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**Investigating Public Attitudes Towards Immigrants and Refugees in Ireland.**

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## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that this material, which I now submit in fulfilment of an M.Sc. degree, has not been previously submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University, and is, unless otherwise stated, entirely my own work.

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## **Abstract**

Public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees are shaped by a complex interplay of psychological, social, and political factors. This thesis examines these attitudes in Ireland through both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component utilises data from the Republic of Ireland arm of the COVID-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC) study, with a sample size of 1041 participants. It focused on key predictors of migration attitudes, including socio-demographic, political, psychological, and mental health variables. The findings indicate that socio-demographics, social dominance orientation, trust in the state, empathy, and conspiracy mentality are significant predictors of migration attitudes, while mental health variables do not show a similar association. The qualitative component comprises data gathered through semi-structured interviews with residents of Dublin, with a sample size of 21 participants. It explored how personal experiences, media narratives, and national identity influence public perceptions towards immigrants and refugees. The reflexive thematic analysis identifies five key themes, along with several subthemes: Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment, Attitudes Toward Diversity, Barriers to Integration, Economic and Public Service Concerns, and Irish Identity. This study enhances the broader understanding of migration attitudes in Ireland and Dublin, underscoring the importance of policy interventions that foster social cohesion, address systemic inequalities, and challenge prevailing exclusionary narratives. The limitations of this study are also discussed, as well as implications for future research, policy development, and intercultural relations.

## **Chapter 1. Literature Review and General Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

### **1.1.1 Background: Immigration and Refugee Issues**

According to the United Nations (2018), over 258 million individuals live outside their country of origin worldwide, and 84 million individuals have been forcibly displaced worldwide in mid-2021 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021; UNHCR). Immigrants are individuals who leave their country of birth to begin a new life in a different country (Brady & Stevens, 2019). The experiences of an immigrant can often be described as complicated, overwhelming, and daunting (Patel et al., 2016). This is often associated with the lengthy vetting process that is required to immigrate to a new country, which can further result in lawful permanent residency and eventually even citizenship (Irish Refugee Council, 2018; IRC). Immigrants often face challenging circumstances such as the migration process, language barriers, adaptation to a new environment and separation from culture and family, all of which can have negative impacts on mental well-being (Derr, 2016). Immigrants also investigate their destinations, look for career possibilities in the country where they intend to live, and can most likely return to their country of origin (IRC, 2018). Motives to migrate can include factors such as desire for freedom of religious and political beliefs, war, poverty, or job advancement (Bas-Sarmiento et al., 2017). War-based immigrants, also known as refugees, are individuals who must flee their residing or birth country due to persecution, war, or when conflict has erupted which does not allow people to return home safely (Amnesty International, 2024; IRC, 2018; UNHCR, 2021). A refugee may be concerned about being oppressed for many reasons such as religion, race, political views, and ethnicity (De Coninck, 2019). Faced with severe threats to their lives, refugees flee their country as their governments are incapable or unwilling to protect them (Amnesty International, 2024). Some refugees receive international protection and crucial aid from organisations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Rescue Committee (Amnesty

International, 2024; IRC, 2018). Sajjad (2018) indicates that the label “refugee” is flexible and context-dependent since it is associated with the concept of citizenship and state. This is illustrated by the decline in Afghan asylum applications across European countries in 2016, after a new risk ratio concluded that only 0.07% of applicants were victims of armed conflict, which was ruled ineligible to seek asylum (Sajjad, 2018).

In addition, two essential variables to be considered are choice (voluntary or involuntary travel) and visa status (authorised or unauthorised arrival), which shape how immigrants and refugees are viewed and the resources available to them in host countries (Segal, 2019). Immigrants are classified as voluntary migrants who are “pulled to” a new location, either through authorised or unauthorised means, to pursue economic opportunities, education, family reunification, or political motivations (Derr, 2016; Segal, 2019). In contrast, refugees are considered involuntary migrants who are “pulled from” their own country due to conflict, persecution, or other circumstances and need protection (IRC, 2018; Segal, 2019; UNHCR, 2016). This thesis will differentiate between immigrants and refugees based on these definitions laid out by UNHCR (2021) and Segal (2019).

