumented in the State continuously for at least three years prior to January 31 2022, and continue to reside in the State undocumented on the date the application is submitted. **The spouse/civil partner/de facto partner must:**

		• Be a non-EEA national. • Be over the age of 18. • Have been living undocumented in the State continuously for at least two years; Have been living with the principal applicant as part of a family unit for the two-year period prior to January 31 2022; and continue to reside in the State undocumented as part of the family unit on the date the application is submitted. **Children under the age of 18 must:** Have been residing with the principal applicant immediately prior to the publication of the Scheme on January 13 2022.
	Family application with at least one dependent adult child	**The principal applicant must:** • Be a non-EEA national. • Be over 18 years old. • Have lived undocumented in Ireland continuously for at least four years prior to January 31 2022 and still be undocumented and residing in the State on the date of application. **The spouse/civil partner/de facto partner and/or dependent adult child (aged 18–23) of the principal applicant must:** • Be a non-EEA national; • Be over the age of 18; • Have been living undocumented in the State continuously for at least two years; • Have been living with the principal applicant as part of a family unit for two years prior to January 31 2022; and continue to reside in the State undocumented as part of the family unit on the date the family application is submitted. **If the child or children are over 23 years of age:** • They cannot be included in a family application. • They must submit an individual application and meet the general eligibility requirements.

International protection	International protection applicants	• Current applicants for international protection in the State. • Have been in the international protection process for at least two years immediately prior to February 7 2022. • Short absences from the State, up to a maximum of 60 days, may be disregarded when assessing continuous residence.

[45]

Note: Applications are also accepted from individuals who are subject to a Deportation Order or who have applied for the revocation of a Deportation Order.

3. Application procedure

The Long-term Undocumented Migrants Strand

The Long-term Undocumented Migrants Strand exclusively accepted applications online through the Immigration Service Delivery (ISD) portal.[46] After submitting the online application form, uploading the required documents, and paying the fees, applicants over 16 years old would receive a link to initiate the Garda vetting process online. If the application was missing any documents, applicants might be asked to provide additional paperwork. Once the Garda vetting process was completed and all required documents were submitted, the application procedure was considered complete.[47]

International Protection Strand

Applicants for the International Protection Strand were required to complete a PDF application form, which, along with the necessary supporting documentation, had to be submitted via email. Applicants over 16 years old for this strand were also required to complete the Garda vetting process online.[48]

4. Required information and supporting documents

To complete an application under the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, applicants were required to provide comprehensive personal information along with a range of supporting documents to verify their identity, residency history, and, where applicable, family relationships. The documentation aimed to establish the applicant's eligibility and demonstrate continuous residence in Ireland during the qualifying period. Below is a breakdown of the required information and supporting materials (see Tables 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, and 2.5).

The Long-term Undocumented Migrants Strand [49]

Table 2.2 Required Information for Online Application Form (The Long-term Undocumented Migrants Strand)	
1. Representative Info	If a representative (e.g., solicitor) is completing the form, their full details must be provided.
2. Applicant Details	- Name - Date of birth - Country of birth - Gender - Nationality
3. Immigration History	- Immigration identifiers if ever interacted with Irish immigration authorities - Date of first arrival - Immigration status upon arrival - Past immigration status and applications - Absence from the state
4. Contact Information	- Address - Phone number - Email
5. Identity/Travel Document	- Passport or travel document details
6. Connection with the State	- Employment status
7. Criminal Declaration	- Offences in Ireland or abroad - Court orders in relation to Family Law - Terrorist activities - Military history or training - Involvement in war crimes

Table 2.3 Required Documents for the Long-term Undocumented Migrants Strand	
Identity Documents	**One** of the following documents per each applicant/ family member: - Full Copy of Passport (valid or expired) - Travel Document (valid or expired) - Drivers' Licence (valid or expired which was issued in Ireland with your photograph on it) - Public Services Card (issued in Ireland, which has your photograph on it) - National identity card (valid or expired) - Birth Certificates of children born in the State - Expired Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card or Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) card

	- Expired Temporary Residence Card (TRC) (Former International Protection Applicants card).
Residency documentation	All applicants must submit **at least one document for each year** in line with the required undocumented residency criteria: • Previous Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card or GNIB Card, or • Previous permission letter issued by the Immigration Service Delivery (formerly Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) • Social Protection Statements • Utility bills • Registration with the Residential Tenancies Board • Tax documents • Marriage/civil partnership certificates carried out in the State • Evidence that the applicant sat the Junior Certificate and/or Leaving Certificate exams in Ireland • School letter • Letter from doctor/hospital in Ireland • Vaccination passport for children, or Covid 19 vaccination card • Statements or other correspondence from bank/building society/credit union • Proof of money transfers between the applicant and a third party, carried out at a money transfer facility in the State • Correspondence from an insurance company regarding an active policy • Other official correspondence from an Irish state agency • Other acceptable official documentation o Letter from the employment company confirming employment and duration on official company-headed paper. o Letter from your local Embassy/Consulate based in Ireland, on official headed paper, highlighting any interactions o Letters from local medical clinics on official clinic/hospital/consultant-headed paper o Evidence of attendance at Training/language courses on official school/college headed paper o Evidence of membership with the local County Council Library, on official headed paper
Evidence of relationship (family application only)	• Marriage certificate or civil partnership certificate • Evidence that family members have been living together for the last two years • Evidence of a durable relationship • Children's birth certificate/adoption certificate/legal documentation attesting sole custody of the minor child/a permission letter from the other parent in cases of shared custody

Letter of authority for a legal representative	A signed letter of authority from all adult family members, if represented by a solicitor or NGO.

International Protection Strand[50]

Table 2.4 Required Information on Application Form (International Protection Strand)	
1. Personal details	- Name - Information about applicant's Temporary Residence Card issued by the International Protection Office
2. Contact information	- Email - Phone number - Addresses
3. Criminal declaration	- Consent to Garda eVetting - Criminal offence and pending charges

Table 2.5 Required Documents for International Protection Strand

For applicants residing in Direct Provision, address details may be partially verified by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth through weekly accommodation registers, while those outside Direct Provision must provide evidence of continuous residence in the State.[51] See accepted documents below:

- Documentation from the International Protection Accommodation Services of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Social Protection Statements;
- Utility bills
- Registration with the Residential Tenancies Board;
- Tax records
- Evidence that the applicant sat the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate exams in Ireland;
- A letter from a school principal in Ireland, confirming attendance at a school if it was in the past five years;
- Statements or other correspondence from bank/building society/credit union
- Proof of money transfers between the applicant and a third party, carried out at a money transfer facility in the State
- Letter from doctor/hospital in Ireland
- Vaccination passport for children or Covid-19 vaccination card issued in Ireland.
- Other official correspondence from an Irish state agency
- Correspondence from an insurance company regarding an active policy (Home or Car Insurance Policy Only).

5. Application fees

The application fee for the Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Strand varied based on the applicant's circumstances. Individual applicants were required to pay €550, while a family unit was charged €700. Payment was made online at the time of application submission using a credit or debit card. The fee was non-refundable in all cases.[52] There was no provision for a discretionary waiver or reduction of fees for individuals and families unable to afford the cost of the scheme.[53]

Applicants under the International Protection Strand were exempt from paying any application fee.

A total of €3,736,000.00 in fees was collected under both strands of the scheme.[54]

6. EVetting

All applicants aged 16 and over included in the application must undergo eVetting by the Garda Síochána National Vetting Bureau to meet the eligibility requirement of demonstrating good character and conduct.[55] Applicants should receive a vetting invitation form within 10 days of applying, which must be printed, signed, and emailed back.

Once the invitation form is signed and uploaded by the applicant, usually after 8-10 weeks, applicants will receive an email from the National Vetting Bureau containing a link to the online vetting application form.[56] Applicants have 30 days to complete and submit the form, which requires the following information:

- Name at birth
- Place of birth
- Passport number
- Mother's maiden name
- All addresses lived at since birth
- Any other names used
- Details of any convictions (in Ireland or abroad)

The progress of the eVetting process can be tracked, and applicants may request a review of their vetting results if they disagree with any of the details.[57]

7. Processing time

The Department of Justice did not provide an official timeline for processing applications during the application period. Its FAQ document noted that processing times could vary depending on the complexity of individual applications and that cases involving existing

deportation orders would likely require additional time.[58] The Immigrant Council of Ireland advised that applicants should expect a processing period of approximately six months.[59] However, there was no system in place for applicants to track the progress of their applications, apart from the eVetting process.

In March 2023, the Minister for Justice reported that the actual average processing time for cases handled in 2023 by the Undocumented Unit was 9.4 months, which may have been longer than applicants had anticipated.[60]

8. Immigration status granted

For both strands, successful applicants were granted a Stamp 4 residence permission for two years and received a letter confirming their permission by registered post.[61] This status includes unrestricted access to the labour market, eligibility for public services and education, and the time spent under this residency counts towards the five-year requirement for naturalisation. If applicable, any existing deportation order against the applicant was revoked.[62]

Successful applicants over the age of 16 must attend their local immigration office to register their permission.[63] Those approved under the Long-Term Undocumented Migrants strand who are over 18 years of age are required to pay a €300 registration fee at the time of registration.[64] Applicants under the International Protection strand are exempt from this charge.[65]

9. Refusal and appeals

An application could have been refused if eligibility had not been established. Common reasons for refusal included not meeting the undocumented residence requirement, national security concerns, poor character, false or inconsistent documentation, or failure to prove a qualifying family relationship. If refused, applicants would have received written notification with reasons and information on how to appeal.

Applicants had 30 working days from the date of refusal to submit an online appeal, either by themselves or through a legal representative. The appeal had to include reasons and could be supported by new evidence. Appeals were reviewed by a different officer, who could have either upheld the original decision or granted permission.

If an appeal was unsuccessful, the decision was final and could not be appealed further. Applicants with another open application, including an International Protection application, would have had that processed, while those without any other application or permission would have received a Section 3 notice under the Immigration Act, 1999, regarding a potential deportation order. They could submit reasons why deportation should not occur, and the Minister was obliged to consider all relevant rights before making a decision (the Section 3 process). If a deportation order was already in place, it remained valid, and applicants might have been required to leave the State. However, legal advice could be sought to request the revocation of the order if circumstances had changed.[66]

10. Summary of Applications and Decisions

According to the latest figures provided by the Minister on February 27, 2025, the Department of Justice received 6,548 applications for 8,311 individuals under the Long-term Undocumented Migrants scheme, including 1,126 minors as part of family applications.[67] Of these, 5,654 (86%) were Single Applications, and 894 (14%) were Family Applications. A total of 1,328 individuals were subject to a Deportation Order. By February 27, 2025, a total of 8,284 decisions had been made, including 6,519 (78.7%) positive decisions, 1,645 (19.8%) negative decisions, and 120 withdrawals by applicants for various reasons (see Table 2.6).[68]

Table 2.6 Summary of Applications and Decisions under the Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Strand

Category	Number	Percentage
Total Applications Received	6,548	100%
Total Individuals	8,311	N/A
Minors (Part of Family Applications)	1,126	N/A
Single Applications	5,654	86%
Family Applications	894	14%
Individuals Subject to Deportation Order	1,328	N/A
Total Decisions Made	8,284	N/A
Positive Decisions	6,519	78.7%
Negative Decisions	1,645	19.8%
Withdrawn Applications	120	1.4%

3,240 applications were received for the international protection strand of the Regularisation Scheme.[69] However, the author did not find recent data on the approval and rejection numbers.

The largest number of applicants under the scheme was from Brazil (1,504), followed by Pakistan (1,307) and China, including Hong Kong (1,159). Other notable countries of origin included the Philippines (751), Nigeria (446), and India (313).

In relation to this research, there were potentially 1,202 Chinese-speaking migrants who applied under the scheme.[70] This figure includes 1,159 applicants of Chinese nationality, 233

Malaysian nationals, and 6 from Taiwan under the Long-term Undocumented Migrants strand, as well as 28 Chinese and 9 Malaysian applicants under the International Protection strand.[71]

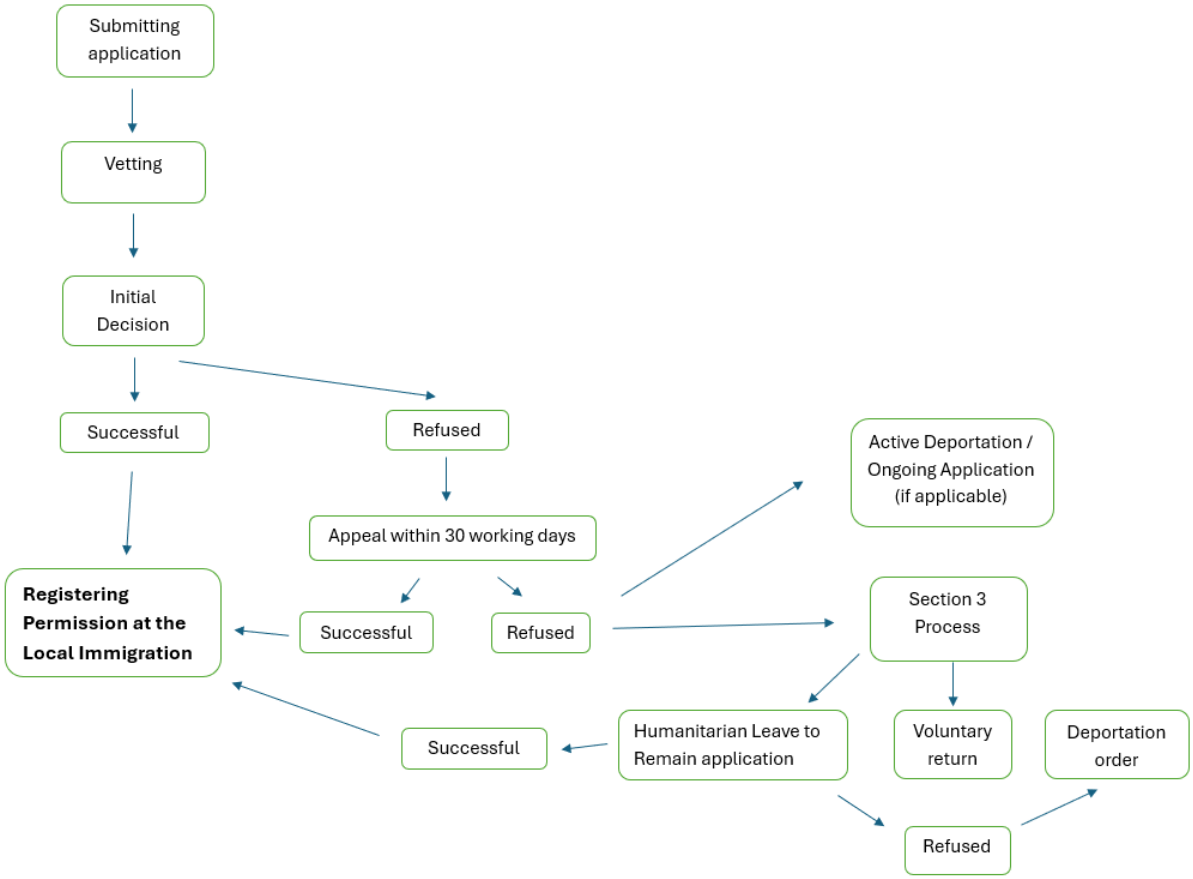

Figure 2.1 The Application Procedure for the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme

11. Administrative Settings, Support for Applicants, and Promotion of the Scheme

The Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme was managed by the Department of Justice, specifically the Undocumented Unit and the International Protection Regularisation Scheme Unit. According to the Minister for Justice's response in Parliament on July 11, 2023, there were 17 staff members assigned to these dedicated units, with the highest number of staff reaching 21 at any given time.[72]

The primary mode of communication for applicants seeking assistance or information is via email, with dedicated email addresses for each unit: undocumentedhelp@justice.ie for the Long-term Undocumented Migrants strand and IPRSU@ipo.gov.ie for matters related to the International Protection strand.[73] For eVetting-related queries, applicants were instructed to contact *undocevetting@justice.ie*, as indicated in the Vetting Invitation Form.[74] Additionally, another email address—*help@justice-undocumented.cloud.gov.ie*—was also used in relation to the Long-Term Undocumented Migrants strand.

It is also important to note that the Department of Justice did not provide dedicated legal support to applicants under this policy, as this was considered unnecessary for the implementation of the scheme.[75]

To ensure the scheme's success and to maximise participation across diverse communities, the Department of Justice implemented a promotional strategy in close collaboration with NGO partners. Outreach efforts included a targeted multilingual social media campaign, launched across major platforms and directed at the top ten nationalities most likely to be eligible. This campaign was tailored in applicants' native languages and continued until the scheme closed at the end of July.[76] A final media push was launched during the closing phase, using various media channels to raise awareness and encourage last-minute applications.[77]

12. Media and Information Resources for the Chinese-speaking Community

A range of communication efforts emerged prior to the launch of the Regularisation Scheme to improve awareness and accessibility within Ireland's Chinese-speaking community. These included official multilingual resources, NGO-led outreach, publicity by commercial agents and law firms, and community-driven media initiatives. Together, these organically developed channels helped ensure that vital information reached a broad segment of this predominantly non-English-speaking migrant population.

Government-Led Multilingual Resources

The Department of Justice made a concerted effort to improve direct access to accurate information by publishing key documents under the Long-term Undocumented Migrants Strand—such as the scheme's policy guidance, applicant guidance, and FAQ document—in 10 languages, including Mandarin and Cantonese, on its official immigration website.[78] This marked an important step toward institutional inclusivity, enabling Chinese-speaking migrants to engage with official policy materials in their native language. However, the International Protection Strand did not offer such multilingual documentation.

Despite this initiative, many members of the Chinese-language community continued to rely on supplementary sources of information due to unfamiliarity with government websites or difficulties navigating formal bureaucratic language.

Collaboration Between Community Media and Immigration Service Providers

Various Chinese-language community media outlets collaborated with immigration agencies and law firms to produce practical guides and application explainers. These resources included documentation checklists, key deadlines, and answers to frequently asked questions, delivered through articles, infographics, and interviews.[79] Some law firms also provided information and services in Chinese on their official websites.[80]

While these materials served an important public information function—helping to raise awareness and clarify the application process—they also carried a commercial intent, promoting legal or consultancy services to potential clients. As a result, the content often lacked detailed guidance on how to navigate the online application system. This blend of public interest and business promotion reflects the dual role such communication efforts often play in migrant communities.

NGO Outreach

Non-governmental organisations played a vital role in bridging communication gaps and supporting applicants throughout the process. Organisations such as Justice for the Undocumented (JFU), Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), MRCI, CMP and Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre (Nasc), and the Irish Refugee Council (IRC) leveraged their grassroots networks and cultural expertise to engage directly with undocumented migrants.

These organisations implemented a range of targeted initiatives:

- Workshops and webinars offered clear, step-by-step guidance on application procedures and created an inclusive space for questions and discussion.[81]
- Helplines and drop-in clinics, staffed with bilingual personnel and interpreters, provided personalised support both by phone and in person.[82]
- Community-managed WeChat groups organised by MRCI and CMP's Chinese-speaking volunteers emerged as critical platforms for real-time updates, peer-to-peer advice, and emotional support.

These efforts were particularly effective in reaching individuals who may have faced difficulties accessing or trusting official communication channels. However, geographically, the influence of these organisations was mainly concentrated in Dublin and Cork, leading to an uneven distribution of support resources across the country.

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[82] MRCI and JFU held free clinics to assist with completing applications in Dublin, Limerick, Cork, and Galway, with support from a Chinese-speaking staff member. For more details on those events, see the MRCI Facebook page, accessed April 26, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/Migrant.Rights.Centre.Ireland; CMP also appointed a part-time Chinese-speaking staff member dedicated to providing in-person assistance for Chinese clients.

Chapter 3

Chinese Immigrants' Experiences with the Regularisation Scheme

3.1 Characteristics of Respondents

1. Number of Respondents

The online questionnaire gathered responses from 100 individuals regarding the Regularisation Scheme, with 97 participants agreeing to have their responses published in the report. Among these, 75 individuals had applied for the scheme, while 22 had not. The two main reasons respondents chose not to apply were ineligibility and lack of awareness. Specifically, 16 individuals (73%) were ineligible, mainly because they had not met the residency requirement and were therefore unable to apply. Additionally, 4 individuals (18%) were unaware of the scheme and missed the application deadline. Two individuals (9%) did not apply because they found it difficult to navigate the application procedure (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2). One participant remarked, "I gave up on applying because no one assisted me, and I didn't think it was important."

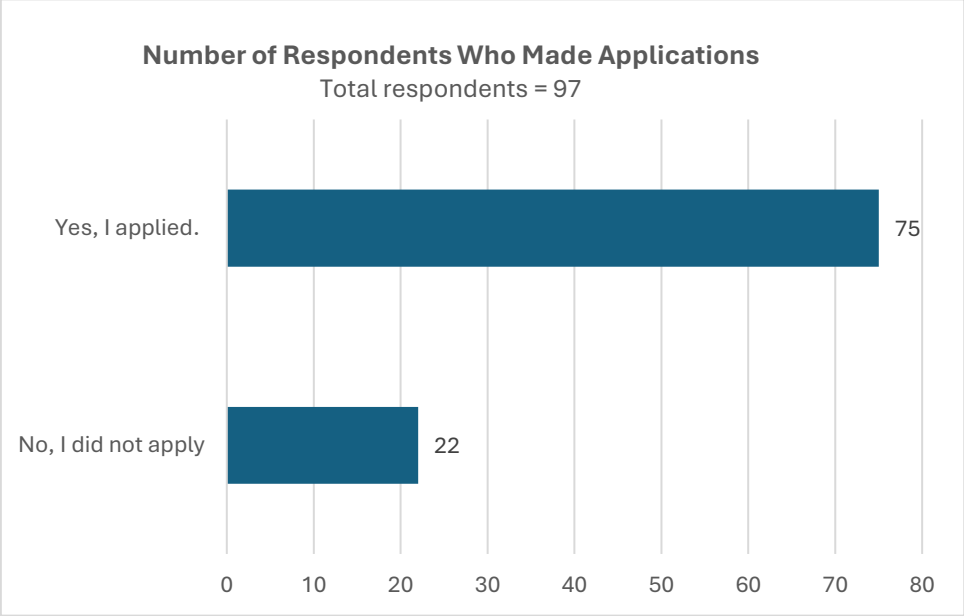

Figure 3.1 Number of Respondents Who Made Applications

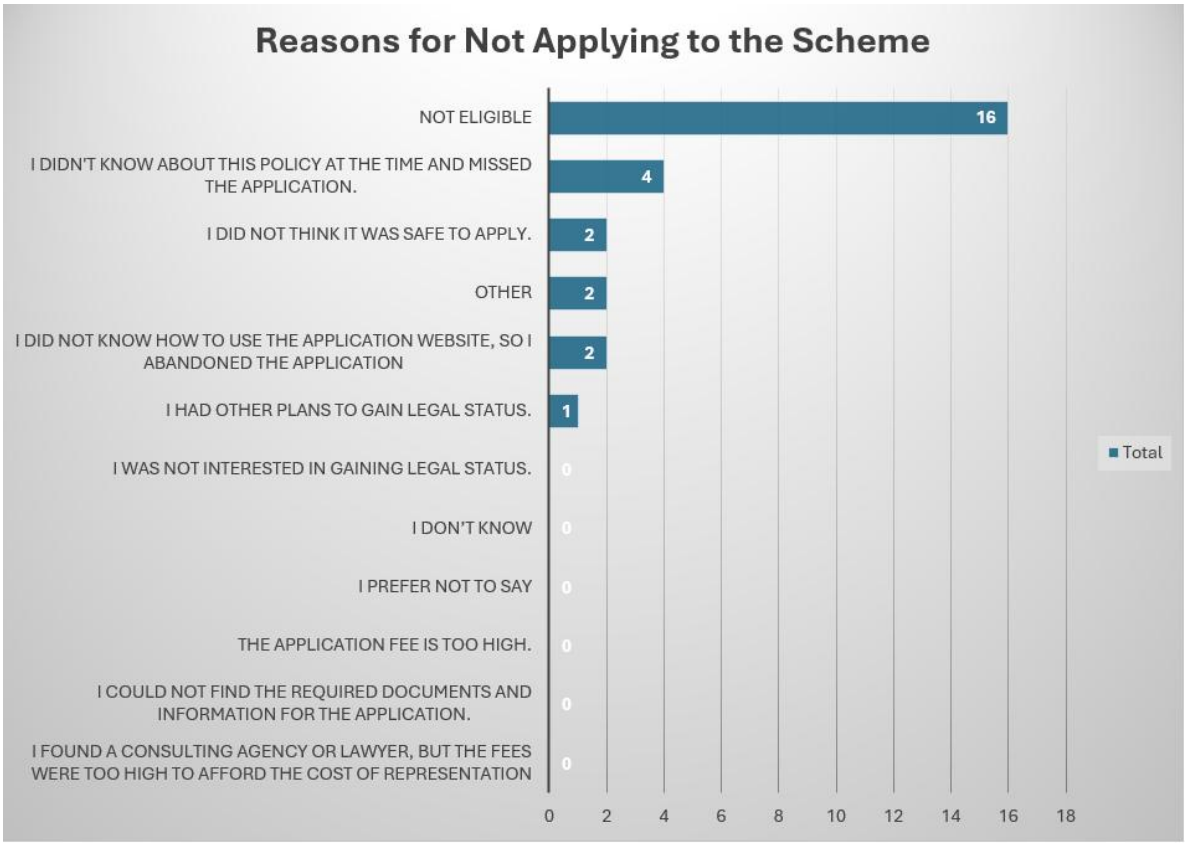

Figure 3.2 Reasons for Not Applying to the 2022 Regularisation Scheme

Of the 75 individuals who applied, 92% (69 individuals) received a positive outcome, 7% (5 individuals) were refused, and 1 individual is still awaiting a result. Notably, all five applicants who were refused had submitted a Section 3 application (See Figure 3.3).