Berry (1997) outlines four acculturation strategies, which are expanded upon by Delgado and Sun (2021) and highlight the complexities of immigrant integration and the corresponding host culture’s responses. The first strategy is assimilation, where immigrants abandon their heritage culture in favour of fully adopting the host culture (Battu & Zenou, 2010; Delgado & Sun, 2021; Piracha et al., 2022); this aligns with the host society’s “melting pot” strategy, which encourages the loss of ethnic identity in favour of cultural uniformity (Delgado & Sun, 2021; West, 2011). Previous literature has shown that social or ethnic identity assimilation has a significant impact and is beneficial to immigrants’ economic outcomes and well-being (Battu & Zenou, 2010; Cai & Zimmermann, 2020; Carillo et al., 2022; Piracha et al., 2022). However, immigrants from collectivistic cultures disagree with

the notion of assimilation, as it can impact their cultural heritage identity (Hofstede, 2011). The second strategy is separation, where immigrants deliberately preserve their heritage culture while rejecting the host culture (Battu & Zenou, 2010; Delgado & Sun, 2021); when the host society enforces this division, it results in segregation (Berry, 1997; Delgado & Sun, 2021; Lichter et al., 2019). The third strategy, marginalisation, occurs when immigrants abandon both their heritage and host cultures, leading to social rejection by the host society (Delgado & Sun, 2021; Derakhshan & Chowdhury, 2024). Finally, integration involves immigrants maintaining their heritage culture while also adopting elements of the host culture (Delgado & Sun, 2021; Schaeffer & Kas, 2024), fostering a multicultural approach supported by the host society's inclusivity (Berry, 1997; Delgado & Sun, 2021). However, while integration can provide opportunities for immigrants and refugees, it can also increase exposure to discrimination and prejudice, leading to a paradoxical situation where greater integration is associated with higher perceived discrimination (Schaeffer & Kas, 2024; Steinmann, 2019). This paradox highlights the complex interplay between immigrant and refugee integration and societal attitudes, where greater visibility and participation in the host society can sometimes provoke negative reactions from the native population. Consequently, public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees play a crucial role in shaping their experiences, influencing both integration outcomes and broader policy responses. The following section will explore several psychological and sociopolitical frameworks that explain how immigrants and refugees are perceived within host societies.

### **1.1.2 Theoretical Frameworks on Attitudes Toward Immigration**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel and Turner (1979) examines how group membership shapes individuals' self-concept and influences their perceptions of other group members, non-members, and rival groups. This is crucial in understanding public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. It indicates that individuals categorise themselves and

others into social groups (e.g., nationality), forming an ingroup favouritism (own group) and an outgroup bias (another group; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). SIT indicates that when individuals perceive immigration as a threat to their national or cultural identity, they may develop negative attitudes toward migrants to reinforce their ingroup status (Brown, 2010; Verkuyten, 2013). This is particularly true when migration is framed as a threat to national identity, cultural norms, or socioeconomic stability (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Creighton et al., 2022; Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018). Previous research indicates that perceived threats to cultural homogeneity are a stronger predictor of anti-immigrant sentiment than economic concerns (Schneider, 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004). However, recent research indicates that economic and cultural factors are interconnected, suggesting they influence one another rather than existing independently when explaining attitudes towards immigration (Kleider, 2022). This perception of immigrants and refugees as an outgroup can heighten intergroup tensions (Vallejo-Martín et al., 2020; Riaz et al., 2023). In addition, media portrayals and political discourse can amplify these group distinctions, reinforcing negative stereotypes and shaping public perception (Esses et al., 2013; Indelicato et al., 2023; Xu, 2020). However, intergroup contact under favourable conditions, as highlighted in Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, can diminish bias and encourage more inclusive attitudes. For instance, policies that promote intergroup cooperation and shared social identity can alleviate the exclusionary effects of ingroup favouritism (Dovidio et al., 2009; Mitterbacher et al., 2024).

Moreover, Stephan and Stephan's (2000) Intergroup Threat Theory (ITT) expands on SIT by distinguishing between two types of perceived threats: realistic threats and symbolic threats. Realistic threats involve concerns that migrants might compete for jobs, burden public services, or contribute to crime rates (Esses, 2021; Indelicato et al., 2023; Laurence et al., 2024; Stephan et al., 2015). In contrast, symbolic threats arise when migrants are