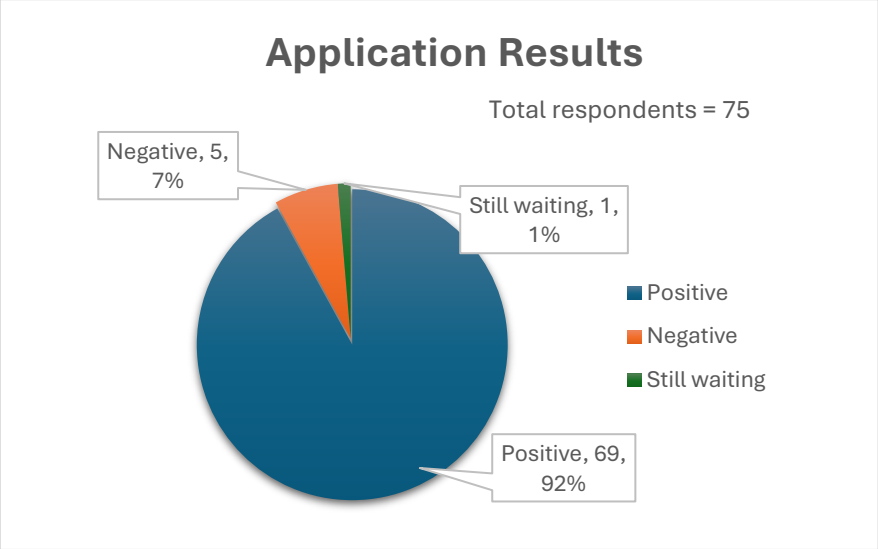

Figure 3.3 Summary of Application Results of the Respondents

Of the 74 respondents who specified the type of applications they made, 77% (57 individuals) submitted individual applications, 8 individuals applied as both principal and dependent applicants for family applications, and 1 respondent applied through the international protection strand (Figure 3.4).

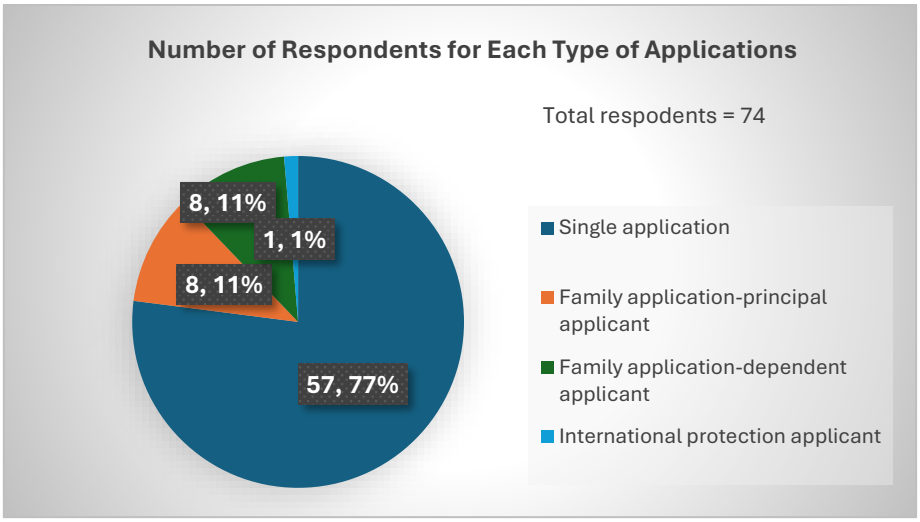

Figure 3.4 Number of Respondents of Each Type of Application

2. Age Distribution

The respondents' ages ranged from their 20s to their 70s, with the majority falling between 26 and 65 years old. The most represented group was the 36–45 age group, indicating that most participants have several years of work or migration experience. While there is some representation from those aged 65 and above, the numbers decline noticeably (see Figure 3.5). Overall, the data suggests that most respondents are of working age. These patterns align with the age distribution of applicants for both the Long-term Undocumented Migrants strand and the International Protection strand (see Figure 3.6).[1]

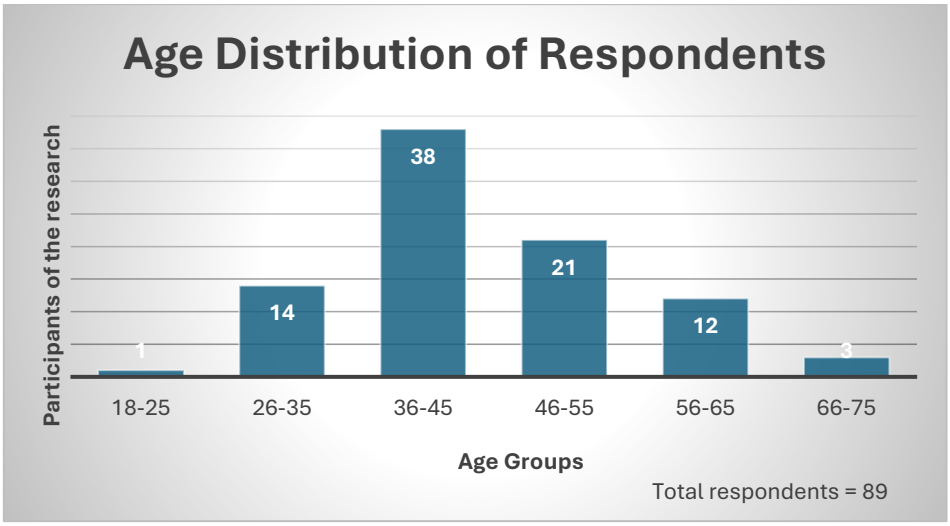

Figure 3.5 Age Distribution of Respondents

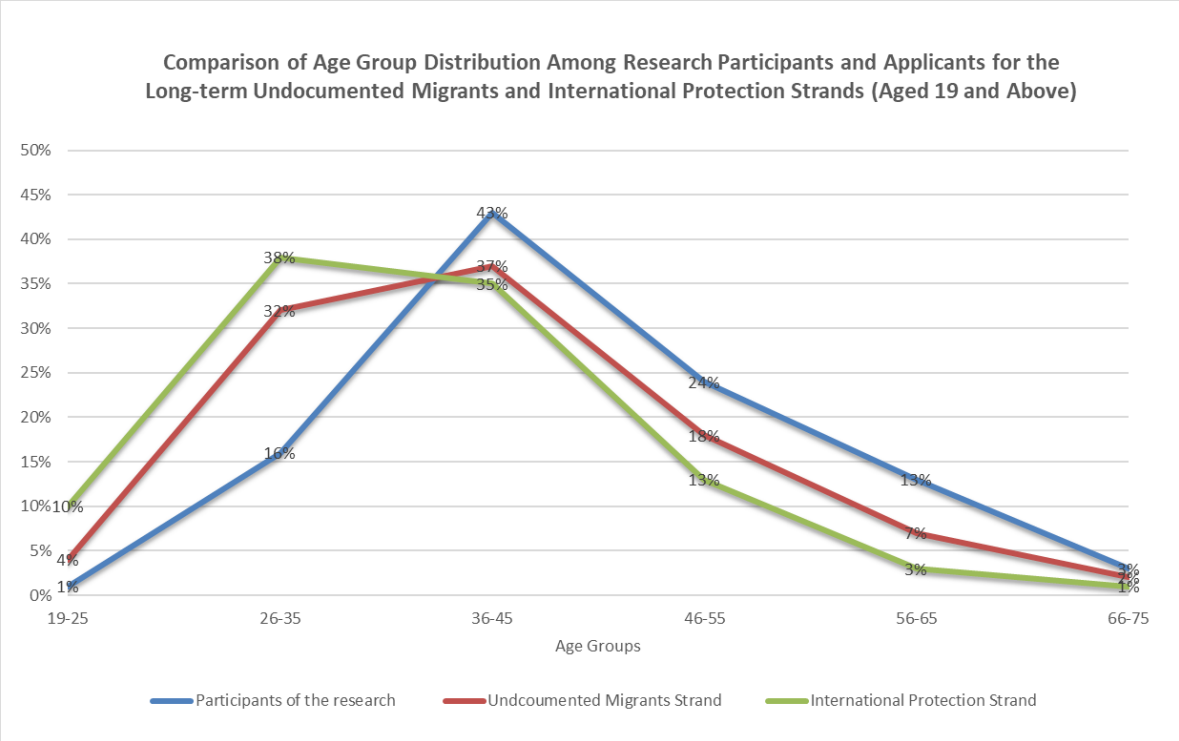

Figure 3.6 Comparison of Age Group Distribution Among Research Participants and Applicants for the Long-term Undocumented Migrants and International Protection Strands

3. Gender Identity

The gender distribution among respondents was slightly more males, with 55% (53 individuals) identifying as male and 45% (44 individuals) identifying as female (see Figure 3.7).

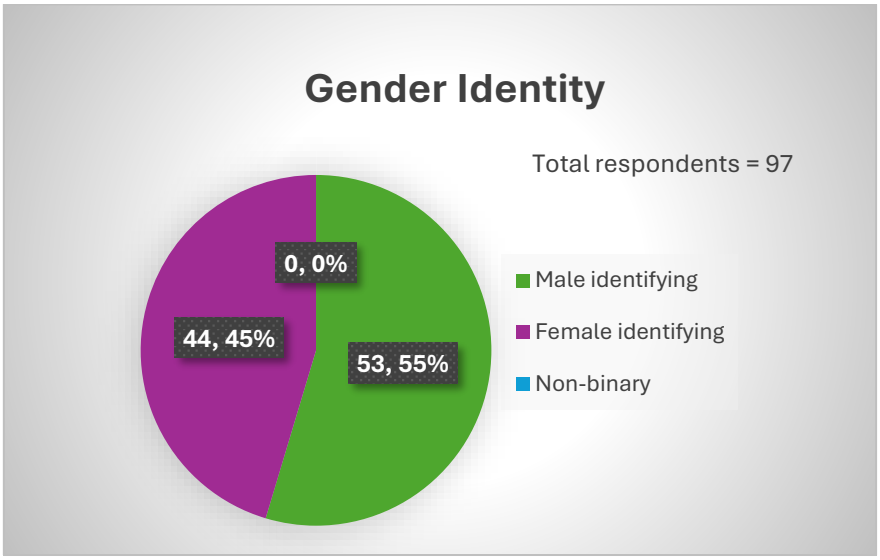

Figure 3.7 Gender Identity of Respondents

4. Country of Birth

The majority of respondents (91% or 88 individuals) were born in Mainland China, indicating that the group primarily consists of Mainland Chinese immigrants. A smaller portion (9% or 9 individuals) was born in Malaysia (see Figure 3.8). No respondents were from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Singapore, or other Chinese-speaking regions, suggesting that the survey sample is relatively homogeneous in terms of national origin. However, the sampling method is not random and therefore not generalisable.

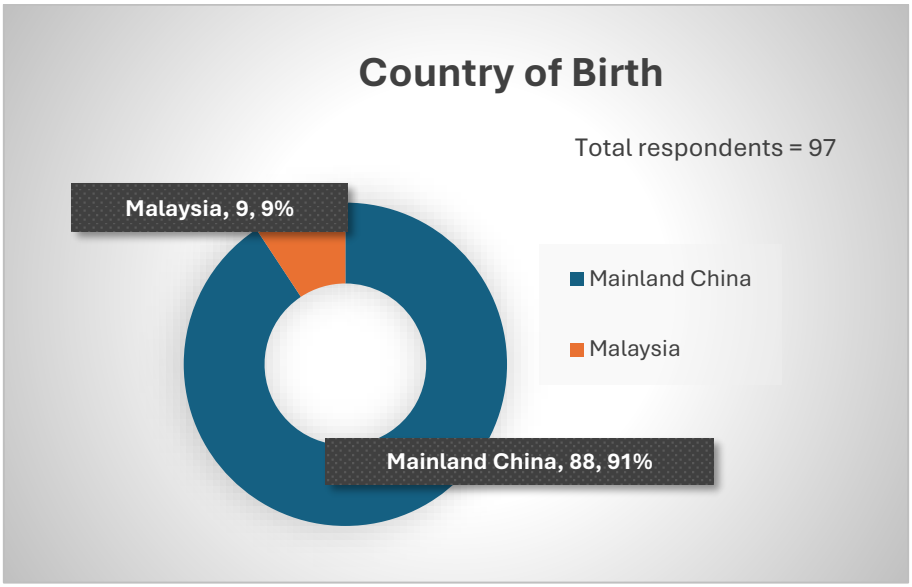

Figure 3.8 Birth Countries of Respondents

5. Civil status

The survey shows that a significant portion of respondents are married, with 57% (54 individuals) identifying as such. A smaller but notable percentage are single (22% or 21 individuals) or divorced (12% or 10 individuals), while smaller segments are in de facto partnerships (4%), widowed (3%), or separated (2%) (see Figure 3.9).

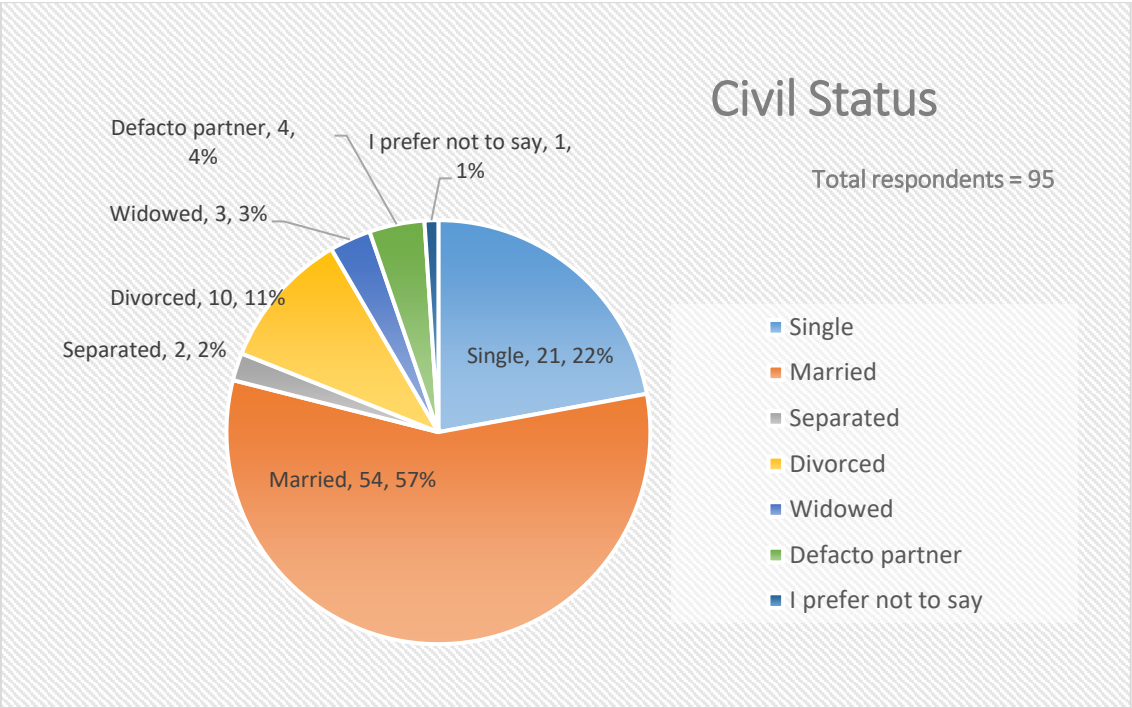

Figure 3.9 Civil Status of Respondents

6. Occupation[2]

The Accommodation and Food Service Activities sector is the dominant occupation among respondents, accounting for 61% of the responses.[3] Other notable sectors include Activities of Households as Employers (8%), Wholesale and Retail Trade (6%), and Full-time Parenting (5%). Smaller representations are found in sectors such as unemployed (4%), Construction (3%), and other services (3%) (see Figure 3.10). These jobs are often service-oriented and typically require low to medium-skilled labour, with minimal requirements for advanced qualifications, formal education, or English proficiency. Additionally, these sectors tend to have long and variable working hours, including evenings and weekends, which can impact participants' work-life balance. Many of these roles offer limited career progression and job security, contributing to lower earning potential. There is also a prevalence of informal work, particularly in caregiving and household employment, which can limit access to benefits and protections. In sectors like Accommodation and Food Service Activities and Household Employment, where many respondents are employed, communication within the workplace may primarily occur in their first language. This lack of exposure to English in everyday work interactions can hinder language development, preventing workers from improving their English skills.

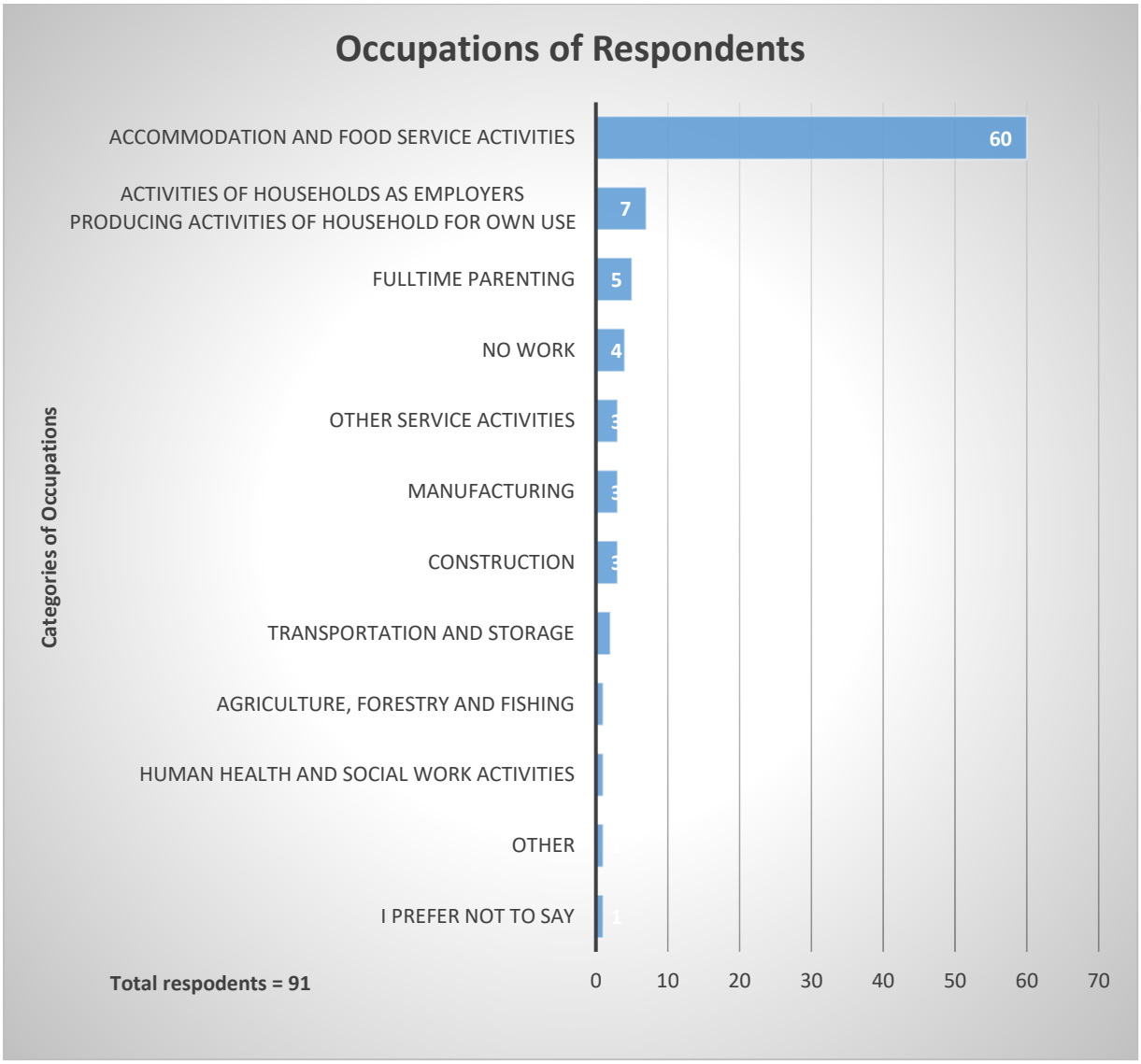

Figure 3.10 Occupations of Respondents

7. Length of stay in Ireland

A significant portion of applicants for the 2022 Regularisation Scheme in Ireland had resided in the State for 6–10 years (40 individuals), while 30 respondents reported a residence period of 11–20 years, and a smaller group of 4 individuals had lived in Ireland for over 20 years. These groups were highly likely to satisfy the scheme's eligibility criteria. In contrast, applicants who had resided in Ireland for 1–5 years (18 individuals) faced greater challenges in meeting the residence requirements and providing sufficient evidence of continuous residence, due to the shorter duration of their stay (see Figure 3.11).

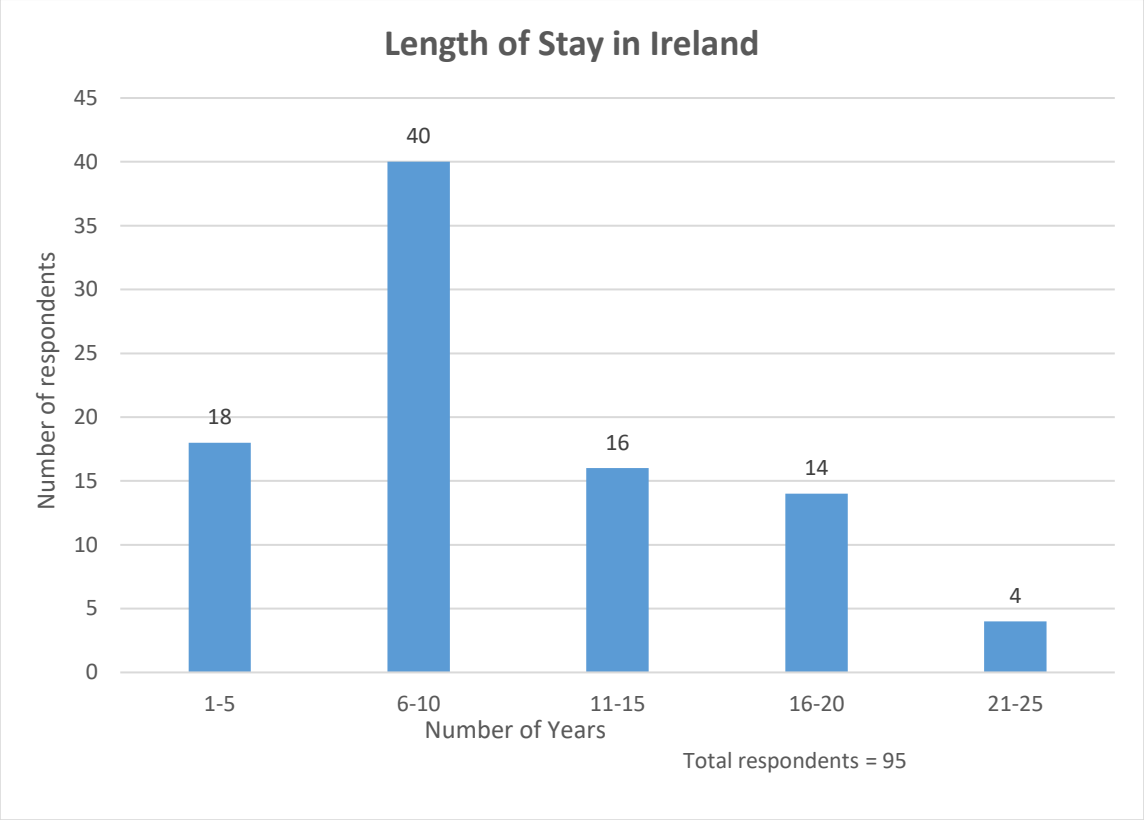

Figure 3.11 Respondents' Length of Stay in Ireland

3.2. English Proficiency Levels

From the result of the online questionnaire, the respondents' English proficiency has been categorised using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).[4] The self-assessment results from applicants for the 2022 Regularisation Scheme highlight a significant language barrier, with the majority possessing little to no functional English ability. Specifically, 28 individuals (30%) reported no English proficiency, while 52 individuals (55%) assessed themselves at the A1 level, meaning they can understand simple expressions but struggle with conversation and complex interactions. Notably, no individuals reported A2-level proficiency. Meanwhile, only 11 individuals (12%) rated themselves at B1, indicating they can manage everyday situations but may struggle in professional or legal contexts. Advanced English proficiency is rare, with just one person each at B1 and C2 levels, meaning fewer than 2% of applicants have the language skills necessary for higher education or skilled employment (see Table 3.1).

Levels of English Proficiency	Number of people	Percentage
No English	28	30%
Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions **(A1)**	52	55%
Can describe matters in areas of immediate need **(A2)**	0	0%
Can deal with most situations likely to arise **(B1)**	11	12%
Can understand technical discussions in my field of specialisation **(B2)**	1	1%
Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes **(C1)**	0	0%
Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read **(C2)**	1	1%
I don't know	1	1%
Total respondents	94	100%

Table 3.1 Summary of Respondents' Self-Assessed English Proficiency Levels

To gain a deeper understanding of respondents' English proficiency, we invited participants in interviews and focus groups to elaborate on their language abilities and how these impact their daily lives and social integration. The effect of English proficiency on their experience applying for the Regularisation Scheme will be analysed in the following chapter.

1. Key Observations regarding language use

● Basic Communication

Many respondents reported being able to handle simple, everyday conversations, such as shopping or asking for directions. However, they often found it difficult to engage in deeper discussions or understand nuanced language.

Ruifeng, 54 years old, has been living in Ireland for 21 years. When he was growing up in China, education was not prioritised in his region, and he began working after completing primary school. Since arriving in Ireland, he had consistently worked in Chinese takeaways and restaurants, focusing his learning primarily on cooking skills and kitchen management rather than on improving his English. He often travelled for job trials at different shops and found it difficult to navigate unfamiliar areas, especially those far from the cities, due to his very limited English.

Ruifeng: *"My English is definitely not enough. Sometimes I mishear things or don't understand at all. Even something as simple as taking the bus—I don't know how to ask for the bus stop. People can tell from my accent that I'm not a native speaker."*

Jiaqi and her husband were in their 30s and had been living in Ireland for nearly 10 years. Her husband was the primary breadwinner of the household. He had also left school after middle school and started working at a young age. While working as a hairdresser in Ireland, he managed to communicate with customers about topics related to his work. However, he struggled to converse beyond that professional context.

Jiaqi: *"He can manage simple conversations, but anything deeper is difficult. For example, when we visit a doctor or need to handle something official, we struggle to communicate fluently."*

● Seeking help from friends

Many relied on friends for translation when handling important matters, highlighting the crucial role of social networks. However, some felt uncomfortable repeatedly asking for help. Jiahao, aged 40, has been living in Ireland for 15 years. When handling personal affairs, it often took him several attempts to complete tasks successfully. He worked in a Chinese restaurant where accommodation was provided, and spent most of his time with colleagues. In situations requiring English, he frequently sought help from coworkers and friends. However, as he needed assistance more often, he began to feel embarrassed. Over time, this led him to avoid activities that involved using English, such as visiting the doctor.

Jiahao: *"For basic conversations, my English is enough. But if I need to apply for a document or a bank card, I'm completely lost. I went to the bank three times and still couldn't sort it out. Asking friends for help makes things easier, but I feel embarrassed about always relying on them."*

● Workplace-Specific Language

Respondents working in English-speaking environments, such as kitchens or customer service roles, often acquired job-specific vocabulary but lacked broader language skills. Tingyu, aged 34, had worked in takeaway shops where English was the primary language used with both coworkers and customers. Having studied at an English Language School during her first year in Ireland, she mainly applied her language learning to workplace communication.

Tingyu: *"I work at a fish and chips shop owned by an Italian. Since I've been there for a long time, I can handle work-related conversations just fine. But if I need to go to a bank or hospital, more complex communication becomes difficult. Takeaways are simple—you just make burgers, fry chips, and prepare kebabs."*

Zijie, 59 years old, had been living in Ireland for 23 years, spending 7 of those years working on construction sites where he was one of the few Chinese workers. During this time, he picked up much of the commonly used vocabulary specific to that environment.

Zijie: *"At that time, I was young and could understand what they were saying. For example, if they asked me to get a hammer, I knew it was called "hammer"; if they needed a shovel, it was "shovel"; and a level was called "level." As long as I could understand what they were saying, I could just get the tool they needed."*

● Limited Formal Communication

Fengtao arrived in Ireland in 2013 when he was 39 years old, and began self-studying English by memorising vocabulary, but he seldom practised speaking due to his introverted nature. He was later attacked and injured in a workplace incident and spent years seeking compensation, during which he often felt unsupported by both the hospital and the Garda station, particularly when it came to communication and progressing his case.

Fengtao: *"I was assaulted once and had to report it to the police and go to the hospital. I could express myself slowly if I really tried, but having a normal conversation is a challenge."*

● Higher Proficiency Cases

A small minority of respondents reported higher English proficiency, usually due to prolonged exposure to English-speaking environments or formal education. Xudong, for example, noted that having an Irish partner significantly improved his conversational skills. At the time of the interview, he was 29 years old and had been in a relationship with an Irish girlfriend, which provided him with more opportunities to practise speaking and helped him use English more naturally.

Xudong: *"I'd say my English is above average, maybe slightly higher than intermediate. My ex-girlfriend was Irish, so that helped a lot.*

2. Learning English in Ireland

Interviewees employed a variety of methods to learn English; however, many faced significant challenges due to limited resources, time constraints, and a lack of formal instruction. Some had studied English in China as part of the nine-year compulsory education system, but, having had little opportunity to use the language before or after arriving in Ireland, they experienced significant language attrition over time.

Pingmei, aged 52, had been living in Ireland for 13 years. She had learned basic vocabulary during secondary school in China, but her knowledge was very fragmented. After arriving in Ireland, she worked as a live-in nanny for Chinese families, with working hours stretching from

7 am until midnight when the children's mother returned home from work. Her main focus was constantly caring for young children and doing household chores. Since she lived and worked entirely within Chinese-speaking households, she rarely had the chance to use even the limited English she had learned.

Pingmei: *"I studied English in secondary school, so I know the basics—like the alphabet and common words such as 'banana' and 'apple.' But after so many years without using it, I've forgotten almost everything."*

● Self-Study

Many respondents relied on self-study methods, such as using dictionaries, mobile apps, or online platforms. Yaqin completed her undergraduate studies and held a stable job as a bank manager in China. When she arrived in Ireland 17 years ago, aged 42, she did not have a smartphone and still maintained the habit of looking up words in dictionaries. She was highly motivated to acquire a new language.

Yaqin: *"When I first came, phones were not as advanced. My husband sent me two learning devices (e-dictionaries) and a dictionary, and I used them constantly. My method was quite clumsy—I would mark pronunciations using Chinese characters because I didn't know phonetics. Now, with smartphones, it's much easier."*

Focus Group Participant: *"Initially, I used a dictionary. Later, with WeChat and other platforms, I followed phonetics lessons online. Now, as long as I see phonetic symbols, I can pronounce words. I also use Duolingo and other apps for listening practice, but speaking is harder because I'm afraid of making mistakes. Sometimes, when I mispronounce something, native speakers don't understand, so I have to repeat myself multiple times and spell the words."*

Fengtao, on the other hand, did not find learning English enjoyable and struggled to find learning methods that suited him.

Fengtao: *"Since I arrived in Ireland, I have been self-studying, memorising vocabulary daily. However, I seem to lack the talent for languages. Despite ten years of effort, I still struggle to use English effectively."*

● Community Classes

Some respondents were aware of free English classes offered by community centres, but issues with availability and accessibility were common. Limited slots and the requirement to register in English often discouraged participation. Lihua, who arrived in Ireland at 48 years old and has been in the country for 7 years, tackled language barriers by using English more often and relying on Google Translate. Although she sometimes asked friends for help, she was particularly concerned about not being able to handle emergencies, such as reporting to the police if she were in danger. As a result, she explored affordable English courses to practise conversational English at community centres but was unable to secure a spot.

Lihua: *"I tried to register twice, but couldn't get in. The class in my area was always full, and I never managed to enrol. So I kept postponing learning English."*

Ruifeng, a former asylum seeker, attended police-organised English classes during their application period but found it difficult to form sentences.

Ruifeng: *In detention, we had an English teacher once a week, but the class was reduced to just one hour. I copied English-Chinese dictionaries by hand, filling two notebooks. However, I still struggled to form sentences and had to ask others directly for help.*

● Previous Language school students

Linna, 30 years old, came to Ireland after completing university. She had received an English education throughout her school years in China and then attended two English Language Schools in Ireland. As a result, she was more confident in writing than speaking, due to years of formal, written language education. She suggested that attending language schools in Ireland helped improve reading and writing skills, but was less effective for enhancing conversational abilities.

Linna*: "I studied English in middle and high school in China and attended a language school in Ireland for three years… Speaking and listening might not be as good, but with reading and writing, I don't have any issues."*

However, many students enrolled in language schools primarily for visa purposes rather than to improve their English. Attendance was often irregular because they had to work to support themselves, and the effectiveness of such schools was questioned.

Jihua: *"I attended a language school for two years, but I barely went—maybe five out of ten days. Most people enrolled for work permit purposes rather than actual learning. I found self-study online more useful. Language schools felt like a waste of time."*

● Workplace Learning

As some respondents noted, formal English education often focused on reading and grammar rather than practical communication skills. For many, the workplace served as the primary environment for learning English, especially in roles requiring interaction with English-speaking colleagues or customers. Similarly to Linna, Xiaomei also arrived in Ireland as a language school student. However, she had more opportunities to practice conversation through her work at hostels, deli shops, and dry cleaners.

Xiaomei: *"I attended two language courses here, each lasting eight months. They provided some help, but the lessons were mainly textbook-based, similar to what I had learned in China. Most of my English learning and improvement came later through work, where I communicated frequently with local people. Since I worked in the service industry, I had many face-to-face interactions with customers. Practising through these conversations helped me improve."*

Another former language student, Jihua, who came to Ireland from Malaysia 12 years ago, also found the workplace to be a better environment for speaking and picking up conversational English. He noted that workplace interactions were especially beneficial when colleagues also spoke English as a second language, as they communicated using simpler language.

Jihua: *"In my current job, I need to use some English for communication. Since some of my colleagues are Thai and some are Portuguese, we usually communicate in basic English. If the language is too complex, they won't understand, and their English level is about the same as ours. So, we all use basic English to communicate."*

3. Challenges in learning English

● **Limited Access to Resources**: Free or affordable English classes were often oversubscribed, and the registration process could be daunting for non-English speakers.

● **Time Constraints**: Many respondents, especially those working long hours in the service industry, found it difficult to dedicate time to learning English.

● **Age and Memory**: Older respondents cited age and declining memory as barriers to learning English effectively.

4. Impact of English Proficiency on Quality of Life

English proficiency significantly influenced respondents' ability to navigate daily life and access essential services.

● Daily Life

Respondents with basic English skills could manage routine tasks like shopping or using public transport, but often required assistance for more complex activities, such as dealing with healthcare or legal issues. Although some workplaces did not require English, as people aged, the need for communication increased, particularly in areas like medical consultations and pension inquiries, making limited English skills a greater obstacle to quality of life and overall well-being.

Huiying, aged 63, came to Ireland in 2007. After being laid off during the wave of redundancies in China in the late 1990s, she used her severance pay to move to Ireland and worked in the catering industry for 17 years. She described her restaurant work as "long hours, low pay," often working 50 to 60 hours a week. Her lack of English meant she could only seek medical care from Chinese-speaking doctors, but even with this option, she still constantly worried about the inconvenience and risks brought by the language barrier.

Huiying: *"I work in a restaurant where I don't need English, but knowing English is still better. We're getting older, and without it, everything is inconvenient."*

● Job opportunity

Limited English proficiency often restricted respondents to jobs with minimal communication requirements, such as kitchen work or manual labour. Those with better English skills had more employment options and career advancement opportunities.

Xudong viewed his intermediate level of English as a significant advantage in securing better positions compared to his co-workers, even those with legal status. His stronger language skills also enabled him to negotiate better working conditions and protect himself from exploitation.

Male: "In Ireland, English is really important. Not every restaurant has the money to pay for professional translations of menus or kitchen orders. I happened to fit that need perfectly, which is why I could secure a better salary. Even though I don't have legal status, my boss doesn't exploit me. I tell him the rate I want, and it's based on my ability."

Tingyu, who had worked in multiple restaurants and takeaways and found the work manageable in terms of language, hopes to find opportunities to learn new skills. However, her limited English proficiency outside the workplace has hindered her ability to access better job opportunities or training courses.

Tingyu: *"I want to learn some skills or languages, and then switch to a slightly more technical job, something more useful. I feel like working at a fast food restaurant, like cleaning, doesn't offer much room for growth. I want to learn something, whether it's a language or a technical skill, and maybe even get a certificate for career advancement. I hope to learn more and explore more. (Regarding skills training courses at community centres) I'm not sure where to find them, and whether they require good language skills. My English is quite basic."*

● Social Isolation

Limited English skills often led to social isolation, as respondents struggled to engage with the broader Irish community. Haiyu was 40 years old and managing warehouses. After six years of living in Ireland, he could recognise the names of items he managed and groceries in supermarkets, but had very little communication with the host community. In his spare time, he preferred to drive around and enjoy the scenery rather than participate in local community activities.

Haiyu: *"Going to the supermarket is fine, but discussing news or local events with others is really difficult. I just don't have enough vocabulary… There is almost no communication with local people, and no integration at all. At most, I occasionally drive around the area to take a look and enjoy the local scenery by myself—that's all."*

5. Recommendations for Improvement

Based on respondents' experiences, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance English language learning and integration for Chinese immigrants in Ireland.

● **Tailored Learning Programs**: Conduct research and community surveys during the planning phase to inform the design and delivery of English classes. Understanding learners' backgrounds, skill levels, goals, and barriers will help ensure that the programs are relevant, culturally sensitive, and effective in meeting the diverse needs of learners.

● **Expand Access to Free or Affordable English Classes**: Increase the availability of community-based English courses, particularly in areas with high immigrant populations. Simplify the registration process to ensure accessibility for non-English speakers by providing multilingual registration materials and support staff. To accommodate diverse needs, offer flexible class schedules, including both daytime and evening options, as well as online and in-person formats. This approach ensures that individuals with varying work hours, caregiving responsibilities, or transportation challenges can participate effectively.

● **Workplace Language Training**: Collaborate with employers to provide on-site English training for workers in industries with high immigrant employment, such as hospitality and construction.

● **Peer Support Networks**: Establish peer-led language exchange programs that combine language learning with social engagement. These informal settings can help build confidence in using English while providing opportunities to make friends and develop a sense of community. By integrating learning with real-life interaction, participants can practice language skills in a supportive, low-pressure environment.

● **Digital Learning Tools and Digital Literacy**: Promote the use of mobile apps, online platforms, and Virtual Reality (VR) tools to support English learning. Ensure these resources are accessible, intuitive, and tailored to the needs of diverse users, especially older learners who may have limited digital experience. Incorporating real-life scenarios, such as visiting the bank, attending a GP appointment, posting a parcel, or speaking with a child's teacher, can make the learning process more practical, engaging, and directly applicable to daily life.

● **Accessible phone & Video Remote Interpreting services:** To improve accessibility for immigrants and non-English speakers, essential public services such as banks, post offices, and GP clinics should expand free multilingual service points, ensuring individuals can access critical services without language barriers. Additionally, convenient online translation services should be developed and promoted, allowing real-time communication with service providers.

3.3 Information Acquisition: Sources and Access Channels

1. First information source

Due to prior rumours and preliminary publicity surrounding the upcoming regularisation policy, many Chinese-speaking migrants were exposed to multiple sources of information simultaneously. Findings from the online questionnaire indicate that initial information about

Ireland's 2022 Regularisation Scheme came from a variety of sources, though it was predominantly accessed through informal channels (see Figure 3.12).

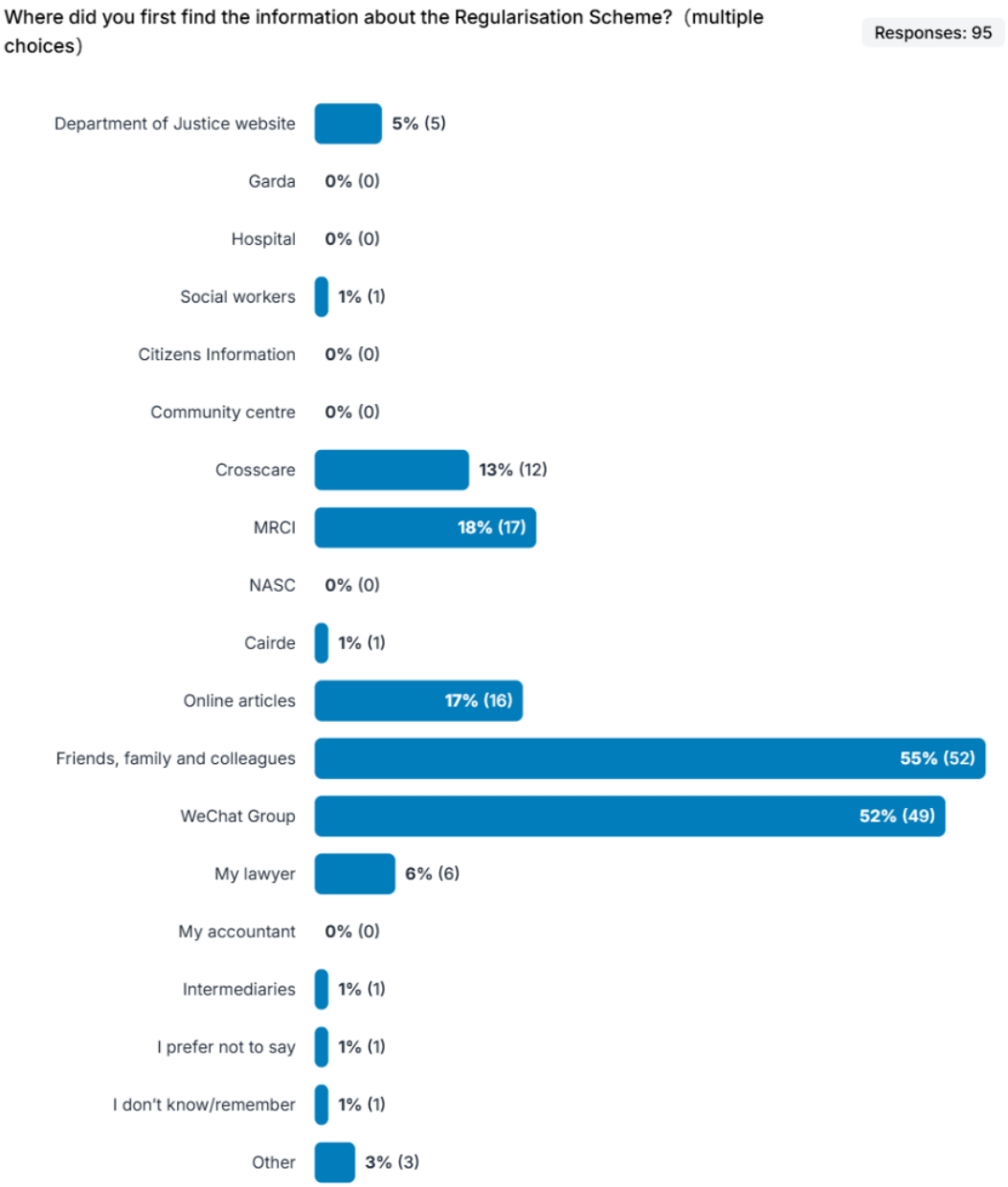

Figure 3.12 Respondents' First Sources of Information

● Friends, family, and colleagues

According to the questionnaire, 52 individuals (55%) indicated that personal networks played a significant role in learning about the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. Word-of-mouth among friends and colleagues helped rapidly disseminate initial information to Chinese-speaking

migrants, often through casual conversations at work or via WeChat messages. This was especially important for individuals with limited social interaction, particularly those less engaged with the local community.

Zijie had a small social circle and led an inactive social life due to financial difficulties and experiences of labour exploitation. He had also been insulted on the street several times, which discouraged him from going out except for work or essential errands like visiting the supermarket. His limited number of friends served as his only source of information.

Ruifeng: *"At first, it was my friends who sent me WeChat messages to notify me, and that's how I found out… All of the information came from them. Otherwise, how would I have known any of this?"*

Haiyu, aged 40, had family in Ireland and spent most of his time with family members and Chinese friends. His social interactions were largely confined to this circle, and he relied heavily on it for information. Not only did he learn about the 2022 Regularisation Scheme through friends, but his initial decision to migrate from China to Ireland was also based entirely on information provided by them.

Haiyu: *"The so-called firsthand information is also passed along between friends—you know, it's spread by word of mouth among Chinese people."*

● WeChat groups and online articles

52% (49 individuals) highlighted using WeChat as the main platform to gather information. 17% (16 individuals) learned about the scheme through online articles. Many respondents noted that they first came across information about the scheme through WeChat channels like "*Chinese Circles*" news media and commercial immigration companies during the COVID-19 pandemic, well before the scheme was officially launched. These accounts often translate and share official updates from the Department of Justice to attract users and potential clients.

Jihua, a 42-year-old Malaysian, had already engaged with a solicitor to seek a legal status with the support of his employer before the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. Due to his pending application, he actively followed policy updates and received information from various sources. His employer, who valued his strong work ethic and found it difficult to hire similarly dedicated staff, played an active role in the process. While Jihua first encountered news of the scheme through WeChat groups, his employer also informed him about the regularisation scheme and encouraged him to apply.

Jihua: *"Sometimes my boss would say he was worried I might get caught. He said it was hard to find workers like me because I'm hardworking. They really like Malaysian employees—we don't fuss about things too much… It (the first-hand information source) was in the WeChat group. They posted the news there. My boss also told me that they had already announced that after you (undocumented migrants) had been here for a few years, you could start applying for the scheme. That's when I found out about it."*

Tingshan, along with her husband and child, applied for the scheme as a family. Her husband had a Section 3 application pending through a solicitor before the 2022 Regularisation Scheme was launched. Similar to Jihua, they had been actively following immigration policy discussions, particularly those related to the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, through WeChat channels, beginning from the debate stage.