perceived as challenging national values, traditions, or religious beliefs (Creighton et al., 2022; Esses, 2021; D’Haenens et al., 2019; Stephan et al., 2015). ITT emphasises that the perception of a threat, rather than the actual existence of a threat, drives negative attitudes toward migrant groups (Stephan et al., 2015). For instance, even when there is little empirical evidence that immigrants are taking jobs or undermining cultural identity, beliefs and perceptions alone can shape public attitudes (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Stephan et al., 2015). This highlights the role of misinformation, stereotypes, and prejudice in shaping intergroup relations (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). ITT identifies several factors that influence an individual’s likelihood of perceiving threats, including pre-existing intergroup tensions, cultural norms favouring homogeneity, and individual differences in prejudice (Hellwig & Sinno, 2016; Stephan et al., 2015). These perceived threats, whether realistic or symbolic, can lead to prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflict, sometimes escalating into hostility or violence (Stephan et al., 2015; Stephan & Stephan, 2017). Additionally, ITT provides insight into why attitudes toward migrants often worsen during economic downturns or political crises (Stephan et al., 2015; Stephan & Stephan, 2017). For instance, public anxiety surged during the 2015 European migration crisis, and political discourse increasingly emphasised cultural incompatibility and security concerns (De Coninck, 2019). Similarly, research suggests that economic recessions heighten realistic threats as competition for jobs and resources intensifies, fuelling anti-immigrant sentiment (Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Social Dominance Theory (SDT) by Sidanius and Pratto (1999) argues that societies maintain hierarchical group structures in which dominant groups (e.g., native citizens) strive to preserve their privileged status by opposing policies that promote equality for subordinate groups (e.g., immigrants). Individuals with a high Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994) favour hierarchy and social inequality and tend to have

negative attitudes toward immigrants, perceiving them as a threat to societal order (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Esses, 2021; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). SDT enables explaining the connection between far-right political ideologies and anti-immigrant rhetoric, as such views are often associated with higher levels of SDO (Gordon, 2021; Pratto et al., 1994). Research indicates that political affiliation affects SDO levels, revealing that right-leaning individuals usually exhibit stronger preferences for hierarchy, correlating with more restrictive attitudes toward immigrants (Gordon, 2021; Ho et al., 2012). Given the strong link between political ideology and attitudes toward immigration, it is unsurprising that immigration remains a highly controversial and politically charged issue in many nations. The following section will examine the broader policy landscape, highlighting how immigration has become a central focus in political discourse and policymaking.

### **1.1.3 Policy Landscape**

One of the most sensitive political topics across North America and Western Europe is immigration (Helbling et al., 2023). Numerous studies confirm that immigration is a relevant subject to most political parties' agendas (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011; Bohman, 2011; Dekeyser & Freedman, 2021; Sønderskov & Thomsen, 2015; Van Spanje, 2011). Alonso and Da Fonseca (2011) claim that from the early 1990s to the present, the political agenda surrounding immigration has shifted, and as long as the left and right avoid polarising the immigration situation, far-right anti-immigrant parties are unlikely to gain traction. However, the far-right parties have succeeded in tapping into the resentment of residents worried about the threat to their culture and economy (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011; Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021). Restrictive immigration policies often reflect dominant social hierarchies and group-based power structures, and concerns over economic and cultural integration frequently shape policy debates and public discourse (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). This trend highlights how political actors exploit anxieties to reshape

immigration narratives, often at the expense of inclusivity. The dynamics of migration governance are further complicated by the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organisations, xenophobic and pro-refugee mobilisations, and the media (Ambrosini, 2021). The influence of right-wing parties, which have gained substantial power in nations like Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom over the past three decades (Mudde, 2012), reinforces the growing traction of anti-immigrant sentiments in European politics (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011; Dekeyser & Freedman, 2021; Mudde, 2012). This trend is linked to radical right-wing ideologies rooted in racism, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism, cautioning that such beliefs, when combined with antidemocratic practices and political violence, risk fostering right-wing extremism (Bozorgmehr et al., 2023; Koehler, 2016). The political divide between political groups further reinforces contrasting approaches to immigration. Indelicato et al. (2023) highlight that right-wing party voters have an anti-immigrant political agenda, while left-wing and green party voters tend to adopt more inclusive stances, which demonstrates how immigration has become a symbolic battleground for broader political debates. In addition, many critique the heavily politicised, disorganised and often contradictory refugee governance in Western nations, which frequently violates international agreements and undermines human rights (Brumat et al., 2021; Faist, 2017; Krause, 2021; Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). These findings highlight the critical need for balanced and rights-based immigration policies. The following section delves deeper into the interplay between systemic racism, political opportunism, and economic concerns regarding immigration and refugee policies.