Tingshan: *"It was through Chinese WeChat channels that I first found out. These accounts would post news from the Department of Justice, translating the original articles. At first, it seemed like a proposal, and after it was approved, it became official. Before the Scheme, my husband had applied for legal status, but he was rejected and issued a Section 3 letter. After that, we continued to apply (under Section 3), but there was no update. Then we came across the 2022 Regularisation Scheme and decided to apply for that."*

● Dublin-centred migrant NGOs

18% (17 individuals) learned about the scheme through MRCI, while 13% (12 individuals) received information through Crosscare. It is worth noting that the primary method these non-profit organisations used to disseminate information to the Chinese community was still through WeChat.

Jiaqi and her husband had been existing clients of CMP and MRCI due to a previously rejected application for legal status. They were informed about the 2022 Regularisation Scheme by staff from both organisations, who identified them as potential beneficiaries of the scheme.

Jiaqi: *"One was your Crosscare and MRCI. I've been following these two organisations closely. When I first applied, MRCI's information led me into a WeChat group, and that's when I gradually got to know more about the Chinese community support groups and organisations. I'm really grateful for the good information they provide through WeChat.*

Having previously faced penalties from immigration authorities due to unreliable advice that resulted in the submission of incorrect information, she strongly emphasised the need for accurate and trustworthy sources of information.

"If we had known from the start that there were so many official and legitimate organisations, we wouldn't have made some wrong turns along the way, you know? We wouldn't have been so lost, not knowing how to improve our situation. Because after learning about these two organisations, we realised that we could go through a legitimate process to submit proper documents, without wasting money on the wrong path, and still get what we want… Also, if people back home (in China) could find out about these two organisations, they would really understand the actual situation Chinese people are facing here. Some people might then reconsider whether they should come or avoid risky routes and take the proper path. This could really increase everyone's safety and legality."

● Lawyers

6% (6 individuals) indicated that lawyers were a key source of information. For those already engaged in immigration proceedings, lawyers played an important role. Some respondents had been detained by immigration authorities prior to the launch of the scheme and received a Section 3 letter, which prompted them to seek legal assistance. When the 2022 Regularisation Scheme was announced during the processing of their cases, these individuals gained access to more formal and accurate information through their solicitors.

Department of Justice Website

Only five individuals in the online questionnaire, and none of the interviewees, reported first receiving information from the Department of Justice website. This suggests that the majority of respondents do not regularly consult official government websites. Consequently, alternative channels such as WeChat and personal networks played a more prominent role in disseminating information about the scheme.

2. Detailed information sources

The main shift in information sources between the initial and later stages of the scheme was the transition from general awareness to more specific, actionable knowledge. This shift not only reflected a growing trust in certain information sources but, in some cases, also illustrated a "more is better" approach, where individuals sought confirmation and reassurance by consulting multiple channels (see Figure 3.13).

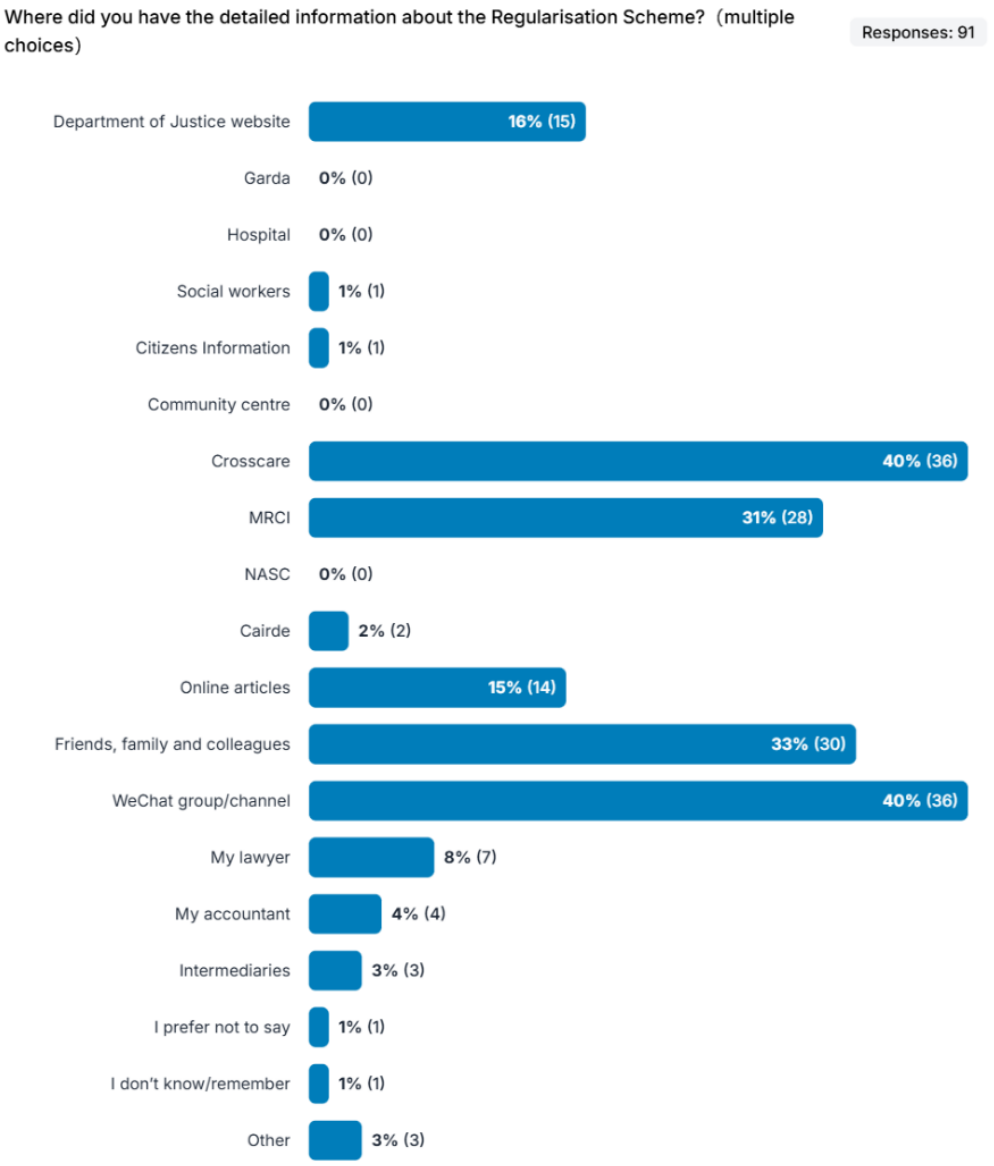

Figure 3.13 Respondents' Sources of Detailed Information

WeChat groups and channels

WeChat remains one of the primary methods of communication and information dissemination within the Chinese-speaking community, with 40% of respondents (36 individuals) reporting that they either discovered articles or participated in discussions related to the scheme WeChat groups or channels. This source of information is particularly valuable due to its rapid dissemination, the richness of shared content, and its interactive nature, which enables users to exchange experiences and raise concerns. In particular, WeChat groups established by NGO staff proved especially useful for gathering collective issues and feedback, facilitating a more responsive and community-informed support process.

While some respondents applied in the early stages of the scheme, others chose to wait until more detailed guidance became available. This included learning from the experiences of early

applicants and benefiting from support provided by NGOs, which had by then gathered frequently asked questions and built up expertise. Common concerns included whether never having paid tax in Ireland would affect eligibility, what the expected waiting times were for each stage of the process, and whether outcomes for a family application would be the same for all family members.[5]

One important point to note is that the accuracy of information about the 2022 Regularisation Scheme shared in WeChat groups or public accounts varied significantly. Some messages provided incomplete or misleading information in order to attract potential clients, while others exaggerated the leniency of the scheme, encouraging undocumented migrants who did not meet the eligibility criteria to apply.

Lihua noted that she first learned about the scheme after an NGO staff member created a dedicated WeChat group, which became her main source of updates. She also used the group to share her own experience with others.

Lihua: *"It was only after she (MRCI staff) set up the WeChat group that we found out about it. Everything was discussed in the group. I submitted my application at that time. People (who received permission) were asked to register at the immigration office. One of my fellow countrymen asked (in group), 'Can I get approved?' I said, 'Yes, I did, so you can too.'"*

Jingxuan, aged 36 and having lived in Ireland for 15 years, previously worked in restaurants before owning and managing her own business, and had worked with many Chinese-speaking staff. She highlighted a gendered dimension of information access, observing that women were more likely to share information through everyday interactions such as group purchases or casual chats. In contrast, some men, focused solely on work, often remained unaware of online groups or broader community discussions.

Jingxuan: *"You know, some people just aren't good at communication, so they don't know about the groups and that kind of stuff. But for us women, we might join group buys or ask someone to help buy things. We chat more, so information spreads. That's how we end up knowing more. But those who just bury their heads in work all day, they don't really check groups or anything like that."*

Dublin-based NGOs

NGOs such as Crosscare, MRCI, and Cairde have emerged as pivotal information hubs, significantly engaged by survey respondents. Specifically, Crosscare led with 40% (36 individuals), followed closely by MRCI at 31% (28 individuals), while Cairde represented a smaller fraction at 2% (2 individuals). This marked increase in reliance on these NGOs contrasts with their initial roles as less visible sources of information compared to more mainstream channels. However, when individuals face immigration-related needs, these NGOs are perceived as reliable sources, particularly during periods of policy updates directly affecting them. Their primary function as advisory bodies, rather than ubiquitous community participants

or central information sources, underscores their specialised role in providing consultation and guidance.

Notably, the high proportion of respondents citing NGOs as their primary information source may be somewhat inflated due to the sampling method. Most participants were either existing clients of these NGOs or were recruited through their networks, making it more likely that they had engaged with these organisations during the application process. As a result, while the data highlights the crucial role of NGOs in providing immigration-related information, it may not fully represent the broader immigrant population's reliance on these sources.

Tingyu, aged 34, had been living in Ireland for eight years and had attended an English language school for one year. She explored a wide range of information sources, including Chinese community media, WeChat groups set up by NGO staff, and online webinars hosted by MRCI. She highlighted MRCI's proactive approach, stating: *"They (MRCI) are doing quite well, with plenty of activities. We also followed their online sessions where everyone consults together."*

Linna's husband was caught working illegally, which led her to seek advice and information from multiple sources, particularly from NGOs that had experience handling similar cases. She participated in online sessions organised by one such NGO, but poor internet connectivity limited her ability to engage fully. She explained, *"I did attend the online meetings organised by the immigration rights group. But the internet connection was bad at the time, so I only heard half of it. Since I had already looked up the policy on the official site and it was mostly the same, I didn't keep listening."*

Friends, family, and colleagues

A significant portion of respondents (33%) turned to their personal connections—friends, family, and colleagues—for more details. Personal networks played an important role in spreading detailed information about the Regularisation Scheme quickly and serving as a trusted support system, although their role was less significant than in sharing first-hand news. Additionally, acquaintances with better English skills, such as individuals who had previously assisted with tax-related matters or setting up bank accounts, were more valuable sources of information. These networks not only helped individuals better understand the policy but also offered a space for sharing experiences, discussing challenges, and offering advice along the way.

Yaqin had previously been assisted by an English-speaking Chinese individual, recommended by a fellow provincial, to obtain a Personal Public Service (PPS) number and open a bank account. These earlier interactions helped establish a sense of trust. Conveniently, the documents he had helped her acquire later served as proof of address for her regularisation application. When preparing to apply for the scheme, she noticed that a well-known immigration agent in Dublin was charging high fees, while this same individual asked for an even higher fee of €2,000. Despite considering the price excessive, she decided to proceed with him primarily due to the trust built through their prior dealings.

Yaqin: *"I'm not sure of the group's name. I joined the groups that I was interested in, but not the ones organised by the immigration agents. The immigration agent often posts in those groups about topics related to the scheme, like required documents, tax matters, and other information, suggesting that people contact them. However, I didn't reach out because I know their fees are quite high—just for a consultation, they charge fifty. So, I decided to wait instead. Eventually, all the information was clarified, and everything was available on WeChat channels, all in Chinese… He helped me before, I went and asked him… he said, 'I'll do it,' so I said, 'Go ahead.' Whenever I need something, I go to him. I said, 'Because when you handle things, you're really steady, you don't say anything unnecessary, and your fees used to be quite reasonable.' But during the regularisation scheme, he charged me quite a lot—€2,000. Still, he's very reliable."*

Department of Justice Website

From the online questionnaire, a smaller portion of respondents (16%, or 15 individuals) had referred to the Department of Justice website.

Jingxuan, who valued independence and self-reliance, believed that placing herself in busy restaurant environments was a way to strengthen her capabilities, ultimately enabling her to open her own business. When it came to applying for the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, she also relied primarily on her own efforts, carefully reading through relevant information on various channels, including the Department of Justice website.

Jingxuan: *"The WeChat channel did mention some things, but after reading it, you definitely need to go to the official website yourself. You have to follow the steps, filling out the information step by step. As you go through it, you gradually understand what is needed. In fact, the documents they ask for aren't many—just your personal information and proof that you've been here for four years without legal status. Since I'd been here for many years, I had more than enough documents."*

However, in most cases, respondents perceived difficulties in navigating or using the official website due to language barriers, even though the site offers an automatic translation function into Chinese.

Pengfei, aged 53, had no English proficiency and did not meet the residency requirements at the time. He did not visit the official website to check information after being informed that he was not eligible for the scheme.

Pengfei: *"I can't really read (the official website), so I'm just relying on what others say."*

Some also expressed a preference for WeChat channels, viewing them as more accessible and relevant to the needs of Chinese-speaking immigrants compared to the official website of the Department of Justice.

Tingshan, aged 37 and living in Ireland for nine years, believed that Chinese community media generally circulated the immigration policies most relevant to their needs, which made her feel there was no need to check the Department of Justice website herself.

Tingshan: *"Basically, it's mostly Chinese-language WeChat channels (I looked at). For example, when the Department of Justice has new notices or policies, some people check them, but there's a chance that much of the information may not interest them—only the amnesty and related topics are of focus. However, our Chinese WeChat channels are quite helpful. They know what information is useful and relevant to us, and they will translate or share the details that matter to the Chinese-speaking community. They explain the steps, usually in great detail, based on the official websites."*

Tingshan also explained another reason for not fully utilising the official website—she preferred using search engines to ask questions and find answers, viewing it as a quicker and more intuitive way to access guidance, even though it often led her to third-party sources rather than the official site.

Tingshan: *"We don't usually have the habit of checking the Department of Justice or official websites for information. For example, if I want to know what documents are needed to renew a Stamp 3 permission, I wouldn't immediately know which webpage to check. I assumed I should go to the Irish Immigration website, but when I couldn't find the information there, I turned to Google and searched, 'How can I renew my Stamp 3?'"*

Regarding the utilisation rate of policy document translations as part of the Ministry of Justice's media campaign, 21 respondents (22%) reported reading the Chinese-language documents related to the Scheme, which were provided on the Department of Justice's Immigration Service Delivery website, alongside translations in eight other languages (see Figure 3.14).[6] The higher readership of these translated documents compared to the official website itself may be attributed to the fact that the documents were circulated through other organisations' websites and alternative channels, making them more accessible to those in need.

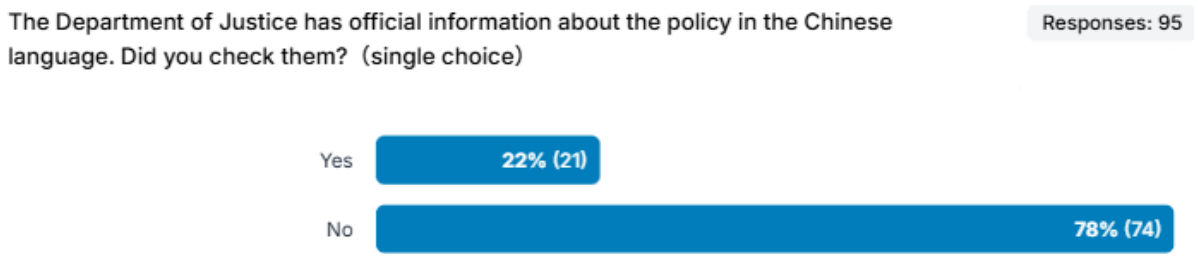

Figure 3.14 Use of Chinese-Language Official Information from the Department of Justice

However, the author did not find any evidence of other organisations promoting or explicitly informing people about the availability of these multilingual translations, or about the

Immigration Service Delivery website's automatic translation feature, which supports 13 non-English languages. In the interviews, the main reason people gave for not using the official translated documents was simply a lack of awareness about their existence. For example, Yiting, aged 50 and living in Ireland for 15 years, mentioned that she used a translation app on her phone to scan English web pages or automatically translate English content, rather than seeking out officially translated documents.

Yiting: *"We all went to the official website to check, and we heard about it (Immigration Service Delivery website) as well. The specific information is all available on the website. We used translation software to translate it."*

Paid services

A portion of respondents (14%, 14 individuals) opted to consult paid services from professionals, such as lawyers (7 individuals), accountants (4 individuals) and intermediaries (3 individuals).

Many respondents, especially those with more complex circumstances, tended to consult multiple sources of information, including paid services that offered Chinese-speaking staff.

Lihua had a history of being caught working illegally, and her passport was confiscated by immigration officials. Given the complexity of her case, she sought paid consultation. After seeing advertisements from various immigration agents of Chinese ethnicity, she chose the agent who was most geographically accessible to her.

Lihua: *"I couldn't locate Immigration Agent A. Immigration Agent B was in Dublin 2, which was very close to me, so I went to them instead… I didn't know how to get there before, but now I can just input the address on Google and find the place."*

While comparing advice and assessing the credibility of various organisations, some respondents demonstrated an awareness of the risk of encountering misinformation online.

Junyu arrived in Ireland as a student 18 years ago, at the age of 21, after graduating from university in China. He considered it more reliable to obtain information through discussions with friends and co-workers, rather than relying on information disseminated by immigration agents.

Junyu: *"Back then, there were online services—those money-driven ones like the Dublin-based immigration agents—and all sorts of disorganised sources posting things on WeChat and elsewhere."*

3.4 Challenges in Accessing Information and Applying for the Scheme

The process of accessing and applying for the 2022 Regularisation Scheme was shaped by a range of structural and personal factors that disproportionately affected undocumented migrants in precarious conditions. While some applicants experienced a smooth application process, others faced considerable barriers that reflected systemic inequities in access to information, documentation, and support. The following research question explores both the advantages that facilitated successful applications and the challenges that hindered others from benefiting from the scheme.

1. Confident and Well-Prepared Applicants

Among interviewees, a subset of applicants reported a relatively smooth application process, attributing their success to several key factors:

● Comprehensive Documentation

Applicants with continuous and well-organised records of residence, such as bank statements, utility bills, and rental agreements, found it easier to meet the scheme's requirements.

Jingxuan, an experienced restaurant worker and a mother who gave birth in Ireland around the time of her application, found the documentation process relatively straightforward. She attributed this ease to her more organised lifestyle, which included having a bank account and maintaining a clean criminal record.

Jingxuan: *"I've been here for many years, so my documents were more than sufficient… But some people might have applied for asylum before, which can be quite troublesome. Others might have a criminal record, which also makes things difficult. But for me, I had nothing like that—I just followed the normal procedure. After making the payment, there was nothing else to do. I did everything myself, and I think the process was really simple. In fact, the eligibility criteria at the time were relatively low. As long as you had at least one proof of residence per year, that was enough."*

Yaqin, aged 59, had previously visited doctors and hospitals and was later contacted by the hospital for annual check-ups. The appointment letters she received from the hospital served as her primary proof of residence for the regularisation scheme application.

Yaqin: *"Later, when I started experiencing breast pain, I decided that I needed to get a health check-up every year. So, I had GP letters from my annual check-ups. When the scheme came, I used all of them as proof."*

● Strong Social Networks:

Social networks played a crucial role in supporting applicants, particularly by helping them gather additional proof of residence when official documents were lacking. Friends or acquaintances often provided information about past living addresses or introduced more trustworthy professionals to assist with the application process. These findings highlight how migrant networks function as informal support systems, bridging gaps in knowledge and resources, and underscore the importance of social capital in the broader process of migrant integration.

Meanwhile, social networks can facilitate discussions on the practical implementation of the scheme, such as how-to questions and processing times.

Weize, who had been in Ireland for five years at the time of the interview, had a close-knit circle of friends and family, which had also supported his initial migration journey from China to Ireland. He also found the online application process convenient and user-friendly, and received a decision within just two months. His positive experience and reduced stress were also reinforced by the fact that some of his friends had already received successful outcomes.

Weize: *"I applied later, so I didn't feel much pressure. I knew others who had already been approved, which gave me confidence that my application would be successful."*

● Familiarity with the System:

Applicants with prior experience navigating Irish immigration policies or who received support from knowledgeable individuals tended to feel more confident and less stressed during the application process. For instance, one applicant was guided by his wife, who had previously obtained legal status through the 2018 Student Scheme. Another applicant, who sought help from an NGO, described the process as smooth and stress-free, saying, "I felt like I got approved in a daze, like a dream."

2. Applicants Facing Challenges in the Process

The survey data reveals that a significant proportion of respondents experienced substantial challenges during the Regularisation Scheme. Out of 70 respondents, the major challenges identified were coping with mental pressure, collecting documents and information, language barriers, and meeting eligibility criteria. Below, we analyse these challenges in detail, integrating both quantitative and qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive understanding (see Figure 3.15).

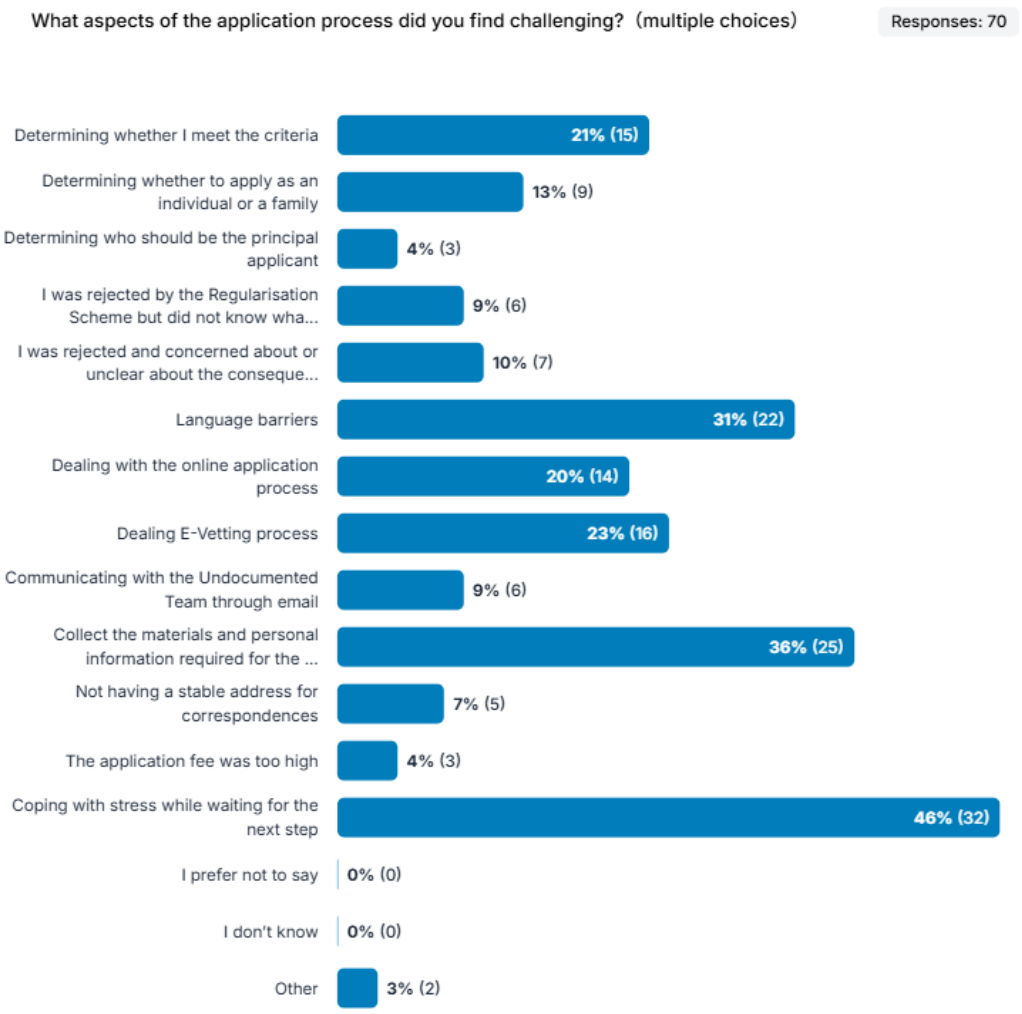

Figure 3.15 Challenges Faced by Respondents During the Application Process

● Coping with Stress While Waiting for the Next Step

The prolonged waiting period emerged as the most frequently cited challenge among applicants, with 46% of respondents reporting significant psychological distress. The anxiety was not only due to the uncertainty of the outcome but also the unpredictable nature of processing times, which created an emotional rollercoaster for many applicants.

As noted in the previous chapter, the Department of Justice did not provide an official processing timeline during the application period. Its FAQ document stated that processing times would vary depending on the complexity of each case, with applications involving existing deportation orders expected to take longer.[7] The Immigrant Council of Ireland advised applicants to anticipate a waiting period of around six months.[8] However, there was no formal system for tracking application progress, apart from updates related to the eVetting process. In March 2023, the Minister for Justice reported that the average processing time for cases handled by the Undocumented Unit in that year was 9.4 months.[9]

Interviewees also reported a wide range of waiting times, based on both personal experience and comparisons with others. For instance, Jihua, who already had a legal status application pending before the scheme began, had experienced prolonged anxiety about potential rejection. The extended wait for a decision under the scheme further intensified his stress. His narrative reflects the pervasive uncertainty many applicants felt, especially when peers received approvals earlier.

Jihua: *"I felt very anxious while waiting for my application to be processed. I kept wondering whether it would be approved or not. My friend received their approval letter first, but I was still waiting. It was agonising."*

Similarly, a focus group participant highlights how the ritual of waiting for the postman became a daily manifestation of hope and despair, underscoring the extent to which the bureaucratic process infiltrated their daily routines and emotional well-being.

Focus group participant: *"I had all the documents ready, but the hardest part was the waiting. It felt endless. Every morning, I would wait for the postman, hoping for good news. He even recognised me because I was always there waiting."*

On the other hand, Jiaqi, whose husband had spent nearly 40,000 euros to travel from China to Ireland through smuggling, offered a contrasting perspective. Although she acknowledged that the waiting period was long, she considered it manageable, viewing the 2022 Regularisation Scheme as a rare and valuable opportunity that was worth the wait. To her family, simply having the chance to apply felt like a blessing, which helped them endure the uncertainty more calmly. This contrast highlights how individual coping strategies and personal outlooks, shaped by contextual factors, significantly influence how people perceive and handle the challenges of waiting.

Jiaqi: *"The waiting time was too long, but I didn't think it was too difficult because having this opportunity was already a blessing. This scheme was like a gift from heaven, not something everyone gets."*

● Challenges in Documenting Residency

The second most frequently reported challenge in the application process was the collection of required documents and personal information. Quantitative data indicate that 36% of respondents encountered difficulties in this regard, while qualitative accounts highlight this as a major bureaucratic barrier disproportionately affecting marginalised groups.

Pingmei, aged 51, for instance, worked as a live-in caregiver for 13 years in Ireland—an employment arrangement that typically requires residing with the employer. Consequently, essential documents such as utility bills and rental agreements were registered under the employer's name, leaving Pingmei without the necessary proof of residence required for the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. Despite meeting the eligibility criteria, she ultimately decided not to apply. Reflecting on her experience, she stated:

Pingmei: *"I couldn't find anyone to help me. My employer at the time didn't care at all. He wouldn't help me with anything…I thought as long as I could work and earn money, my legal status wasn't that important. But I never expected to fall ill later on."*

In addition, the eVetting process introduced an additional layer of complexity, with 23% of respondents citing it as particularly challenging. This requirement, which mandated applicants to list all addresses since their arrival since birth, proved especially burdensome for those with unstable housing histories.

Zijie, in Ireland for 23 years, shared his experience: *"The hardest part was listing all the places I've lived since I came to Ireland. I've moved 16 times, and now I'm about to move for the 17th time. It's hard to remember everything."*

The rigorous scrutiny of application materials and the prolonged process of submitting additional documents placed significant psychological stress on applicants. Many described the experience as a protracted and exhausting ordeal. Junjie, who had to sort proof of residence through reference letters from friends, co-workers in the workplace, an accountant, and even a local police officer, recounted his frustration with the repeated requests for supplementary documents and the extended waiting period:

Junjie: *"The back-and-forth process of submitting additional materials took a long time. I started my application in February, just three days after the scheme opened, and kept submitting documents until November. My application wasn't approved until October, and I had to provide additional materials three times. The whole process was incredibly frustrating."*

The reliance on formal documentation created a Catch-22 situation for live-in caregivers, kitchen staff, and others in precarious employment, whose accommodations were often tied to their jobs. They needed legal status to secure stable housing and employment, yet proving residency required precisely those stable conditions.

As it became evident that many applicants could not provide conventional documents, the Scheme began accepting alternative forms of supportive evidence as primary documentation, including photos, reference letters, social media posts, delivery notes, shopping receipts, Leap Card top-up records, and other creative proofs.

This shift toward recognising informal evidence marked a significant step toward inclusivity. However, this observation is based on the author's experience assisting applicants in desperation, and there was no official confirmation that supportive documents were consistently accepted as primary evidence. This ambiguity likely contributed to some applicants abandoning their applications midway when asked to provide more formal proof of residence.

● Language and digital literacy barriers

Language barriers were a significant obstacle for many respondents. Quantitative data revealed that 31% of respondents cited language barriers as a challenge, while qualitative accounts highlighted the reliance on friends or professionals for assistance.

Beyond language difficulties, 20% of respondents identified the online application process itself as a major challenge. While digitalisation can enhance efficiency, it also creates barriers for those lacking digital literacy.

A participant in the focus group shared, *"Even if you're good at English, you're still afraid to do it yourself because it's about getting legal status. You don't want to make a mistake, so you end up looking for a professional to help."*

● Eligibility

Among the 70 respondents surveyed in the online questionnaire, 21% reported difficulties meeting the eligibility criteria for the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. A key barrier for many applicants was the requirement to have been undocumented for at least four years. This threshold, designed to prioritise long-term undocumented migrants, inadvertently excluded those who had more recently fallen out of status.

Xudong, who entered Ireland as a language school student six years ago, lost his legal status due to difficulties securing an employment permit. Despite having lived in Ireland for six years, he was deemed ineligible for the scheme because his undocumented period was slightly shorter than the required four years.

Xudong: *"I feel this is really unfair to many of us. I also came with a student visa and worked legally at first...Although we are undocumented now, at least we have spent several years in this country, contributing economically. But I have seen many others, including two of my colleagues from China, who entered the country through irregular means, essentially by illegal stay or even smuggling. Yet, they can obtain legal status through this scheme…So they (the authority) want to tell others that in the future, people should come through illegal means to enter?"*

Applicants who narrowly missed the eligibility cut-off faced significant uncertainty. For example, Yuting, a former language school student, had lived in Ireland for seven years but was just 19 days short of meeting the four-year undocumented period requirement. She struggled with the decision of whether to apply, initially hoping for some flexibility in enforcement. However, she was ultimately rejected.

Yuting: *"I thought maybe they would be flexible since I was only 19 days short. But in the end, I was rejected and received a Section 3 letter... Then I found a solicitor (to represent me)."*

Those applicants in borderline cases experienced significant anxiety, fearing both rejection and potential exposure to immigration authorities.

Of course, respondents often faced multiple challenges rather than a single difficulty, compounding the stress and complexity of the application process.

Focus Group participant: *"We didn't understand English, and gathering the necessary documents was also difficult. On top of that, we had no legal status. Our jobs were unstable, moving from one to another, and even finding housing was a challenge—some landlords didn't want to rent to us."*

The experiences of undocumented migrants in the Regularisation Scheme reveal a complex interplay between structural barriers and individual agency. While the scheme offered a critical opportunity for legalisation, it also reinforced pre-existing inequalities by privileging those with stable documentation, strong social networks, better language skills, and prior immigration knowledge. At the same time, undocumented migrants demonstrated remarkable resilience in overcoming these obstacles. Their ability to leverage social networks, creatively document their residency, and seek external support underscores their agency within constrained circumstances.

3.5 Support and Assistance Accessed

Having identified the common challenges faced by undocumented migrants in applying for the Scheme, this section will critically examine the support mechanisms they accessed, the quality of services provided, and the extent to which these resources were effectively implemented.

Findings reveal that 79% of the 73 survey respondents who answered this question relied on external assistance, while only 21% applied independently (see Figure 3.16).

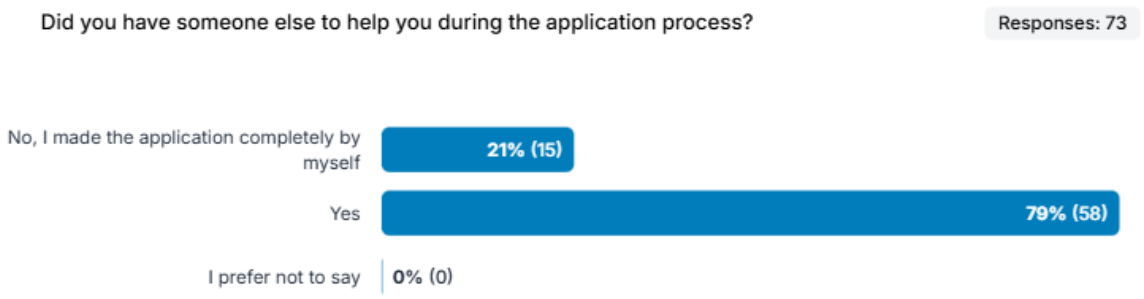

Figure 3.16 Proportion of Respondents Who Sought Help

Among the 58 respondents who answered the questions regarding the forms of assistance they accessed, an overwhelming 79% of respondents prioritised in-person assistance, underscoring the significance of face-to-face interactions in fostering trust, particularly when disclosing

sensitive information. 64% (37 out of 58) relied on WeChat as their primary communication channel, whereas only 3% used WhatsApp. By contrast, engagement with institutional resources such as webinars (10%) and emails (7%) remained low (see Figure 3.17). This pattern reflects broader structural barriers, wherein limited access to linguistically and culturally appropriate services compels migrants to depend on informal networks or commercial intermediaries, perpetuating vulnerabilities within an already precarious system.

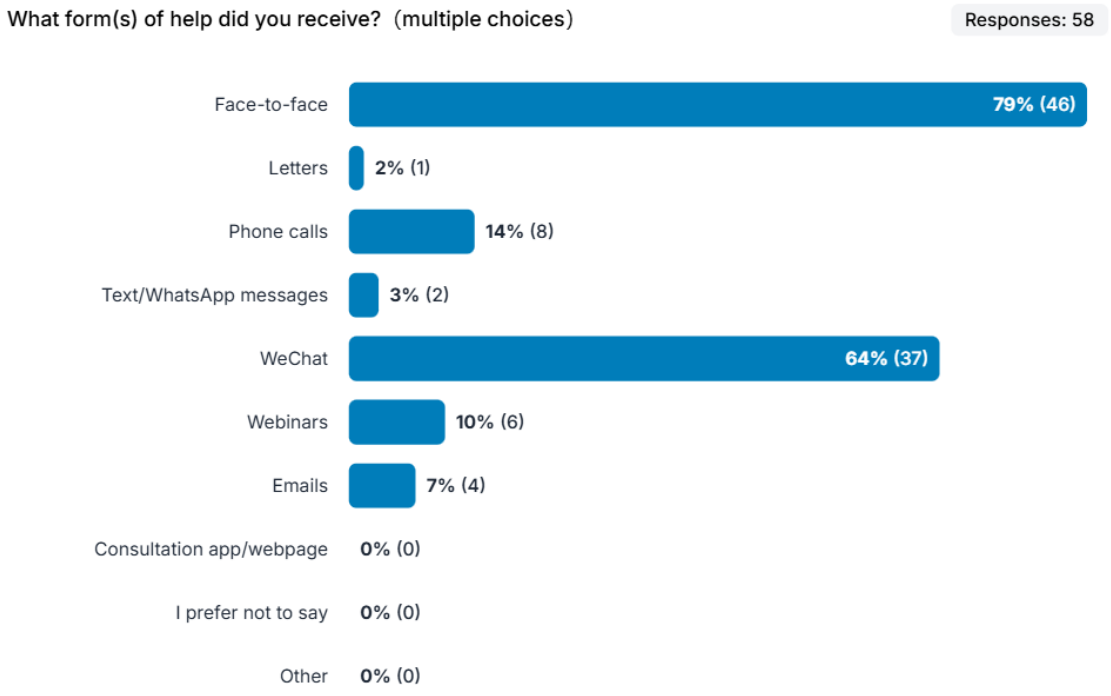

Figure 3.17 Forms of Assistance Received by Respondents

NGOs, along with ethnic networks, played a crucial role in helping migrants navigate bureaucratic complexities. However, systemic flaws, such as unregulated intermediaries and monolingual state services, continued to reinforce cycles of exploitation. The section below aims to identify the types of assistance accessed by migrants and assess their effectiveness, while also examining how power dynamics influence migrants' experiences of service quality.

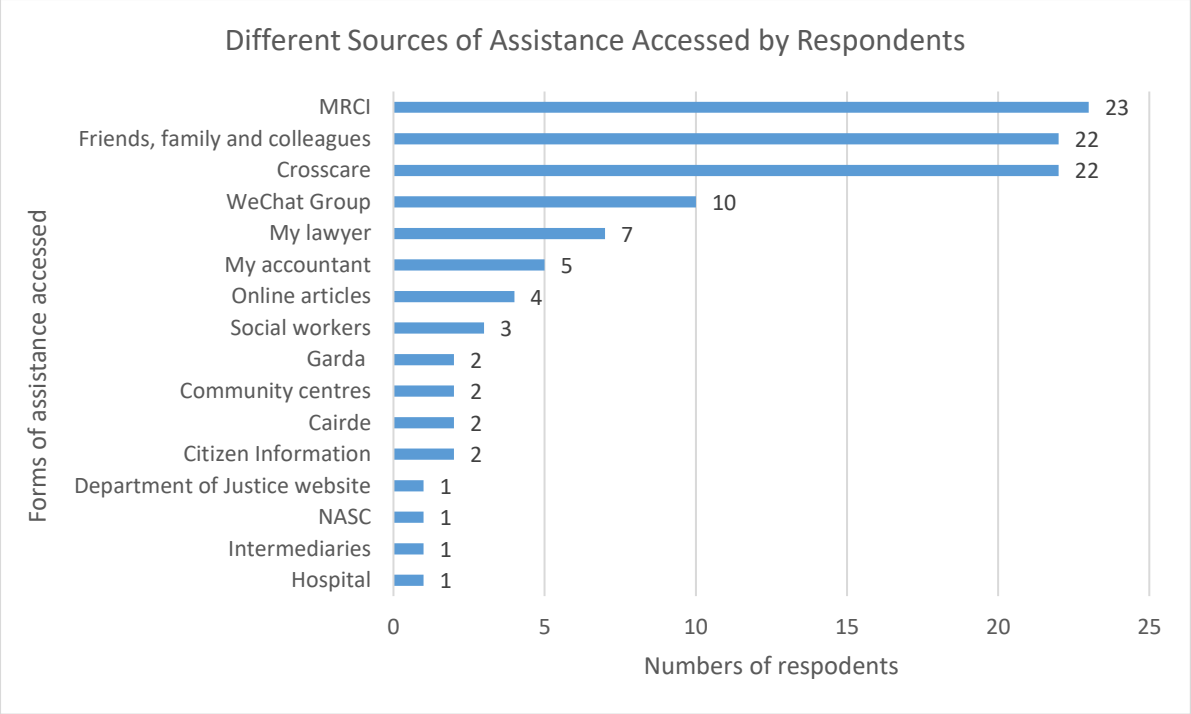

Figure 3.18 Different Sources of Assistance Accessed by Respondents

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to examine from whom participants sought assistance and how effective these services were. In the online questionnaire, participants were asked to evaluate services based on affordability, availability of interpreters, respectfulness, timeliness, transparency, and their willingness to use the service again. Additionally, they were asked to rate the overall usefulness of each type of assistance. In the qualitative interviews, respondents provided detailed accounts of their interactions with various service providers. Their experiences reflect a reliance on both formal and informal support networks, with feedback ranging from positive to critical, particularly regarding professionalism and service transparency.

● Institutional Social Capital: NGOs

MRCI (23 respondents) and Crosscare (22 respondents) emerged as the most frequently accessed services, highlighting their role as institutional social capital. These organisations provided multilingual and transparent services, effectively bridging the gap between migrants and the state. Those NGOs offered assistance through various channels, including webinars, one-on-one consultations (both online and in-person), WeChat groups for information sharing, and direct case advocacy. This ensured that migrants could access support tailored to their specific circumstances, whether they needed guidance for self-application or direct representation. Their diverse support mechanisms catered to the varied needs of Chinese migrants across different regions, language proficiencies, and levels of digital literacy.

For some, NGO consultations provided the necessary information to navigate the application process independently. Jiaqi, who had already engaged with the immigration system and NGOs in Ireland for her own residence permission, used the information provided by NGOs to help her husband with his application.

Jiaqi: *"Through my contact with these organisations, I was able to obtain highly reliable information, submit the required documents, and complete the forms… I just needed additional consultation and assistance in preparing materials."*

Others, such as Fengtao, aged 50 and in Ireland for 10 years, benefited from direct NGO representation as existing clients. He shared his experience: *"They basically helped me apply unconditionally. I knew nothing about the process, so I went to ask the staff at the MRCI. I asked them, and they helped me... step by step, guiding me through everything. I am truly grateful to them."*

These accounts illustrate the critical role NGOs play in supporting migrants, whether by equipping them with the knowledge to apply independently or by providing hands-on assistance to those with limited experience in navigating immigration procedures.

● Informal network and private social capital: friends, family and colleagues, WeChat groups and paid services:

Friends, family, and colleagues (accessed by 22 respondents), along with WeChat groups (accessed by 7 respondents), were among the most utilised forms of assistance. These informal networks functioned as crucial sources of private social capital, allowing migrants to navigate bureaucratic complexities through trust-based, culturally familiar relationships. The reliance on such networks underscores not only their effectiveness in filling gaps left by institutional support but also the systemic barriers that migrants face in accessing official resources.

Colleagues with better English proficiency, such as international students working part-time, often became key sources of assistance. Some provided help voluntarily, while others charged a small fee. One female respondent, for example, sought assistance from a coworker who handled her application process for a €50 fee.

● Paid Professionals

From the online questionnaire responses, those who could afford professional services sought help from lawyers (5 respondents), accountants (3 respondents), and intermediaries (1 respondent). While some professionals provided efficient assistance, others exploited migrants' vulnerabilities.

Interviewees revealed that they found these professionals mainly through acquaintances or WeChat groups, as these sources seemed more trustworthy.

Zijie, who had his journey from China to Ireland facilitated by his cousin 23 years ago, and also received assistance in finding work through her, was able to find someone to help with his application for the scheme through his cousin as well. He felt that the quote he was given was reasonable and appreciated the transparency of the professional's service. He paid €350 for the professional to complete his application on his behalf.

Zijie: *"The professional messaged me every step of the way, explaining what needed to be done next and how to proceed. Even though we were strangers, he was very thorough. This was a recommendation from my cousin, so I trusted him—there was no way he would deceive me. That's why I wanted someone reliable to handle this for me."*

Similarly, Jingyi, aged 54 and living in Ireland for eight years, paid €500 to a Chinese-speaking immigration agent recommended by a friend for a full-service package. This package included email registration, consultation, document preparation, and application submission. She was very satisfied with the cost-effectiveness of the service and felt it provided good value for the support she received throughout the process.

Jingyi: *"The intermediary told me exactly what documents I needed to prepare and gave me clear guidance on what to do. Since I didn't know how to handle the paperwork myself, they walked me through it… They even helped me set up an email account. The service was great—whenever I messaged them, they responded quickly."*

A focus group participant used an accountant to submit her application, as she trusted the accountant, who already had access to her tax records and personal information. She was satisfied with the assistance she received, which also cost €500.

In contrast, Jihua had a different experience regarding the transparency of the services he received. He had previously hired a lawyer through his employer before the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, paying €1,600 to apply for legal permission. However, he was unable to get a clear answer from the lawyer about whether his initial application for legal permission had been submitted. When the 2022 Regularisation Scheme was introduced, the lawyer applied for it on his behalf. Although he ultimately obtained legal status through the scheme, he was dissatisfied with the lack of transparency in the lawyer's service.

Jihua: *"Before the scheme was announced, my employer took me to see a lawyer to try and apply for legal status since I had already been in Ireland for several years… I paid €1,600 for this. Until the scheme came out, he still couldn't get it done for me. In the end, I was approved through the scheme, but I had already wasted that money… It doesn't matter now, though—the most important thing is that I got my legal status. I don't mind the money anymore."*

Although Pingmei, a 51-year-old Malaysian live-in caregiver, was unable to apply for the Regularisation Scheme due to a lack of proof of address, her legal circumstances took a positive turn when she became seriously ill and received free legal assistance from a pro bono lawyer. This support proved crucial, enabling her to access urgent medical care and other social resources. Through free legal representation, she obtained legal status and avoided homelessness despite her illness. She expressed deep gratitude toward the social workers and lawyers who helped her.

Pingmei: *"I don't speak English, so when I sent my thank-you email to the lawyer, I had to rely on translation software. I don't even know if I wrote it correctly. I just wanted to say how incredibly grateful I was. To them, I was just a complete stranger, someone they didn't even know. Some of the social workers who helped me. I can't even remember their names. I just felt so miserable back then."*

However, not all experiences were positive. In some cases, high fees were not indicative of professionalism but rather a form of exploitation targeting vulnerable groups. Letian, a 66-year-old Malaysian who had lived in Ireland for nearly 20 years, worked as a sushi chef in well-known Chinese and Irish-owned restaurants. One of his employers, who valued him, brought him to a lawyer to apply for asylum. Although the asylum application was successful, he declined the permission granted under that route, as he still hoped to return to Malaysia one day to visit his family.

When the 2022 Regularisation Scheme opened, Letian was approached by a Chinese friend who recommended an English-speaking lawyer. The lawyer charged him €1,500 for handling the application, while the friend requested an additional €500 as a referral fee. Later, the lawyer claimed that a further €500 was needed to purchase insurance, but after the payment was made, Letian never received any receipt. As the scheme deadline approached, the lawyer still had not submitted his application, but demanded another €500 to have an accountant print his tax documents. Frustrated by the excessive fees and lack of transparency, Letian eventually abandoned the lawyer and turned to an NGO for assistance.

Letian: *"By June 28th, my lawyer still hadn't submitted my application, even though I had already paid for the service. My daughter confronted the lawyer (on the phone), asking why we had waited so long and why she hadn't submitted it yet. Then the lawyer asked for another €500 to get my P60 from an accountant… Something wasn't right. I cut off contact with them. Losing €2,500 was one thing, but I wasn't going to let them scam me out of another €500."*

In regard to scams, a focus group participant shared that a friend, who was not eligible for the scheme, paid €5,000 to a well-regarded Chinese-speaking professional for assistance with the application. Despite the high fee, the application was ultimately rejected, highlighting the risks of misinformation and potential exploitation within trusted community networks.

Participants in the questionnaire were then asked to select up to three aspects they found most helpful when receiving assistance with their applications. With 53 responses, the survey results provide valuable insights into the specific areas where support was most beneficial.