### ***1.1.3.1 Immigration and Refugee Policies***

Policies regarding immigration, immigrants and refugees have historically been racialised where white supremacist ideologies have fuelled cultural narratives and framed

immigrants and refugees as threats rather than contributors, perpetuating exclusionary practices in immigration policy (Joseph & Golash-Boza, 2021; Lebrón et al., 2023; LeBrón & Viruell-Fuentes, 2019). Anti-immigration constituencies advocate for lower migration numbers since they perceive immigrants and refugees as an ‘invasion’ by undesired individuals, reinforcing polarised views (Mudde, 2019). Anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies not only marginalise immigrants and refugees but also increase negative behaviours among host populations by fostering social isolation, hostility, xenophobia, discrimination, and violence against migrants (Bozorgmehr et al., 2023; Edge & Newbold, 2012; Louis et al., 2006; Marfouk, 2018; Strang & Quinn, 2019). For instance, far-right parties often use anti-immigration narratives to advance their political agendas (Benček & Strasheim, 2016). In Spain, the Vox party portrays immigrants as threats to national, cultural, and economic security (Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2020). Similarly, Austria’s Austrian People’s Party emphasises anti-Muslim rhetoric, targeting specific groups to mobilise anti-immigrant sentiment (Abdou & Ruedin, 2021). In Germany, support for radical right-wing movements is geographically and socioeconomically clustered, reflecting more profound inequalities that fuel anti-immigration attitudes (Bozorgmehr et al., 2023).

In the Irish context, immigration has not yet become a significant political issue in elections, as it has in the rest of Europe (Müller & Regan, 2021). According to the 2020 general election Exit poll, less than 1% of voters indicated that immigration was the primary factor influencing their voting (Elkink & Farrell, 2020). However, research notes that attitudes towards immigrants became less positive in the last six months of 2023 (Laurence et al., 2024). In addition, several news articles have indicated Ireland’s notable shift in its political landscape concerning immigration. Recent developments indicate a growing prominence of immigration as a political issue. In the lead-up to the 2024 general election, immigration emerged as a significant concern among voters, surpassed only by housing and

cost of living issues (Humphries, 2024). Despite the absence of far-right representatives in the Irish parliament, far-right rhetoric has begun influencing local discourse, which is evident in the formation of alliances among political parties with far-right views on immigration, such as Ireland First, the National Party, and the Irish People, aiming to maximise their electoral chances (McQuinn, 2024). These developments highlight the increasing traction of anti-immigrant sentiments within certain segments of Irish politics. This rise of far-right movements is largely rooted in the perception of immigrants as cultural and economic threats, a narrative that exploits vulnerable citizens' fears and grievances (Indelicato et al., 2023). However, advocates of immigration argue that host countries gain economic and cultural benefits, including workforce expansion, population growth, and diversity (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Helbling et al., 2023; Oliinyk et al., 2021; West, 2011).

#### **1.1.4 Socioeconomic Factors**

Migration-related labels such as “refugees”, “economic migrants”, and “asylum seekers” carry significant implications, shaping how societies and governments perceive and respond to migrant groups, which often frames refugees and immigrants within polarised narratives (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018; Mudde, 2019; Sigona, 2017). These framings are not merely descriptive but are shaped by underlying psychological and sociopolitical processes, as explained by the theoretical frameworks above (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, while an anti-immigrant socio-political climate portrays migrants as an economic drain (Torres et al., 2018), empirical evidence highlights their economic contributions (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Oliinyk et al., 2021). In the U.S., immigrant labour supports economic growth, fills critical workforce gaps, and supports entrepreneurship, creating jobs for both natives and immigrants (Segal, 2019; West, 2011; Yoon et al., 2023). For instance, the labour market often prefers economic immigrants since they integrate more successfully because their migration decisions are driven by human

capital considerations, while refugees and family-reunification migrants face significant barriers and take decades to achieve economic parity with economic migrants (Fasani et al., 2018; Kanas & Steinmetz, 2020). However, in European nations, the labour market disadvantages immigrants, especially non-Western nationals, who face lower employment rates and are overrepresented in low-skill, low-wage sectors (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Kanas & Steinmetz, 2020; Oliinyk et al., 2021). These labour market disadvantages can threaten social cohesion and lead to lower economic and psychological well-being for immigrants and refugees (Esses, 2021; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). These patterns suggest that the framing and reception of different migrant groups are pivotal in determining their economic outcomes.

Additionally, the specific challenges faced by refugees further highlight the complex dynamics of labour market integration (Bevelander, 2020; De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010). Although global refugee migration has surpassed 50 million, only a small percentage seek asylum or resettle in developed countries (Bevelander, 2020). Refugees often arrive with limited resources and face additional hurdles, such as poor health and restrictive dispersal policies, which hinder their integration into labour markets (Bevelander, 2020; Bozorgmehr et al., 2023; Brell et al., 2020). While studies, such as Stempel and Alemi's (2020), show that some refugee groups, like first-wave Afghan refugees, experience economic gains over time, their employment rates generally remain lower than those of economic migrants and natives (Brell et al., 2020). In turn, the media and political rhetoric heighten these issues, polarising public opinion and framing refugees' slower economic integration as a societal burden (Bevelander, 2020; Krzyżanowski et al., 2018).

### **1.1.5 Media Influence**

The media plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions of immigrants and refugees, serving as a primary source of information and influencing widely shared,

seemingly intuitive understandings of complex issues by simplifying or framing them in specific ways (D'Haenens et al., 2019; Soderlund, 2007; Xu, 2020). This influence extends to both policy and public attitudes, as mainstream media frequently adopts strong, polarising stances on immigration and refugee migration (De Coninck, 2019; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). Research reveals that media narratives can either shape or reflect public opinion, highlighting a dynamic feedback loop between the public, politicians, and the media itself (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; Shanahan et al., 2008; Soroka & Wlezien, 2009). However, the extent of this reciprocal relationship remains debated (Birkland, 2006; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017), with some studies suggesting the media primarily amplifies political elite discourses, directly influencing attitudes toward immigrants (De Coninck, 2019; Schmidt-Catran & Czymara, 2022). The media significantly influences how a crisis is framed by selectively emphasising certain aspects while downplaying others and constructing narratives that can sway public sentiment (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; Lorenzetti, 2020; Xu, 2020). Media coverage of immigrants or refugees frequently reinforces group-based distinctions and amplifies perceived threats (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, the portrayal of Syrian refugees in the U.S. media heavily focused on broadcasting terrorist attacks rather than humanitarian struggles, leading to widespread fear and hostility. This framing spurred political actions, such as conservative governors attempting to block refugee resettlement, and fuelled Islamophobic attitudes, further marginalising Muslim Americans and refugees (Hunt, 2017). Similarly, social media platforms provide additional spaces where contrasting narratives emerge about immigrants and refugees (Berry et al., 2016; Ekman, 2019; Lorenzetti, 2020; Merry, 2022). Bozdog and Smets (2017) found that tweets about refugees reflected contrasting national attitudes; Flemish users emphasised security threats and cultural concerns, while Turkish users expressed solidarity, often grounded in shared religious identity.

### ***1.1.5.1 Media Portrayal and Framing***

The relationship between media consumption and public attitudes toward immigration highlights the significant role of media in shaping policy preferences and perceptions (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; Soderlund, 2007; Xu, 2020). For instance, Fox News consumers in the U.S. are more likely to support stricter immigration and refugee regulations compared to viewers of MSNBC or CNN (Hoewe et al., 2020). While individuals with restrictive views may be drawn to Fox News, Hoewe et al. (2020) demonstrate that the network's ideological framing also reinforces these policy attitudes, illustrating a reciprocal relationship between media use and political preferences. This dynamic extends beyond the U.S., as Strömbäck et al. (2017) found that in Swedish newspapers, negative portrayals of refugees were more frequent than positive ones, shaping public perceptions in ways that reinforce exclusionary attitudes. Similarly, O'Regan and Riordan (2018) compared refugee, asylum seeker, and immigrant (RASIM) coverage in the UK and Ireland, finding that the UK press emphasised a divisive "them versus us" narrative, while Irish media adopted a more neutral or positive framing, demonstrating how sociopolitical and cultural contexts influence media narratives. Media framing often perpetuates stereotypes and biases, particularly through sensationalism (Ekman & Krzyżanowski, 2021; Haw, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2016). Commercial news outlets, compared to public news, tend to employ more tabloid-style elements, correlating with greater negativity toward immigrants among their audiences (Jacobs et al., 2016). This framing frequently positions immigrants and refugees as societal threats or links them to criminality, fostering public distrust and hostility (Bozdag & Smets, 2017; Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017; Jacobs et al., 2016). The power of media framing extends to policymaking, with consistent coverage of specific issues influencing both public opinion and legislative priorities, particularly during crises such as the Ukrainian-Russian conflict (Eberl et al., 2018; Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023). The differential treatment of refugee groups also reflects the