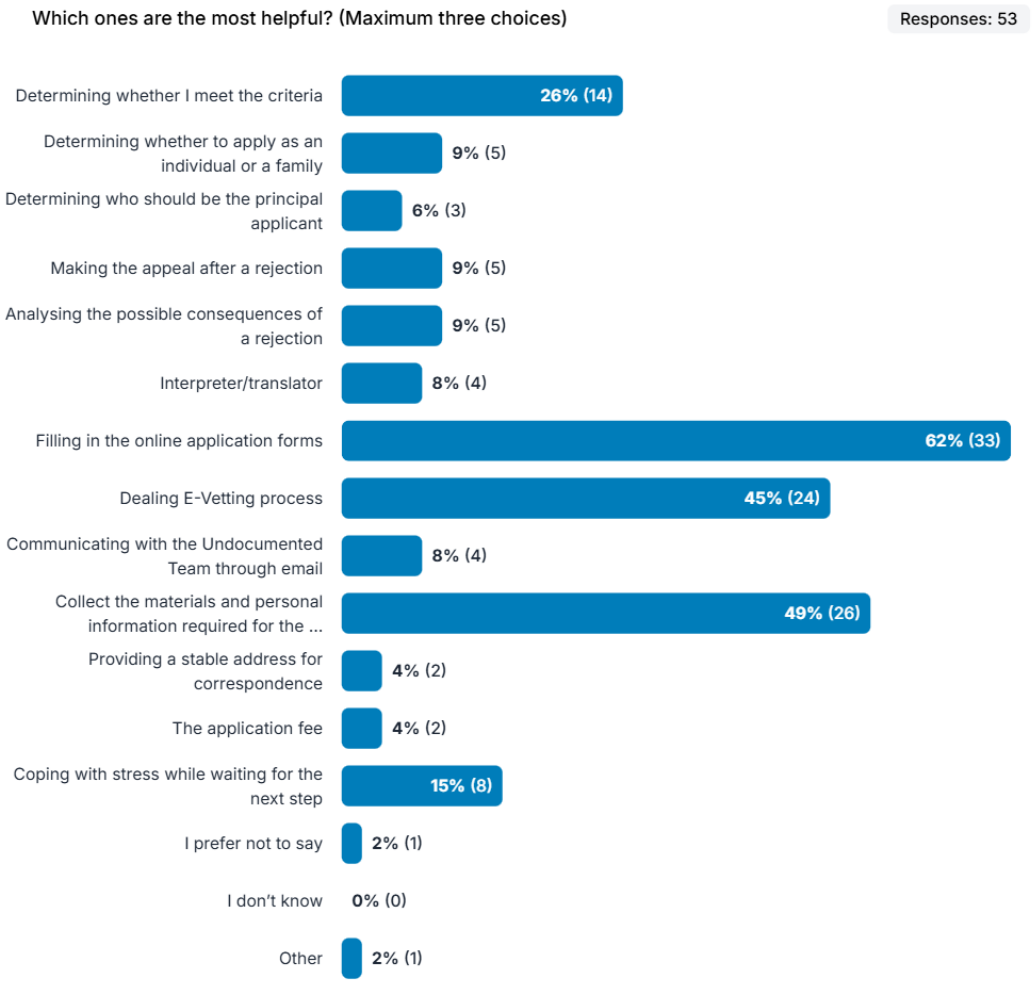

Figure 3.19 Types of Help Rated Most Helpful by Respondents

The findings reveal a strong correlation between the challenges applicants faced and the types of assistance they sought. The most frequently cited forms of support included help with filling out online application forms (62%), gathering necessary documents and personal information (49%), navigating the eVetting process (45%), and determining eligibility (26%). This alignment highlights the complexity of the application process, which extends beyond technical procedures like online submissions to encompass difficulties in understanding documentation requirements and legal criteria.

Moreover, the emotional toll of waiting for a decision emerged as a significant concern, with 15% of respondents identifying stress management as an important area of support. This finding underscores the need for a holistic approach to application assistance—one that not only addresses procedural challenges but also provides emotional and psychological support to applicants.

3.6 Direct Interaction with the Department of Justice

During the Scheme's opening period, all communication regarding application submissions, eVetting procedures, and requests for additional documents was conducted primarily via email, with decisions sent by post. As a result, applicants needed to have an active email account and a stable address, and regularly monitor it for updates.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the dedicated email addresses for the 2022 Regularisation Scheme included *undocumentedhelp@justice.ie* for the Long-Term Undocumented Migrants strand and *IPRSU@ipo.gov.ie* for matters related to the International Protection strand. [10] For eVetting-related queries, applicants were instructed to contact *undocevetting@justice.ie*, as indicated in the Vetting Invitation Form.[11] Additionally, another email address—*help@justice-undocumented.cloud.gov.ie*—was also used in relation to the Long-Term Undocumented Migrants strand. No specific response time was guaranteed for these communication channels, as it depended on the volume of queries, the number of applications, and the complexity of individual cases.

Given the importance of this interaction, the author inquired during interviews whether applicants had experience directly contacting the Department and whether they felt capable of doing so. This inquiry aimed to explore potential ways to improve communication between applicants and the Department of Justice, ensuring smoother exchanges of information and reducing misunderstandings or delays in the process.

Many participants expressed difficulties in contacting the Department of Justice directly, citing language barriers, a lack of familiarity with emails, in some cases, fear of the consequences of being ineligible for the scheme and exposing themselves to the authority.

Some individuals, particularly those with limited digital literacy, reported not knowing how to contact the Department or navigate the online process of sending an email. Zijie stated, *"I don't know how to contact them. My language skills are poor, my memory is not great, and I don't know how to write or operate anything online."*

Participants who had previously received deportation orders expressed a strong reluctance to initiate contact with the Department, fearing that revealing their details, such as their address, could lead to enforcement actions. One participant, Jian, explained: *"Because I had a deportation order, it was different. They told us at the time that if we didn't leave within the given period, we could be forcibly deported. If we get caught, we will be sent back. So, I don't dare to contact them directly."*

Limited English proficiency was another major obstacle preventing applicants from feeling confident in contacting the government. Yaqin, aged 59, described the experience as intimidating and stated her preference for dealing with immigration matters in person: *"I don't know how to communicate with them or how to navigate the process. I feel like a child, even worse than an elementary school student. There's a sense of distance; I feel like I can't reach them. If my language were better, I'd be braver. I believe I could negotiate with them, ask*

questions in person, and consult them directly. But since my language skills are weak, this is a huge barrier."

This statement illustrates how language barriers not only limit access to information but also create a psychological distance between applicants and immigration authorities, reinforcing a sense of exclusion and helplessness.

3.7 Impact of the Scheme on Respondents' Lives

After surveying respondents and conducting interviews about their experiences with the Regularisation Scheme application, participants were also asked to reflect on the scheme's impact on their lives. This included identifying the most significant improvements following the acquisition of legal status, the ongoing challenges they continued to face, and the areas where they hoped to see further progress. The three questions posed in both the questionnaire and interviews regarding the impact of the Scheme were:

- What are the biggest improvements in life after obtaining legal status? (see Figure 3.20)
- What has not improved? (see Figure 3.21)
- What do you hope to improve most? (see Figure 3.22)

The most frequently cited benefits included family reunification, greater security, improved economic stability, and enhanced mobility, all of which foster a deeper sense of belonging and freedom. However, respondents also highlighted persistent challenges and areas for improvement, particularly in housing, family reunification, healthcare, and further economic advancement. Responses reflected a mix of improvement and continued hardship within the same aspect of life. Because of this overlap, the following sections are organised thematically rather than by the three separate questions, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of the complex ways in which legalisation has impacted different aspects of people's lives.

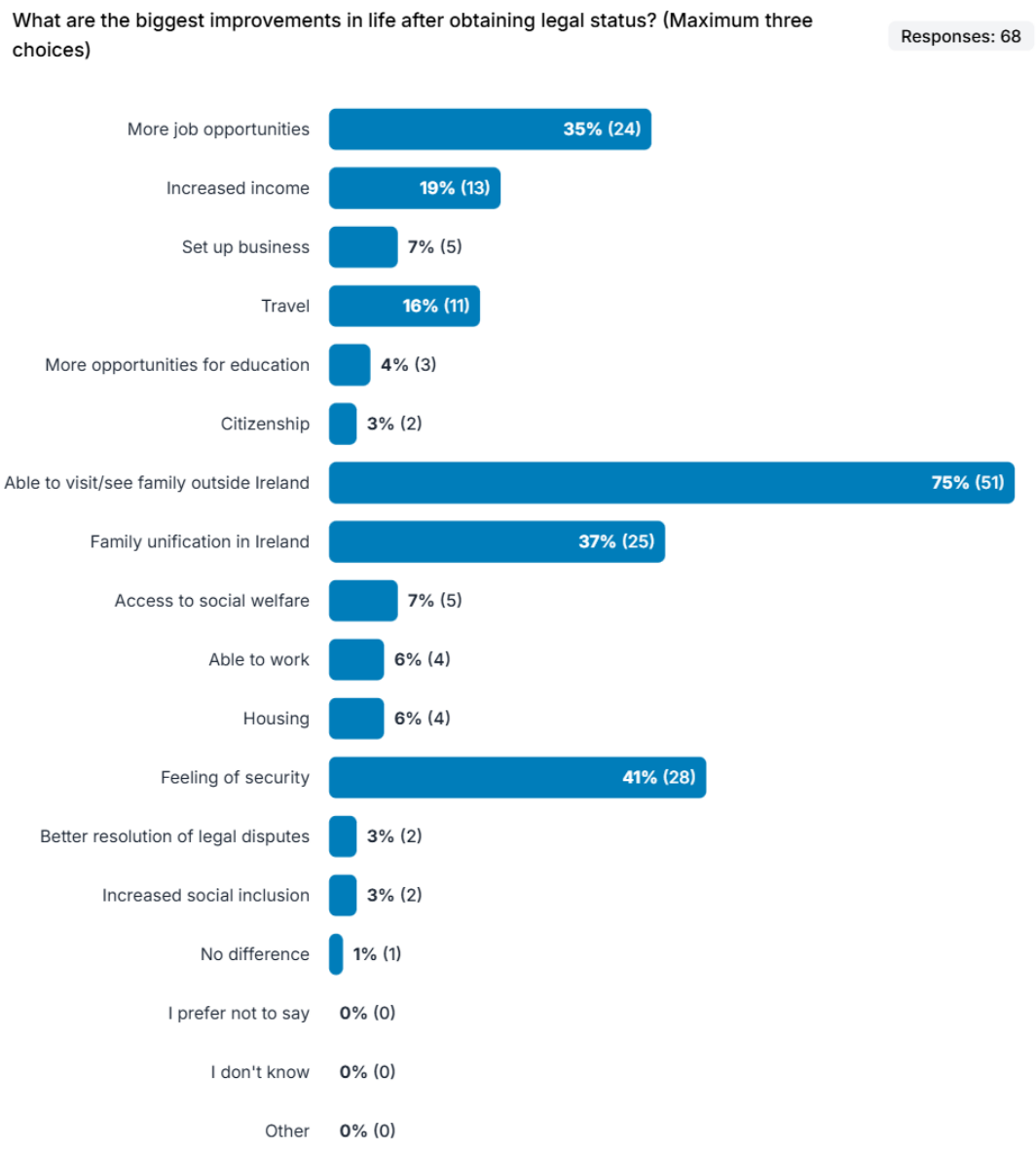

Figure 3.20 Biggest Improvements After Obtaining Legal Status

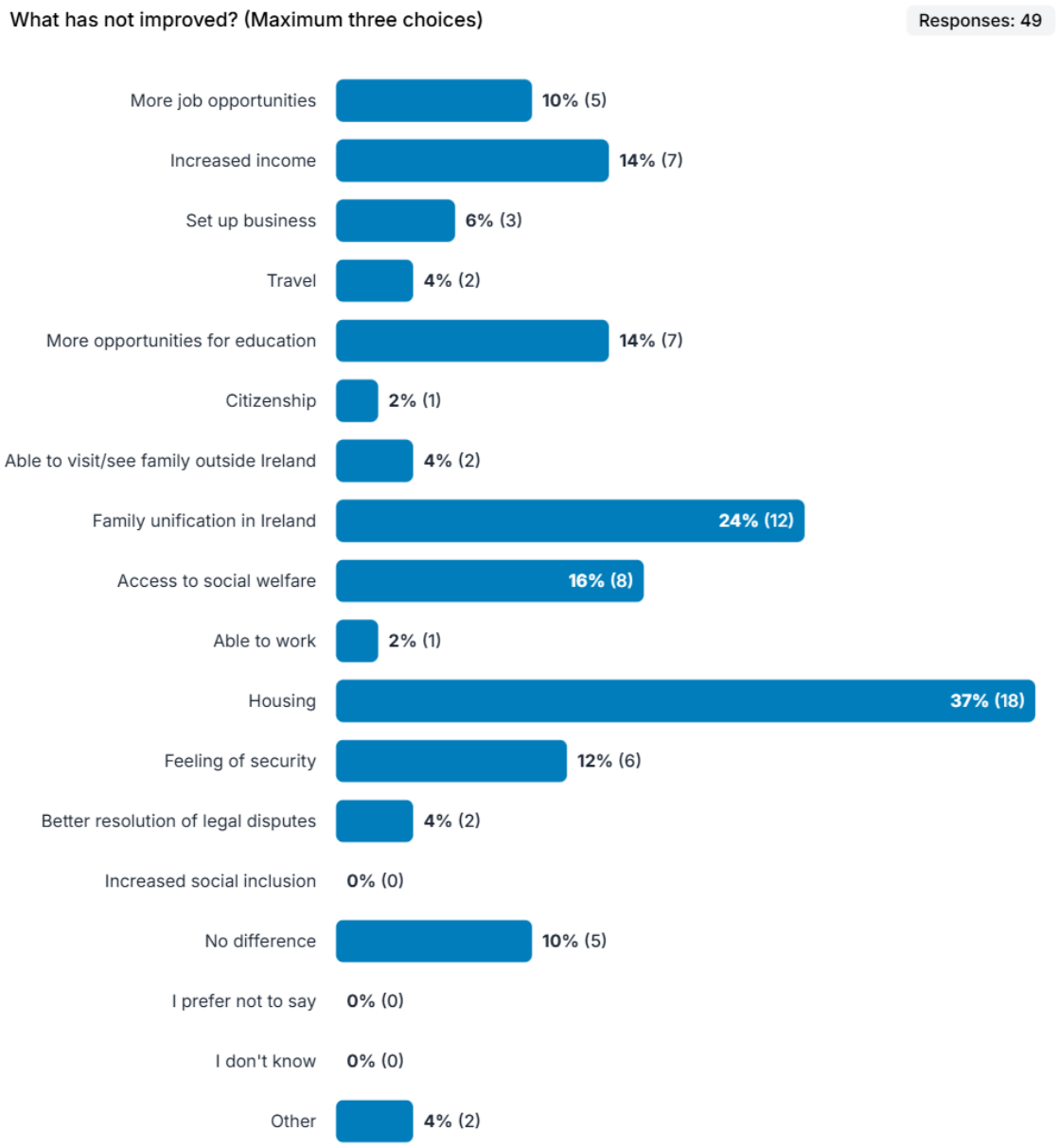

Figure 3.21 Areas Showing No Improvement After Obtaining Legal Status

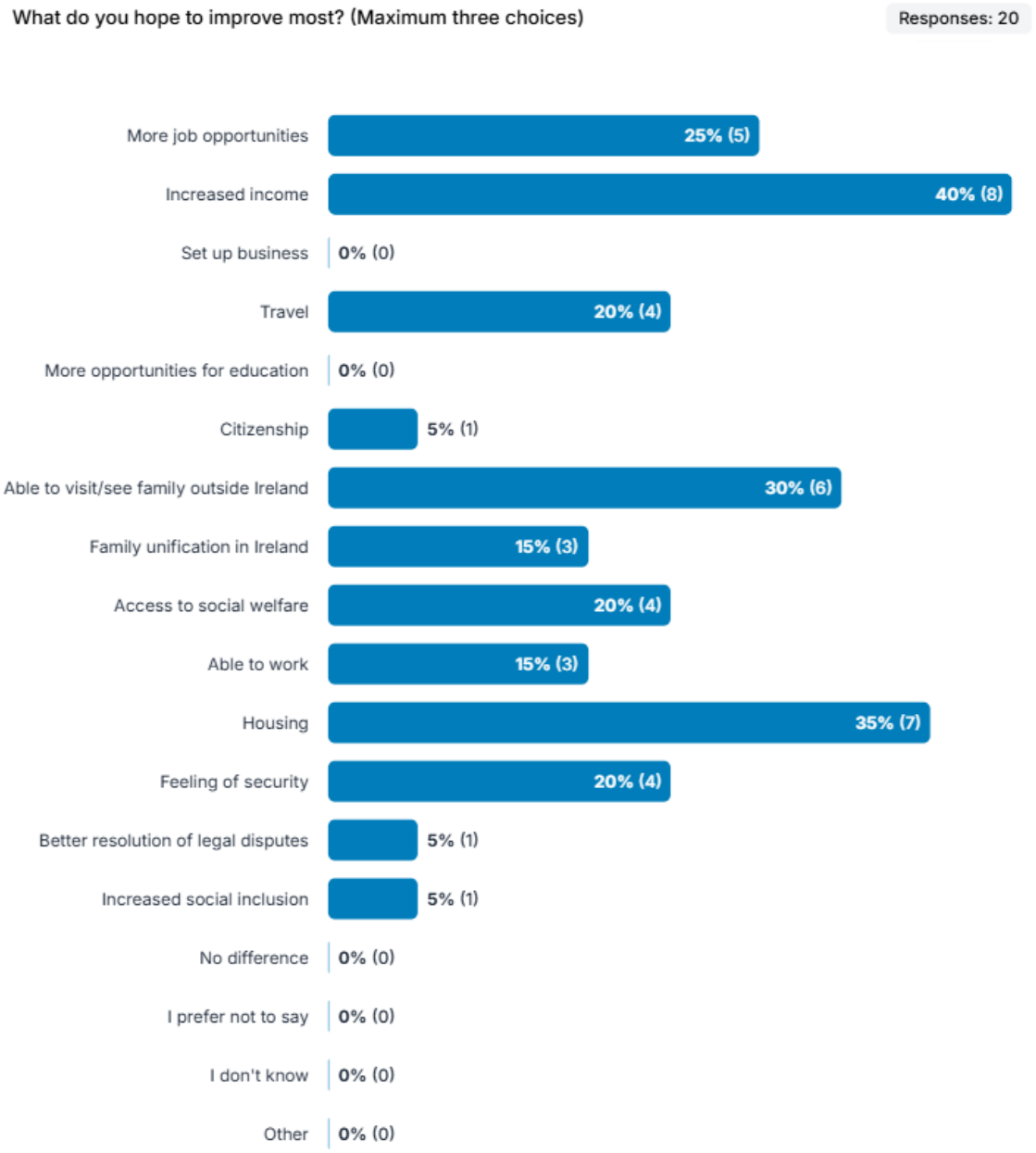

Figure 3.22 Respondents' Expectations for Future Improvements

1. Family reunification

● The Ability to Visit Family (75%)

The most frequently cited improvement following the acquisition of legal status was the ability to visit family outside Ireland. Most applicants would have been living in Ireland for over four years without leaving the country, resulting in prolonged separation from their loved ones. This extended period of isolation intensified their longing for family, making a

visit home their top priority. For many, securing legal status meant they could finally book a flight and travel freely, transforming long-awaited family reunions into an immediate and easily achievable reality.

Tingshan, aged 37 and living in Ireland for nine years, met her husband, who was also undocumented, in Ireland. They had a child together but never had the opportunity to visit or meet each other's families in China. Tingshan shared her joy of being able to travel home, *"I travelled back once after obtaining my legal status. My child had never met their grandparents before—neither paternal nor maternal. Last Spring Festival, I was able to take my child home for the first time."*

● Family Reunification in Ireland (37%)

For those who obtained Stamp 4 permission through the 2022 Regularisation Scheme and wished to rebuild family life in Ireland with immediate family members residing in their home countries, the next step involved acting as a sponsor in a family reunification application. To qualify, Stamp 4 holders were required to demonstrate sufficient financial capacity to support their family members for long-term residence in Ireland.

The *Non-EEA Family Reunification Policy Guidelines* sets out the comprehensive statement of Irish national immigration policy in the area of family reunification. At the time the 2022 Regularisation Scheme concluded, the minimum pre-tax annual salary required for a stamp 4 holder to sponsor a spouse to come to Ireland for more than three months was €30,000. To bring one child, the sponsor needed a net weekly income of at least €591, and for two children, the requirement increased to €692 per week after tax.[12] Additionally, sponsors were required to provide an Employment Detail Summary covering the three years prior to the application date.[13]

For those who had only begun paying taxes after obtaining legal status, meeting these income and documentation requirements posed a significant challenge. As a result, while family reunification remained a crucial goal, it was not immediately attainable for many. Consequently, 24% of respondents identified this as an ongoing challenge.

Guoqiang, aged 41 and living in Ireland for seven years, began paying taxes after obtaining Stamp 4 permission through the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. After one year of tax contributions, he decided to apply to bring his family to Ireland.

Guoqiang: *"My income hasn't increased; I can now pay taxes, but before, I had no legal status, no place to pay taxes, and my employer wouldn't register me. If I apply for family reunification, I just hope the financial requirements won't be so strict. You understand—being here alone without family is really lonely."*

Si'an, aged 61 and living in Ireland for nine years, came to Ireland after being laid off from his job in China. He was not optimistic about the possibility of bringing his wife to join him in Ireland, even with a stamp 4 permission.

Si'an: *"If I could secure stable employment and support myself properly, maybe even get a house here, then I could think about bringing my wife over. But right now, I don't have the financial ability. Bringing my wife and family here is very difficult."*

Regarding family reunification applications, respondents highlighted the high financial thresholds required to sponsor elderly family members for stays longer than three months in Ireland. In particular, sponsors must demonstrate a post-tax annual income of over €75,000 to bring both parents. They argued that allowing elderly parents to stay for more than three months under lower financial requirements would not only support individual families but also contribute to broader goals such as economic growth and social cohesion in Ireland.

Jiaqi and Jingxuan, both of whom had children attending school and relied on their husbands as the primary breadwinners, expressed a desire for an easier pathway to bring their parents to Ireland. They hoped that having their parents take care of the children would relieve them of domestic responsibilities and allow them to contribute financially to the household. However, as part of a single-income household or being unable to work full-time themselves, they did not meet the financial threshold required to sponsor their parents for stays longer than three months under the current family reunification policy.

Jiaqi: *"I think it would be great if the government could be more flexible, especially for middle-class families like ours. Both of us are skilled workers, and if I could free myself from the current restrictions of looking after my children, I could contribute more to the family in terms of labour and income. Our lives would improve. Of course, right now, we have to do everything ourselves because we can't rely on our parents. If my mom could stay longer, it would ease the pressure of rent, and the kids would have a better life. I would also have more time with my mom, which would be very valuable. If the government could give more flexibility in terms of allowing relatives, like parents, to stay longer, it would help us create more, contribute more taxes, and earn more. It's a win-win situation. I don't understand why the stay is limited to just three months. It's hard to find work in such a short period. If it were extended, it would help."*

Jingxuan: *"For people like us, most of the elderly prefer to have their grandchildren around. It's comforting for them to see the children. In my case, my children were in China before, but now they are here, and the grandparents still worry. They're not used to being here (in Ireland) for long, as they're also concerned about healthcare. They're older and worry that the medical care here might not be as good (as in China). Mainly, they just want to help us, especially when we are busy at the end of the year. The kids need to study, and we are juggling everything. They want to help us reduce the pressure. But the timing is awkward. Three months is just not enough. Even one more month would be better—at least one semester."*

Overall, legal status significantly improved the ability to visit family members. However, for many, family reunification within Ireland remains a distant goal due to stringent financial requirements and the complex nature of immigration policies. These findings highlight the need for more flexible and inclusive immigration policies that support family unity, enhance economic contributions, and address the emotional and practical challenges faced by immigrant families.