impact of media narratives (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017; Sambaraju & Shrikant, 2023; Sipahioğlu, 2023). For instance, reports on Syrian refugees framed them as economic and cultural threats in Europe, contributing to public division and the dissemination of misinformation (McCloskey, 2022; Mickelsson, 2024; Sales, 2023). Meanwhile, the contrasting portrayal of Ukrainian refugees, who were often depicted more favourably due to perceived racial and cultural similarities, highlights how media coverage can reinforce discriminatory attitudes based on race and ethnicity (McCloskey, 2022; Mickelsson, 2024; Sipahioğlu, 2023). These findings highlight the media's significant role in shaping public perceptions of immigrants and refugees. Media narratives can either perpetuate xenophobia and fear or promote empathy and inclusion.

#### **1.1.6 Forms of Discrimination**

Discrimination manifests in various forms, both as individual actions and systemic inequalities, creating barriers that perpetuate disadvantage and hinder the inclusion of immigrants and refugees, often driven by a desire to maintain existing group hierarchies (Acolin et al., 2016; Esses, 2021; Lippens et al., 2022; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For example, bias in institutional systems is evident in student evaluations of teaching (SET), where non-White American and foreign professors consistently receive lower scores compared to their White American counterparts (Wang & Gonzalez, 2020). This systemic bias is mirrored in consumer preferences, where individuals favour inferior domestic products over superior foreign ones, further demonstrating how prejudice operates across multiple societal domains (Semaan et al., 2019). Such pervasive discrimination fosters hostile environments, limiting immigrants' and refugees' social integration and economic opportunities in host countries (Esses, 2021). For instance, research in Canada shows that higher perceived discrimination was found to be a predictor of lower dual identity integration and increased stress in immigrants, highlighting how prejudice undermines psychological

well-being and integration (Yampolsky & Amiot, 2016). This aligns with Minority Stress Theory, which proposes that members of marginalised groups experience chronic stress due to prejudice, stigma, and discrimination, leading to adverse mental and physical health outcomes (Frost & Meyer, 2023; Meyer, 2003).

Esses (2021) and Lippens et al. (2022) categorise discrimination into taste-based and statistical forms. Taste-based discrimination stems from personal prejudice or general dislike of certain groups, independent of performance or objective factors. Statistical discrimination, on the other hand, relies on stereotypes or group characteristics such as language proficiency or income levels, that affect decisions and reinforce inequities. For example, landlords might use lower average immigrant incomes as a rationale to deny housing, or employers might make assumptions about job performance based on language ability (Esses, 2021). These patterns demonstrate how both individual biases and structural systems contribute to immigrants' marginalisation. In addition, racial and ethnic dimensions of discrimination further exacerbate disparities (Esses, 2021). Refugees and immigrants of the same ethnicity as the host population are more readily accepted than those from differing ethnic backgrounds (De Coninck, 2019). Similarly, expatriates, often portrayed as skilled and privileged White immigrants, are perceived positively, in contrast to non-White immigrants, who are stereotyped as low-skilled and from developing countries (De Carvalho, 2023). This dichotomy highlights a broader trend of racism and xenophobia, which has been increasing across Europe (Wieviorka, 2018). This highlights how discrimination, whether through institutional biases, societal perceptions, or systemic inequalities, undermines the integration, fairness, and opportunities of immigrants and refugees. The different forms of discrimination that immigrants and refugees face will be discussed in the following sections.

### ***1.1.6.1 Ethnocentrism and Racial Prejudice***

Throughout history, humanity has experienced horrors caused by racial and ethnicity-based discrimination (Černigoj, 2022). Ethnocentrism, so-called ethnicity in-group favouritism, has been characterised as a “strong sense of ethnic group self-centredness and self-importance” (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012, p. 4) while marginalising out-groups (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, expatriates holding ethnocentric beliefs are more likely to exhibit xenophobic behaviour, struggle with intercultural adjustment, and allow strong patriotic feelings to negatively influence their work behaviours (Joachim & Weerasekera, 2022). These tendencies reflect how ethnocentrism perpetuates exclusionary practices and undermines cultural integration in globalised contexts (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Joachim & Weerasekera, 2022). The consequences of racial and ethnic discrimination extend beyond immediate social exclusion, impacting mental and physical health outcomes (Esses, 2021; Lippens et al., 2022). Ethnic minorities facing perceived discrimination are at an increased risk of psychotic experiences and symptoms (Bardol et al., 2020; Esses, 2021), and individuals from ethnic minority groups report poorer mental and physical health outcomes (Hackett et al., 2020). While the effect on mental health is quite clear, effects on physical health can be severe and thus, should not be neglected. For instance, Agbonlahor et al. (2023) reveal a connection between racial discrimination and cardiometabolic diseases, demonstrating how prolonged exposure to bias and systemic inequities can lead to cumulative physiological harm. This underscores the urgent need for structural reforms and culturally competent health interventions to address the physical and emotional toll of racial prejudice. In a related vein, Koopmans et al. (2019) highlight how discrimination extends beyond health impacts to employment, with employers in Germany more likely to favour applicants whose cultural values align with the dominant German culture. This suggests that employment discrimination is often rooted in perceived cultural

differences rather than objective qualifications such as education levels, further emphasising the prevalent consequences of bias across multiple domains of life. In addition, the global spread of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies how sociopolitical crises amplify racial prejudice (Huang et al., 2023; Perng & Dhaliwal, 2021). Tan et al. (2021) found significant variations in predictors of anti-Asian sentiment; in the U.S., political affiliation was the most significant factor, whereas, in Australia, a broader range of socioeconomic variables, such as age, gender, employment status, and income, was implicated. The rise in abuse cases and hate crimes highlights the tangible and immediate harms of such prejudice, reinforcing systemic injustices and interpersonal hostility (Huang et al., 2023; Perng & Dhaliwal, 2021; Tan et al., 2021). Ethnocentrism and racial prejudice in sociopolitical crises, employment, and healthcare settings further illustrate how cultural biases perpetuate systemic injustices.

#### ***1.1.6.2 Religious Intolerance***

Religion remains a major contributor to prejudice, intolerance, and marginalisation globally, shaping societal dynamics in deeply impactful ways (Dauda, 2020; Esses, 2021; Wu & Schimmele, 2021). Religious discrimination is particularly pronounced against Muslims, both in Europe (Adida et al., 2010) and the United States (Carol et al., 2021; Gaddis & Ghoshal, 2015), often driven by perceptions of cultural or religious threat, which is particularly evident in negative attitudes toward Muslim immigrants, where symbolic threats dominate public discourse (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). This form of intolerance often manifests in everyday social interactions, as native residents may avoid social contact with Muslim immigrants by refusing to date, hire, rent apartments to, or conduct business with them (Carol et al., 2021; De Coninck, 2020; Di Stasio et al., 2019; Martiniello & Verhaeghe, 2023). Religion also influences attitudes toward immigration more broadly, contributing to anti-immigrant sentiment (De Coninck, 2020; Esses, 2021). Sherkat and Lehman (2018)

demonstrate that sectarian religious beliefs, such as those held by biblical literalists, Sectarian Protestants, and white Catholics, correlate with less welcoming attitudes toward immigrants and Muslims. Conversely, individuals with secular beliefs and non-Christian religious affiliations show more positive attitudes toward immigrants. For example, in Canada, Wilkins-Laflamme (2018) found that older, conservative, lower-educated populations and Quebec residents are more likely to hold negative views towards Muslim immigrants and refugees. Similarly, Creighton et al. (2022) observed that while Irish respondents may suppress hostility based on race or ethnicity, they openly express negative attitudes when religion, specifically Islam, is emphasised. Research also highlights that prejudice against Muslims is often more pronounced than against migrants in general (Esses, 2021; Gusciute et al., 2020b). Doebler (2014), Gusciute (2020), and Strabac and Listhaug (2008) all found that while hostility toward migrants is common, there is a distinct and greater intolerance toward Muslim migrants, who are often perceived through a lens of religious and cultural difference. Similarly, Dauda (2020) identifies a range of Islamophobic acts, including attacks, property destruction, violations of fundamental rights, and increased fear and mistrust between Muslims and non-Muslims. Such acts not only marginalise Muslim communities but also undermine social cohesion, posing significant threats to global peace and harmonious coexistence. This highlights how religious bias, particularly against Muslim immigrants, operates at both individual and societal levels, leading to increased discrimination and limiting their full integration into host societies.