2. Enhanced Mobility

Gaining legal status symbolises not only freedom of movement but also greater access to international opportunities, including leisure travel. However, the increasing digitalisation of visa application systems and bureaucratic complexities in other countries continue to create significant barriers, limiting some respondents' ability to travel abroad. As a result, more respondents chose to visit their home countries rather than travel to other countries for tourism.

Tingyu: *"I have only travelled back to my home country. Travelling to other countries remains a challenge for us, especially in terms of understanding how to apply for visas. It's quite difficult for us."*

3. Increased Security and Sense of Belonging

The feeling of security (41%) is one of the most significant emotional and psychological benefits gained through legal status. Before regularisation, many undocumented individuals lived under constant stress, fearing detection and deportation. This anxiety affected their daily lives, limiting their ability to engage fully in society, plan for the future, or even move freely within the country. With legal status, these uncertainties have largely been alleviated, allowing individuals to regain a sense of control and stability and start to establish a sense of belonging.

Several respondents mentioned how the subconscious stress of being undocumented, constantly looking over their shoulders, was replaced by a newfound sense of ease and confidence.

Lihua: *"Now I can pay taxes, and I no longer have to hide from immigration checks. I can go about my daily life openly and without fear."*

Haiyu: *"Subconsciously, I feel much more at ease. I can go anywhere without worrying about encountering the police or being questioned. And emotionally, I feel a greater sense of belonging."*

The ability to move freely without fear of immigration enforcement contributes significantly to mental well-being.

Jihua: *"My mental health has improved—I feel more at peace. At least when I walk down the street, I no longer have to worry about someone checking my ID. This country values human rights, if something were to happen to me, at least now I have legal status, which makes everything much easier to handle."*

Beyond immediate security, legal status fosters a long-term sense of inclusion. The transition to legal residency transforms this experience, allowing individuals to feel truly rooted in the country.

Juntao, who came to Ireland over six years ago, left China due to the financial pressure of paying for his child's extracurricular tutoring. He saw hope in creating an easier educational environment for his child in Ireland after obtaining the legal status.

Juntao: *"There's a real sense of belonging now. Before, it felt like I had no roots here; like I could be forced to leave at any moment. But with legal status, even if I don't own a house yet, I can finally plan for a long-term future here."*

4. Economic Stability

Gaining legal status significantly expands employment opportunities, with 35% of respondents citing improved job prospects as a key benefit. This, in turn, has contributed to greater financial stability, as reflected in the 19% who reported increased income and the 7% who highlighted their ability to establish their own businesses. However, despite these economic improvements, a substantial 41% of respondents expressed a desire to further enhance their financial situation. Additionally, 25% specifically hope for better job opportunities, whether by securing higher-paying positions or transitioning into more skilled professions.

● Income Improvements and Workplace Rights

Many respondents noted that obtaining legal status led to a significant improvement in their wages and working conditions. Huiying, aged 63, in Ireland for 20 years, had always worked in the catering industry, emphasised that her wages finally normalised after receiving legal status: *"Before, they would pay me just €10 per hour. Now, I receive at least the legal minimum wage. Without status, unscrupulous employers could underpay us. (Now), if they offer too little, I can just leave."*

Tingshan, aged 37, whose husband worked in a takeaway shop, described the financial pressure of raising a child in a single-earner household. The burden was especially heavy during the period when the family, due to their undocumented status, was not entitled to receive Child Benefit payments.[14]

Tingshan: *"For example, although my husband had been paying taxes, his salary is relatively low, and his boss is hesitant to report a higher salary. After getting legal status, his boss would report a higher salary, and his wages would increase as well. I have two children, so I could choose to work part-time when my kids are at school. Without legal status, it's harder to find part-time work. But with legal status, I could get a part-time job and contribute, because one person's income isn't enough for a family. The kids also need support. Now I am able to buy snacks, milk powder, bread, and other things for my kids."*

The impact of legal status extends beyond personal security to the workplace, where individuals now experience greater transparency and legal protections.

Yaqin: *"The biggest change is having more job options and greater transparency. If I have concerns or issues at work, I can now express them without hesitation. Before, without legal status, I was always hesitant and afraid to speak up."*

● Entrepreneurial Opportunities and Expanded Client Base

Since Stamp 4 permission allows holders to establish and operate a business, obtaining legal status opened the door to those interested in entrepreneurship.[15]

Junyu, who had been working in the catering industry in Ireland for 18 years, felt increasing pressure from rising rents and was in the process of setting up his own business.

Junyu: *"Now that I have legal status, I can run my own business, which has significantly increased my income."*

Others found that a wider range of clients became available.

A focus group participant: *"Income levels may not have drastically changed, but the variety of available jobs has expanded. Previously, I couldn't get office cleaning jobs because I lacked legal status."*

● Challenges in Job Mobility and Career Growth

Despite these positive changes, some respondents found that transitioning into higher-paying or more stable jobs remained difficult.

Tingyu, who came to Ireland as a language student eight years ago and worked in takeaway shops, expressed a desire to upskill: *"I want to learn new skills or improve my English so that I can transition into a more technical job. Right now, working at a fast food restaurant doing cleaning tasks has limited prospects."*

Xiaomei, aged 35 and formerly a nurse in China, initially aimed to pursue a nursing career in the U.S. but was denied a visa. She came to Ireland as a language school student and later worked in a deli and a dry cleaner. After obtaining legal status, she hoped to transition into more structured full-time employment, either in nursing or with a major supermarket chain. However, she encountered unforeseen barriers in the job market. She described her job search experience: *"I thought getting legal status would mean I could easily find work outside of Chinese-owned businesses. But even with customer service experience, it's still difficult to secure a well-paying cashier job with benefits."* She applied to multiple large retailers but struggled to get responses. Additionally, as a former nurse in China, she considered working in home care but found the fragmented nature of the job unappealing: *"Home care jobs require travelling to different households, often just for an hour at a time. Most of the workday is spent commuting, making it difficult to earn a stable income."*

5. Housing

One of the most significant challenges faced by immigrants in Ireland, particularly those who have gained legal status through programs such as the 2022 Regularisation Scheme, is the issue of housing. Despite securing legal status, many respondents in a recent survey expressed their

desire for long-term settlement in Ireland, with the hope of achieving a sense of belonging and stability. However, the reality of high rental prices and housing costs has rendered these aspirations difficult to fulfil.

Shiyu, aged 32 and living in Ireland for 10 years, longed for stability and hoped to stop moving from place to place by having a home of her own. She stated, *"Before having legal status, I felt like I was drifting. After obtaining status, I long for a sense of belonging. The primary indicator of belonging for me is owning a house in Ireland."*

Letian, aged 66, once collapsed at work and underwent a successful brain surgery. However, this experience, along with ongoing health concerns, has left him anxious about the future. He expressed a hope to access residential care for the elderly, in case he requires emergency support or long-term care.

Letian: *"My doctor told me I should apply for government housing. The worry is that, when I am older, in my fifties or sixties, if something happens to me, I won't have anyone to help. If I live in government housing, I can rely on emergency services."*

Despite the urgency and desire for stable housing, many respondents expressed frustration over the high costs of housing.

Weize: *"Housing remains unresolved. Rent is still very high, and I can't afford to buy a house."*

Zijie, who had moved 16 times, used the old Chinese saying '安居乐业' (which means 'settle down and enjoy your work') to emphasise the longing for stable housing. Housing represents not just a physical need, but also an emotional one. It is essential for building a sense of community, security, and belonging.

6. Education

Language continues to be a significant barrier for many immigrants in Ireland, impacting essential aspects of daily life such as healthcare, banking, taxation, and interactions with the police. Despite efforts to improve their English skills, many respondents still find themselves unable to handle these matters independently. They expressed frustration over the high costs of translation services, which are often not readily available when needed. This underscores how language proficiency remains a critical factor in immigrants' integration and their access to essential services.

Lihua expressed that gaining legal status made her feel a strong need to learn English: *"So now, I'm forcing myself to learn English. If you want to live here, you have to learn English. If my status hadn't been resolved, I wouldn't have cared. If I couldn't speak, I'd just go back to my home country. But now that I have legal status, I have to learn English."*

At the same time, she acknowledged the difficulty of learning a new language at the age of 55:

"But as I get older, it's harder to remember things. Actually, when I was in middle school, my English was pretty good, but I forgot everything. Now, sometimes when I try to speak, my mind

just goes blank, and everything I think of is in Chinese. Sometimes, when I go out to handle things, I think, 'My God, I don't want to stay here, I can't communicate.' Anyway, I'm just forcing myself to learn English."

In addition to improving their English, some respondents have sought to enhance their professional skills and qualifications to improve their employment prospects. Xiaping, a 37-year-old Malaysian, came to Ireland at the encouragement of a friend living there, but later found herself undocumented due to a lack of prior knowledge about visa regulations. In Malaysia, she had worked in an office, but in Ireland, she ended up working in her friend's takeaway shop for €50 a day, barely enough to cover her rent. After obtaining legal status, she expressed a strong desire to pursue a course in Ireland to gain a certificate and acquire skills that would enable her to return to office work.

Xiaping: *"I want to continue my education here, so I'm thinking of applying for some courses…I'm interested in continuing my studies in a field related to my previous work, like certification in business administration, accounting, or supply chain management."*

Another significant concern among respondents is the education of their children, especially for those who had already applied for family reunification. A few interviewees expressed the difficulty of affording higher education for their children, particularly due to the high fees for non-EU international students.

Yaqin: *"I brought my child to attend university, but the tuition fees for non-EU students are too expensive! Since my child did not arrive as an international student but has now received a Stamp 3 permission (as a dependent of a Stamp 4 holder), I also have a Stamp 4 permission. I wonder if they could reduce my tuition fees."*

Regarding the cost of living for children, a participant in a focus group also raised concerns about the high cost of IRP renewal for young adults. She stated that:

*"The Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card renewal fees are too high, and this should be reported to the Department of Justice. Some children (young adult dependents) need to renew their permissions every year, which costs €300 annually.*16*Even for adults, paying €300 every three years is excessive. Compared to Greece and other European countries, where registration fees are much lower, Ireland's system feels exploitative."*

7. Convenience in Daily Life

Legal status grants individuals access to essential societal functions. Before the regularisation scheme, Xiaping had deliberately avoided any engagement with government offices and financial institutions in order to erase all traces of her life in Ireland before the 2022 Regularisation Scheme. This, in turn, severely limited her ability to seek employment.

Xiaping: *Before I had my legal status, I faced many difficulties. I had no PPS number, and no bank account, and therefore struggled to find employment. Even though I could communicate in English without issue, my undocumented status limited my opportunities. I couldn't even take*

on cash-in-hand jobs. When I needed to send money to my family, I had to do it through others' accounts. But once I obtained legal status, I finally felt equal to everyone else.

Similarly, Jingxuan highlighted how having a car and being able to register for a driving licence, which requires legal status, greatly improved her commuting experience in Ireland.[17]

Jingxuan: *"Public transport can be exhausting. After years of work, squeezing onto buses every day became unbearable. Having a car has made life much more convenient."*

Several respondents expressed a desire for better language support in public services. A few respondents hoped that services such as airports, post offices, and banks would provide language assistance or multilingual instructions.

8. Access to Social Welfare

Some respondents expressed a need for welfare support but lacked assistance in navigating the application process. Others were unaware that they were even eligible for welfare benefits, holding the misconception that immigrants have the obligation to pay taxes but not the right to access welfare.

Jingxuan shared her perspective: *"Personally, what I've been taught is that you have to rely on your own efforts. The only thing we need to do is pay taxes, but we can't receive welfare. If you think about it, sometimes you might feel it's unfair."*

This lack of awareness not only affects individuals like Jingxuan, but also reflects a broader systemic issue where immigrants, particularly those who have recently obtained regularised status, struggle to fully integrate into society due to misinformation about available support. Despite the large number of beneficiaries of the Regularisation Scheme, there is a notable absence of information sessions or coordinated efforts from the Department of Justice or the Department of Social Protection to inform new Stamp 4 holders about their rights in immigration and social welfare. This communication gap exacerbates the challenge of ensuring that these individuals can fully access and benefit from the support they are entitled to.

9. Access to healthcare

Legal status granted respondents greater access to healthcare options. While some felt that healthcare in Ireland met their needs, others appreciated the ability to return to China for medical check-ups, where they experienced shorter waiting times and more convenient services. This dual access allowed individuals to choose the best healthcare options based on their specific needs and circumstances.

Pingmei, aged 51, was undergoing cancer treatment before obtaining legal status and faced the risk of homelessness due to unable to continue working as a live-in caregiver. Gaining Stamp 4 permission granted her access to social welfare, which significantly eased her concerns about continuing cancer treatment and gave her a sense of stability during a vulnerable time.

Pingmei: *"You see, all my healthcare is guaranteed, with government benefits and such. I don't have to worry about anything outside of my treatment. My life is secure, so I can focus on getting well."*

For some, there were more choices regarding healthcare after obtaining status, like the option to return to China for faster services.

Linna: *"We can go back to China for check-ups. It's much more convenient and quicker than here."*

Jingxuan: *"After I got my status, I went back to China for a full physical check-up. The medical system there is more comprehensive. Here, even though you have status, treatment is generally free, but we don't rely on public healthcare that much. The way they treat you is a bit casual, so we prefer to go back home."*

However, the socioeconomic environment can sometimes prevent individuals from accessing proper healthcare in Ireland. For example, Ruifeng, aged 54, explained how his physical limitations from working in Chinese kitchens for many years, such as hand strain and rheumatism, made it difficult for him to find work or pay rent. Without the means to pay for rent, he could only find work in Chinese restaurants that offered employee housing, but these jobs often required physical strength. His ability to access healthcare was further compromised by his unstable work situation, which made it difficult to keep medical appointments and treatments on track:

"I've been to 4 restaurants in Limerick, then Dublin, Navan, and Galway, always in remote areas. It's hard to get around. One day I was in Mullingar, dragging my luggage. The place where I lived was 30 minutes from the restaurant, and I couldn't even manage to drag my luggage in one hour. It was exhausting, and I couldn't even find a place to stop and rest."

The perceived inefficiencies in Ireland's healthcare system also caused delays in treatment. Yiting shared a tragic example of how prolonged wait times led to delayed treatment and the worsening of her colleague's medical condition.

"Sometimes you have to first see the GP, and the whole process is really frustrating. If you need further tests at the hospital, it can take so long. Some serious cases, like malignant tumours, can get delayed. I have a colleague who initially thought he had a cold, but it was thyroid cancer. He waited for two or three months because he was misdiagnosed. By the time he went to the hospital, it was already terminal cancer, and he passed away in Ireland."

The regularisation of status has provided respondents with greater access to healthcare and a sense of security in their treatment. While many individuals appreciate the benefits of healthcare in Ireland, such as government-funded support and free treatment, some also choose to return to China for medical check-ups due to shorter waiting times and a more efficient healthcare system. This highlights the importance of not only securing legal status but also addressing the broader structural and systemic issues within the healthcare system to ensure that all individuals, particularly vulnerable migrants, can receive timely and appropriate care.

10. Access to legal aid

After obtaining legal status, the general response from the respondents was that they felt they had more rights and entitlements. However, some interviewees still faced difficulties in advancing their cases, even after acquiring legal status.

Fengtao, aged 49, recounted a challenging experience in which, after being recognised as a victim of an assault, he was dissatisfied with the medical treatment he received at the hospital. He then faced multiple obstacles in seeking legal recourse, struggling to obtain his records from both the hospital and the police.

Fengtao: *"I am a victim, and I want to know if anyone can assist me. For example, when I went to the hospital, they refused to help. Why? Because they told me nothing was wrong, but they had messed up my face during surgery… When I requested a medical report in order to present my case to the court, they wouldn't provide it. I kept asking, going back to the doctor, even writing letters to the hospital, but they ignored me. Essentially, I had to find a lawyer to deal with them. But that meant I had to spend a lot of money to do so."*

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Chapter 4

Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the transformative impact of Ireland's Regularisation Scheme on the lives of undocumented migrants, particularly Chinese-speaking immigrants. However, the research also reveals significant systemic and structural barriers that hinder full integration and equitable access to opportunities. To address these challenges and build on the successes of the scheme, this chapter offers actionable recommendations for policymakers, government agencies, NGOs, and community stakeholders. These recommendations aim to enhance the effectiveness of future regularisation initiatives, improve support services, and foster a more inclusive and equitable society for all migrants.

4.1 Policy-making

1. Policy Learning and Strategic Coherence

Revisit Eligibility Criteria to Ensure Fairness and Strategic Consistency: Although Ireland's 2022 Regularisation Scheme was comparatively generous by EU standards, with no requirements related to employability, local connection, language skills, or vulnerability, it still contained eligibility gaps that merit review. For instance, there was no dedicated application route for unaccompanied minors, and individuals who had previously held legal residence were, in some cases, excluded because they did not meet the required duration of undocumented stay. This paradoxically penalised those who attempted to follow legal migration pathways and risked incentivising irregular residence.

Recognise the Policy Signalling Effect of Regularisation Schemes: Regularisation is not just a technical process but also a symbolic and strategic act that shapes public expectations and migrant behaviour. Future schemes should be designed with a clear long-term vision that promotes lawful residence and integration, avoids perverse incentives, and reinforces the integrity of the overall immigration system.

2. Simplify and Streamline Application Processes

Understand Information Access Patterns: Conduct research into the preferred information channels, languages, and habits of different migrant communities. This will enable the design of culturally and linguistically appropriate communication strategies that effectively reach and engage target populations.

Reduce Administrative Burdens: Simplify document requirements, particularly for individuals in precarious living and working conditions. Accept a wider range of informal

proofs of residence, such as social media posts, delivery notes, and reference letters, as primary evidence.

Lower Application Fees: Ensure that fees are affordable and consider income-based waivers or instalment payment options to make the scheme accessible to low-income applicants. For those experiencing severe financial hardship, consider full fee waivers upon verification of their economic situation.

Reduce Processing Times: Minimise prolonged waiting periods by increasing staffing and resources for application processing. Implement a transparent tracking system that allows applicants to monitor the whole progress of their cases in real time. Clear communication on expected timelines and proactive updates should be provided to reduce applicant anxiety and improve trust in the system.

3. Enhanced Family Reunification Policies

Adjust financial requirements to reflect the realities of regularised migrants' incomes. Introduce more flexible criteria for sponsoring elderly parents. Enabling elderly parents to support with childcare and household responsibilities would ease the burden on migrant families and enhance the labour market participation of working-age migrants, particularly women.

4.2 Service Delivery and Support

1. Strengthen NGO and Community Outreach

Expand Multilingual Services: Increase funding for NGOs to provide multilingual support with a more diverse staff, including translation and interpretation services, and support in migrants' native languages. This will help bridge language barriers and ensure effective communication for migrant communities.

Develop Tailored Programs: Design targeted initiatives for marginalised migrant groups, such as undocumented migrants, live-in caregivers, kitchen staff, and older migrants. These programs should address the specific challenges their participants face in accessing legal documentation, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Enhance Peer Support: Strengthen collaboration with ethnic media outlets and community leaders to ensure accurate and timely dissemination of information on immigration policies, available support services, and legal rights. Encourage peer-led initiatives and support networks within migrant communities to foster trust, share experiences, and improve access to relevant resources.

2. Improve Access to Learning Opportunities

Expand Free English Classes: Increase the availability of free or affordable English language courses, particularly in areas with high immigrant populations. Simplify registration processes to make them accessible to non-English speakers.

Explore Practical and Innovative Learning Approaches: Design language programs that prioritise conversational skills and practical communication for daily life, such as workplace interactions, healthcare consultations, and legal proceedings. Incorporate innovative technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and AI-driven tools to simulate real-life scenarios, enhance engagement, and accelerate learning outcomes.

Integrate Language Training with Employment: Collaborate with employers to provide on-site English training for workers in industries with high immigrant employment, such as hospitality and construction.

Enhance Digital Literacy Programs: Offer funding and technological support to develop free or low-cost digital literacy training courses to help migrants navigate online services, including immigration portals, social welfare platforms, and healthcare systems.

3. Enhance Legal Aid and Advocacy Services

Increase Access to Pro Bono Legal Services: Expand funding for legal aid organisations to provide free or low-cost legal assistance, particularly in cases of regularisation, human trafficking, workplace exploitation, domestic violence, and child protection.

Develop Legal Literacy Programs: Offer workshops and resources to educate migrants about their legal rights and responsibilities, empowering them to better understand immigration policies and the legal system in Ireland.

4.3 Integration

1. Improve Access to Public Services

Increase Awareness of Entitlements: Launch targeted information campaigns to inform regularised migrants of their rights to social welfare, healthcare, and other public services. Collaborate with NGOs and community organisations to disseminate this information effectively.

Expand Language Support: Provide multilingual services in key public institutions, such as healthcare facilities, banks, airports, post offices, and government offices, to ensure equitable access for non-English-speaking migrants.

2. Promote Job Mobility and Career Advancement

Provide Skills Training and Certification: Offer affordable or subsidised vocational training programs to help migrants transition from low-wage, precarious jobs to higher-skilled, stable employment.

Support Entrepreneurship: Develop initiatives to assist migrants in starting their own businesses, including access to microloans, business planning resources, and mentorship programs.

Enhance Workplace Rights Awareness: Conduct outreach campaigns to educate migrants about their rights in the workplace, including minimum wage laws, working conditions, and protections against exploitation.

3. Address Housing Insecurity

Increase Affordable Housing Options:

Expand access to social housing and affordable rental options for regularised migrants, particularly those with low incomes or large families.

Provide Housing Assistance Programs:

Offer support for migrants navigating the housing market, including guidance on tenant rights, rental agreements, and housing applications.

4.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Conduct Regular Impact Assessments

Monitor Implementation Challenges: Track difficulties applicants face during the application process, including document collection, language barriers, and digital literacy, to inform future policy adjustments.

Expand Feedback Channels Beyond NGOs: In addition to collecting feedback through NGOs, ensure that direct channels are established for migrants themselves, particularly the most vulnerable and those not connected to support organisations, to provide input on regularisation schemes and major immigration policy changes. This may include anonymous online platforms, multilingual surveys, and dedicated community consultations. Doing so helps capture a broader and more representative range of migrant experiences and needs.

Establish a Formal Policy Review Mechanism: Develop a systematic process by which the government revisits and evaluates the design and implementation of regularisation schemes and broader immigration policies at regular intervals. This process should go beyond outcome

evaluation and include structured policy feedback loops that identify gaps, unintended consequences, and evolving community needs.

Ensure Transparency and Accountability in Policy Adjustments: Publish the findings of each review process and outline the changes made in response. Transparent communication builds public trust and encourages continued engagement from stakeholders.

2. Monitor Commercial Agents

Closely monitor the activities of commercial agents, especially during policy changes, to prevent misinformation, fraud, and the exploitation of vulnerable migrants. Implement stricter regulations and regular audits of agents' practices, and ensure that they are held accountable for any deceptive or unethical behaviour. Establish clear reporting channels for migrants to report any suspicious activity or malpractice, offering them protection from retaliation.

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Appendix 1 Online Questionnaire (English Translation)

Section 1 information sheet and consent form: Part 1

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study

I am Meishan Zhang, an IRC Post Doctoral Fellow, in the Department of Sociology, Maynooth University.

I am undertaking a research study as part of my research funded by the Irish Research Council's 2023 Enterprise Partnership Scheme, partnered with Crosscare.

The study is concerned with Chinese immigrants' experiences obtaining policy-related information in the immigration system in Ireland and how that might shape the provision of professional, up-to-date consulting services by Chinese and English language-speaking advisers.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

What will participating in the study involve?

The study will involve a 20-minute online questionnaire.

What information will be collected?

Information on the ways you gathered information about the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme (Regularisation Scheme) and your current needs regarding obtaining updated immigration information.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked because you have experience of applying for the Regularisation Scheme.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy of this and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised on September 30th, 2024. A decision to withdraw, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Crosscare and Maynooth University.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, and electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Meishan Zhang.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances, the University will take all reasonable steps within the law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information that you give?

Your questionnaire data will be collected and analysed by researchers with password-protected computers. Your consent form and the encrypted computers that carry your data will be kept in locked offices.

All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by Meishan Zhang.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a summary report, discussed at internal group meetings, presented at National and International conferences, and may be published in scientific journals or books. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

It is possible that talking about your experience may cause some distress.

What if there is a problem?

If you experience any distress following the procedure, you may contact the National Counselling Service. (https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/national-counselling-service/contact-us/) or get Text About It service using free-text HELLO to 50808 for an anonymous chat with a trained volunteer, any time. Crosscare can refer you to a free legal advice service if your stress is caused by the security of your stay in Ireland, or a referral to Safetynet to get free access to the GP service if required.

You may contact my supervisor, Dr Rebecca King O'Riain (rebecca.king-oriain@mu.ie) if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Meishan Zhang, meishan.zhang@mu.ie.

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Consent Form

I agree to participate in Meishan Zhang's research study titled "Interpreting Justice: An Exploration of Chinese Immigrants' Experiences in the Immigration System in Ireland."

Please tick each statement below:

☐ I am over 18 years of age.

☐ The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me.

☐ I am participating voluntarily.

☐ I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet.

☐ I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below.

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at

research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information, the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The Data Protection office is located in Room 27, Rye Building, North Campus, Maynooth University, which can be contacted at dataprotection@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for the participant, 1 for the PI

1. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

A. Yes
B. No

Section 2: Characteristics of Respondents

2. What is your age?

3. What is your gender identity?

A. Male identifying
B. Female identifying
C. Non-binary
D. Other

4. What's your place of birth?

A. Mainland China
B. Hong Kong, Macao or Taiwan
C. Malaysia
D. Singapore
E. Other
F. I prefer not to say

5. What is your civil status?

A. Single

B. Married
C. De facto partner
D. Separated
E. Divorced
F. Widowed
G. I prefer not to say

6. **What is your occupation?**

A. No work
B. Fulltime parenting
C. Agriculture, forestry and fishing
D. Mining and quarrying
E. Manufacturing
F. Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply
G. Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities
H. Construction
I. Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles
J. Transportation and storage
K. Accommodation and food service activities
L. Information and communication
M. Financial and insurance activities
N. Real estate activities
O. Professional, scientific and technical activities
P. Administrative and support service activities
Q. Public administration and defence, compulsory social security
R. Education
S. Human health and social work activities
T. Arts, entertainment and recreation
U. Other service activities
V. Activities of households as employers producing activities of the household for own use
W. Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies
X. I prefer not to say
Y. Industry not stated

7. I would like to add.

8. **Which one below best describes your English proficiency?** (Multiple choices)

A. No English
B. Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions.
C. Can describe matters in areas of immediate need.
D. Can deal with most situations likely to arise.

E. Can understand technical discussions in my field of specialisation.
F. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.
G. Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.
H. I don't know

9. How long have you been in Ireland?

Section 3: Migration

10. What are the reasons for leaving China? (Multiple choices)

A. Lack of political and human rights
B. Dissatisfaction with the education system
C. Insufficient elderly care resources
D. Family's decision
E. Difficulty finding better job opportunities
F. Limited social welfare
G. Limited medical recourse
H. Natural/environmental influence
I. Persuasion by others
J. Desire to gain life experiences abroad
K. Personal safety concerns (family conflict, life-threatening events…)
L. Local tradition to emigrate
M. My company sent me here
N. Trapped by a human trafficking organisation
O. I prefer not to say
P. I don't know
Q. Other

11. I would like to add more causes.

12. What are the reasons for choosing to move to Ireland? (Multiple choices)

A. Greater political and human rights
B. Better education for oneself or descendants
C. Better elderly care
D. Family's decision
E. More job opportunities in Ireland
F. Better social welfare in Ireland
G. Relaxed immigration and border controls in Ireland
H. Attraction to Irish culture
I. Recommended by commercial intermediaries (migrant/study intermediaries)

J. Initially unaware it was Ireland
K. English is spoken in Ireland, and I only speak English in foreign languages
L. Policies accepting Chinese refugees
M. My company's decision
N. The smugglers' routes took me here
O. Social network in Ireland
P. Local traditions to emigrate to Ireland
Q. Positive feedback from other migrants in Ireland
R. I prefer not to say
S. I don't know
T. Other

13. I would like to add more reasons.

14. What resources facilitated your trip to Ireland? (Multiple choices)

A. My own savings
B. Family's support
C. Borrowed money from lending services
D. Borrowed money from friends
E. Information from family and friends in Ireland
F. Information from social media and website
G. Information from intermediaries
H. Information from the Irish government
I. Information from potential employers
J. Information from paid consultant services including solicitors
K. Information from free consultant services including NGOS
L. I prefer not to say
M. I don't know
N. Others

15. I want to add more answers.

16. What was your status upon arrival in Ireland?

A. Illegal entry
B. Short-term visit/tourist visa
C. Work visa
D. Student visa
E. Join-family visa
F. Seeking asylum
G. I prefer not to say

H. I don’t know
I. Other

17. I want to add more answers.

Section 4: The Regularisation Scheme

18. How did you become undocumented? (Multiple choices)

A. Did not have any upon arrival
B. Short-term visa expired
C. Work relationship breakdown: made redundant
D. Work relationship breakdown: exploitation
E. Work relationship breakdown: could not renew work permit or find a new job that enabled the renewal
F. Student visa expired
G. Family relationship breakdown: dependency can’t continue
H. Failed asylum application
I. Due to a lack of know-how or supporting documents
J. I prefer not to say
K. I don’t know
L. Other

19. I want to add more answers.

20. Did you make an application for the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme (the Regularisation Scheme) that opened on 31 January 2022?

A. Yes, I applied.
B. No, I did not apply

21. Which application did you make? (Multiple choices; Shown if choose ‘applied’ in 20)

A. Single application
B. Family application-principal applicant
C. Family application-dependent applicant
D. International protection applicant
E. I prefer not to say
F. I don’t know

22. What is your application result? (Shown if choose 'applied' in 20)

A. Positive
B. Negative
C. Still waiting
D. I prefer not to say
E. Other

23. I want to add more answers.

24. Why didn't you apply? (Multiple choices; Shown if choose 'not applied' in 20)

A. I did not think it was safe to apply.
B. I was not interested in gaining legal status.
C. I had other plans to gain legal status.
D. I didn't know about this policy at the time and missed the application.
E. Not eligible
F. I could not find the required documents and information for the application.
G. I did not know how to use the application website, so I abandoned the application
H. The application fee is too high.
I. I found a consulting agency or lawyer, but the fees were too high to afford the cost of representation
J. I prefer not to say
K. I don't know
L. Other

Note: Group 1 (A-E, low aspiration), Group 2 (F, G, low capability, lack of opportunity), Group 3 (H, low capability, lack of knowledge), Group 4 (I, J, low capability, lack of resources)

25. I want to add more reasons.

26. What's your future plan? (Only shown if choose 'Negative' in 22; Multiple choices; New question)

A. Stay undocumented
B. Section 3 application
C. A separate application based on family members
D. Return to China
E. I prefer not to say
F. I don't know
G. Other

27. I want to add more reasons.

28. Where did you first find the information about the Regularisation Scheme? (Multiple choices)

A. Department of Justice website
B. Garda
C. Hospital
D. Social workers
E. Citizens Information
F. Community centre
G. Crosscare
H. MRCI
I. NASC
J. Cairde
K. Online articles
L. Friends, family and colleagues
M. WeChat Group
N. My lawyer
O. My accountant
P. Commercial immigrant agent
Q. I prefer not to say
R. I don't know/remember
S. Other

Note: Group 1 (A-F, public services), Group 2 (G-J, NGOs), Group 3 (K-O, personal network)

29. I want to add more answers.

30. Where did you get the detailed information about the Regularisation Scheme? (Multiple choices)

A. Department of Justice website
B. Garda
C. Hospital
D. Social workers
E. Citizens Information
F. Community centres
G. Crosscare
H. MRCI
I. NASC
J. Cairde
K. Online articles
L. Friends, family and colleagues
M. WeChat Group
N. My lawyer
O. My accountant
P. Commercial immigrant agent

Q. I prefer not to say
R. I don't know/remember
S. Other

31. I want to add more answers.

32. What aspects of the application process did you find challenging? (Multiple choices)

A. Determining whether I meet the criteria
B. Determining whether to apply as an individual or a family.
C. Determining who should be the principal applicant.
D. I was rejected by the Regularisation Scheme but did not know what to write for the appeal.
E. I was rejected and concerned about or unclear about the consequences.
F. Language barriers
G. Dealing with the online application process.
H. Dealing E-Vetting process.
I. Communicating with the Undocumented Team through email.
J. Collect the materials and personal information required for the application.
K. Not having a stable address for correspondence
L. The application fee was too high.
M. Coping with stress while waiting for the next step.
N. I prefer not to say
O. I don't know
P. Other
Note: Group 1 (A-E, low capability, lack of knowledge), Group 2 (F-I, low capability, lack of skills), Group 3 (J-M, low capability, lack of resources)

33. I want to add more answers.

34. Did you have someone else to help you during the application process?

A. No, I made the application completely by myself
B. Yes
C. I prefer not to say

35. What form(s) of help did you receive? (Shown if choose 'Yes' in 34; Multiple choices)

A. Face-to-face
B. Letters
C. Phone calls
D. Text/WhatsApp messages
E. WeChat
F. Webinars
G. Emails
H. Consultation app/webpage

I. I prefer not to say
J. Other

Note: Group 1 (A-C, traditional), Group 2 (D-H, digital)

36. I want to add more answers. (Shown if you choose 'Yes' in 34)

37. In what aspect(s) did you get help? (Shown if choose 'Yes' in 34; Multiple choices)

A. Determining whether I meet the criteria
B. Determining whether to apply as an individual or a family.
C. Determining who should be the principal applicant.
D. Making the appeal after a rejection.
E. Analysing the possible consequences of a rejection.
F. Interpreter/translator
G. Filling in the online application forms.
H. Dealing E-Vetting process.
I. Communicating with the Undocumented Team through email.
J. Collect the materials and personal information required for the application.
K. Providing a stable address for correspondence
L. The application fee.
M. Coping with stress while waiting for the next step.
N. I prefer not to say
O. I don't know
P. Other
Note: Group 1 (A-E, gain capability, knowledge), Group 2 (F-I, gain capability, skills), Group 3 (J-N, gain capability, resources)

38. I want to add more answers. (Shown if choose 'Yes' in 34)

39. Which ones are the most helpful? (Shown if choose 'Yes' in 34; Maximum three choices)

A. Determining whether I meet the criteria
B. Determining whether to apply as an individual or a family.
C. Determining who should be the principal applicant.
D. Making the appeal after a rejection.
E. Analysing the possible consequences of a rejection.
F. Interpreter/translator
G. Filling in the online application forms.
H. Dealing E-Vetting process.
I. Communicating with the Undocumented Team through email.
J. Collect the materials and personal information required for the application.
K. Providing a stable address for correspondence

L. The application fee.
M. Coping with stress while waiting for the next step.
N. I prefer not to say
O. I don't know
P. Other

40. What individuals or organisations did you seek help from about your application for the Regularisation Scheme? If you have used any of them, check their quality in the aspects below. (Shown if choose 'Yes' in 34, Scale question)

A. Department of Justice website
B. Garda
C. Hospital
D. Social workers
E. Citizens Information
F. Community centres
G. Crosscare
H. MRCI
I. NASC
J. Cairde
K. Online articles
L. Friends, family and colleagues
M. WeChat Group
N. My lawyer
O. My accountant
P. Commercial immigrant agent

1. Affordable
2. Has an interpreter
3. Respectful
4. Timely
5. Transparent
6. Will use again

41. What individuals or organisations did you seek help from about your application for the Regularisation Scheme? If you have used any of them, please rate their service. (Shown if choose 'Yes' in 34, Scale question)

A. Department of Justice website
B. Garda
C. Hospital
D. Social workers

E. Citizens Information
F. Community centres
G. Crosscare
H. MRCI
I. NASC
J. Cairde
K. Online articles
L. Friends, family and colleagues
M. WeChat Group
N. My lawyer
O. My accountant
P. Commercial immigrant agent

1. Not useful

2. Slightly useful

3. Somewhat useful

4. Very useful

5. Extremely useful

42. The Department of Justice has official information about the policy in the Chinese language. Did you check them?

A. Yes
B. No

43. Which method(s) of communication do you feel more comfortable with in the process of consulting information about immigration policies? (Multiple choices)

A. Face-to-face
B. Letters
C. Phone calls
D. Text/WhatsApp messages
E. WeChat
F. Webinars
G. Emails
H. Consultation app/webpage
I. I don't know
J. Other

44. I want to add more reasons.

45. What are the biggest improvements in life after obtaining legal status? (Only shown if choose “positive” in 22; Maximum three choices)

A. More job opportunities
B. Increased income
C. Set up business
D. Travel
E. More opportunities for education
F. Citizenship
G. Able to visit/see family outside Ireland
H. Family unification in Ireland
I. Access to social welfare
J. Able to work
K. Housing
L. Feeling of security
M. Better resolution of legal disputes
N. Increased social inclusion
O. No difference
P. I prefer not to say
Q. I don't know
R. Other

46. I want to add more answers. (Only shown if choose “positive” in 22)

47. What has not improved? (Only shown if choose “positive” in 22)

A. More job opportunities
B. Increased income
C. Set up business
D. Travel
E. More opportunities for education
F. Citizenship
G. Able to visit/see family outside Ireland
H. Family unification in Ireland
I. Access to social welfare
J. Able to work
K. Housing
L. Feeling of security
M. Better resolution of legal disputes
N. Increased social inclusion
O. No difference

P. Other
Q. I don't know
R. I prefer not to say

48. I want to add more reasons. (Only shown if choose "positive" in 22)

49. What do you hope to improve most? (Only shown if choose "No, I did not apply" in 20; Maximum three choices)

A. More job opportunities
B. Increased income
C. Set up business
D. Travel
E. More opportunities for education
F. Citizenship
G. Able to visit/see family outside Ireland
H. Family unification in Ireland
I. Access to social welfare
J. Able to work
K. Housing
L. Feeling of security
M. Better resolution of legal disputes
N. Increased social inclusion
O. No difference
P. I prefer not to say
Q. I don't know
R. R. Other

50. I want to add more reasons. (Only shown if the respondent chooses "No, I did not apply" in 20)

51. What else will you be looking at next on immigration? (Only shown if choose "positive" in 22; Multiple choices; will insert their colloquial names)

A. Stamp 5
B. Citizenship and Irish passport
C. Join family visa
D. Social welfare
E. Legal matters
F. Medical matters
G. Housing matters
H. I prefer not to say
I. I don't know
J. Other

52. I want to add more answers. Only shown if the respondent chooses "positive" in 22

Section 5: Consultation App

53. Would you like to use a free app that provides immigration policy information in Chinese?

A. Yes
B. No

54. What features are you most looking forward to in this consulting app? (Multiple choices; Only shown if choose 'Yes' in 53)

A. Timely and accurate immigration policy with Chinese translation
B. Online consultation
C. Making an appointment for an in-person consultation
D. Translation services
E. Workshops or policy briefings
F. Political advocacy
G. Academic research
H. Chinese mutual aid platform
I. Legal advice and representation
J. Guidance for domestic violence, child protection and mental health matters
K. Contact information for government services and charitable organisations
L. I prefer not to say
M. I don't know
N. Other

55. I want to add more answers. (Only shown if choose 'Yes' in 53)

56. What concerns would you have about using a free app for this service? (Multiple choices)

A. I'm not very good at using mobile phones
B. The App cannot develop a solution based on my situation
C. Using the App will risk my privacy
D. I don't trust the information on the App to be timely and accurate
E. Other
F. I have no concerns about the App.

57. I want to add more answers.

58. What type of process do you need help with regarding your immigration status in Ireland? (Multiple choices)

A. Access to immigration information and decision-making
B. Interpreting or translating services
C. Paperwork such as form filling and letter writing
D. Online application
E. Sending and receiving letters
F. Financial aid
G. Other
H. I do not need help
I. I prefer not to say

59. I want to add more answers.

60. Do you have any suggestions for the app?

Section 6 Consent Form: Part 2

61. Do you agree to the quotation/publication of extracts from my questionnaire?

A. Yes, I agree
B. No, I disagree

62. Do you agree to your data being used for further research projects?

A. Yes, I agree
B. No, I disagree

Section 7 Conclusion

Thank you for your participation. Please keep your response ID and contact meishan.zhang@mu.ie or 086 035 3685 to arrange a one-hour free consultation session if needed.

Appendix 2 Interview Questions (English Translation)

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study

I am Meishan Zhang, an IRC Post Doctoral Fellow, in the Department of Sociology, Maynooth University.

I am undertaking a research study as part of my research funded by the Irish Research Council's 2023 Enterprise Partnership Scheme, partnered with Crosscare.

The study is concerned with Chinese immigrants' experiences obtaining policy-related information in the immigration system in Ireland and how that might shape the provision of professional, up-to-date consulting services by Chinese and English language-speaking advisers.

Who has approved this study?

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

What will participating in the study involve?

The study will involve a 60-minute interview. The interview will take place at Crosscare at 2 St Mary's Place North in Dublin 7. The interview will be audio recorded.

What information will be collected?

Information on the ways you gathered information about the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrant Scheme (Regularisation Scheme) and your current needs regarding obtaining updated immigration information.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked because you have experience of applying for the Regularisation Scheme.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy of this and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised on September 30th, 2024. A decision to withdraw, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Crosscare and Maynooth University.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, and electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Meishan Zhang.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances, the University will take all reasonable steps within the law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give?

The interview will be audio-recorded by two voice recorders to ensure the content captured is accurate and complete. The recording will be transferred to a password-protected computer after the interview and deleted from the voice recorders. The recording will then be transcribed and analysed by researchers. Your consent form and the encrypted computers that carry your data will be kept in locked offices.

All the information you provide will be anonymised on September 30th, 2024. It means the information will be kept in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you after that day. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, all data will be destroyed by Meishan Zhang.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a summary report, discussed at internal group meetings, presented at National and International conferences and may be published in scientific journals or books. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

It is possible that talking about your experience may cause some distress.

What if there is a problem?

If you experience any distress following the procedure, you may contact the National Counselling Service. (https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/national-counselling-service/contact-us/) or get Text About It service using free-text HELLO to 50808 for an anonymous chat with a trained volunteer, any time. Crosscare can refer you to a free legal advice service if your stress is caused by the security of your stay in Ireland or a referral to Safetynet to get free access to GP service if required.

You may contact my supervisor, Dr Rebecca King O'Riain (rebecca.king-oriain@mu.ie) if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: Meishan Zhang, meishan.zhang@mu.ie.

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Consent Form

I agree to participate in Meishan Zhang's research study titled "Interpreting Justice: An Exploration of Chinese Immigrants' Experiences in the Immigration System in Ireland".

Please tick each statement below:

☐ I am over 18 years of age.

☐ The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me.

☐ I am participating voluntarily.

☐ I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet.

☐ I give permission for my interview with Meishan Zhang to be audio-recorded.

☐ I agree to the quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.

OR

☐ I do not agree to the quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.

☐ I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below.

☐ I agree to my data being used for further research projects.

OR

☐ I do not agree to my data being used for further research projects.

Signed …….

Date …….

Participant Name in block capitals ……...

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed …….

Date …….

Researcher Name in block capitals ……...

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information, the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. The Data Protection office is located in Room 27, Rye Building, North Campus, Maynooth University, which can be contacted at dataprotection@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for the participant, 1 for the PI

Part 1: Characteristics of Respondents

1. What is your age?

2. What's your gender?

3. What is your country of birth?

4. What is your civil status?

5. What is your education level?

6. What is your native language?
Please rate your English level. Where did you learn English for how long? Do you usually need English? Can you cope with the demands of work and life?

7. How long have you stayed in Ireland?

Part 2: Migration

8. What are the reasons for leaving China?

9. What are the reasons for choosing to move to Ireland?

10. What resources did you access through travelling?

11. What was your status upon arrival in Ireland?

Part 3: Integration

12. How did you become undocumented?

13. What was your source of income during the Undocumented Period?

14. What was your source of accommodation during the Undocumented period?

15. How did you get treatment for health issues during the Undocumented period?

16. What local organisations or community activities have you participated in during your leisure time?

17. Have you experienced racism in Ireland?

Part 4: Engagement with the Regularisation Scheme

18. Did you make an application for the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme (the Regularisation Scheme) that opened on 31 January?

19. Why didn't you apply? Why were you eligible but did not apply?

20. Which application did you make?

21. Have you received the results?

22. Where did you first find the information about the Regularisation Scheme? Where did you find the detailed information?

23. What aspects of the application process did you find challenging?

24. Did you have any help during the application process? Who did you ask for help?

25. Did you have the experience of directly contacting the Department of Justice regarding the application? Did you have experience of directing contacting the Department of Justice ever?

26. Do you feel comfortable directly contacting the Department of Justice? Why?

27. What did they do? Were you communicating online or offline? What do you think was most helpful?

28. What help was free, and what was charged? Do you think the price is reasonable? Can you afford it?

29. Did you get the information you were looking for during each of the above consultations?

30. Did you need an interpreter during each of the above consultations?

31. Did the agency have Chinese consulting services or interpretation services?

32. Did you feel respected while using this service?

33. Did you get timely responses while using this service? How long would you wait for their reply?

34. Did you feel this service was transparent with your application process?

35. Would you like to continue using each service in the future?

36. What has been improved and what has not after the scheme?

37. What else will you be looking at next on immigration?

38. In what ways do you feel more comfortable in the process of consulting information about immigration policies? Online or in person?

Part 5: Consultation App

39. Would you like to use a free app that provides immigration policy information in Chinese?

40. What features are you looking forward to in this consulting app?

41. What will be your concerns about using this app?

42. Overall, what bothers you while dealing with your immigration status in Ireland? What you need most when dealing with those issues?

Appendix 3 Focus Group Questions (English Translation)

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

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The focus group will be audio-recorded in order to accurately capture what is said. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature for focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study. You may choose how much or how little you want to speak, but please not to use any names during the session.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

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17. Did you feel respected while using this service?

18. Did you get timely responses while using this service? How long would you wait for their reply?

19. Did you feel this service was transparent with your application process?

20. Would you like to continue using each service in the future?

21. What are the biggest improvements in life after obtaining legal status? What has not improved?

22. What else will you be looking at next on immigration?

23. In what ways do you feel more comfortable in the process of consulting information about immigration policies? Online or in person?

24. Would you like to use a free app that provides immigration policy information in Chinese?

25. What features are you looking forward to in this consulting app?

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27. Overall, what bothers you while dealing with your immigration status in Ireland? What do you need most when dealing with those issues?

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

Taighde Éireann Research Ireland

cross care

CHINESE-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCE
NAVIGATING IRELAND'S 2022
REGULARISATION OF LONG-TERM UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS SCHEME

MEISHAN ZHANG

CHINESE-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCE

MEISHAN ZHANG

Ireland's 2022 Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme marked a significant milestone in Irish immigration policy, offering thousands, including many Chinese-speaking migrants, a long-awaited opportunity to secure legal status. For these individuals, the scheme has been transformative: enabling family reunification, improving financial stability, and restoring a sense of belonging. Yet as this report reveals, regularisation is only the first step on a longer and more complex path toward full integration.

Based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as community engagement, this report highlights the persistent challenges faced by applicants during their interaction with the Regularisation Scheme and the evolving needs of newly regularised migrants. The report offers actionable recommendations aimed at policymakers, government agencies, NGOs, and community stakeholders. These include simplifying application procedures, enhancing family reunification policies, expanding multilingual and tailored support services, improving access to language and digital literacy programs, strengthening legal aid and advocacy, and implementing rigorous monitoring of commercial immigration agents. It also calls for the establishment of a formal, transparent policy review mechanism to regularly assess and adapt immigration policies to evolving migrant needs.

Authored by Dr. Meishan Zhang, a postdoctoral researcher at Maynooth University in collaboration with Crosscare Migrant Project and funded by Research Ireland under the Enterprise Partnership Scheme, this work bridges academic insight and frontline practice to support migrant inclusion. It provides a vital resource for those working to ensure that all migrants in Ireland can thrive with dignity, safety, and equal opportunity.

MEISHAN ZHANG