### ***1.1.6.3 Gender Discrimination***

Gender discrimination refers to the unjust treatment of individuals based on their gender, which can take place in a variety of settings, including jobs, housing, and academia (Bilan et al., 2020; Casad et al., 2020; Gusciute et al., 2020a; Lucifora & Vigani, 2021). For immigrants, gender discrimination is deeply intertwined with perceptions of outgroup threats

and intergroup conflict, often amplifying the biases they face (Gereke et al., 2020; Suárez, 2021; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Gambetta and Hertog (2017) highlight that young immigrant men are frequently portrayed as more prone to violent crimes, leading to heightened fear and stereotyping. This perception persists even when evidence shows that native populations often commit crimes at higher rates than immigrants (Feltes et al., 2018). Such narratives are fuelled by security concerns among host populations, suggesting that gender intersects with immigration status to frame young immigrant men as symbolic threats (Gereke et al., 2020; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Further aggravating this issue, cultural biases magnify the perception of immigrant men, particularly those from Muslim-majority countries, as a cultural threat in Western societies (Ward, 2019). These biases not only shape public opinion but also inform policy decisions, reinforcing systemic barriers for these groups (Esses, 2021). While men are frequently framed through the lens of fear and cultural incompatibility (Gambetta & Hertog, 2017), immigrant women encounter distinct challenges, experiencing a “double burden” of discrimination rooted in both gender and immigrant status (Delara, 2016). This dual marginalisation restricts their access to opportunities and increases vulnerabilities, particularly in employment (Delara, 2016; Duran, 2018; Weichselbaumer, 2019). The discrimination immigrant women face often manifests through intersectional prejudices that combine gender, ethnicity, and religion due to encountering various challenges in their host country, such as limited job opportunities, lower wages, cultural differences, and language barriers (Delara, 2016; Weichselbaumer, 2019). For instance, women wearing headscarves, such as the hijab, face pronounced stigmatisation in many host countries (Weichselbaumer, 2019). Delara (2016) identifies this as a form of compounded discrimination tied to visible religious and cultural identity markers. Similarly, refugee women face dual discrimination based on gender and ethnicity in various facets of their integration processes, particularly in job markets in their host countries due to the

various identities they embody (De Coninck, 2020; Duran, 2018). These patterns reflect an intersectional framework (Losleben & Musubika, 2023), which indicates how overlapping social identities such as gender, ethnicity, and religion intersect to shape immigrants' and refugees' experiences of discrimination. This highlights how gender discrimination against immigrants and refugees is multifaceted, with men often stereotyped as threats and women marginalised through intersectional discrimination.

#### ***1.1.6.4 Linguistic Prejudice***

Language is a critical dimension in discussions of immigration, often acting as a proxy for broader cultural integration and national identity (Esses, 2021; Hopkins, 2014). Previous research identifies that the lack of linguistic integration has been pointed out as a significant motive of concern that immigration will damage national culture in Western countries (Hopkins, 2014; Newman et al., 2012; Schildkraut, 2010). These concerns often stem from the perception that linguistic assimilation is an individual choice, with a failure to integrate linguistically being viewed as deliberate noncompliance or resistance by migrant populations (Choi et al., 2020). For instance, in the United States, even minor instances of using Spanish in public can provoke hostility among native-born citizens, demonstrating how language becomes a flashpoint for intergroup tension (Hopkins, 2014; Newman et al., 2012). However, these attitudes reveal more about societal biases than the actual impact of linguistic diversity (Esses, 2021). Choi et al. (2020) highlight that prejudice against immigrants persists even when linguistic barriers are overcome. For example, Muslim immigrants may continue to face discrimination despite language assimilation, as deeper cultural stereotypes and systemic biases outweigh linguistic integration efforts (Choi et al., 2020).

De Costa (2020) suggests that multilingualism is frequently viewed with suspicion instead of being celebrated as an asset. The ability to translanguage, a skill indicative of cultural adaptability, can be framed as a burden by host populations, further marginalising

multilingual immigrants (Raza & Chua, 2022). Countries implementing official multicultural policies and encouraging ethnolinguistic diversity do not experience heightened prejudice among native populations (Choi et al., 2020). This indicates that institutional approaches to linguistic integration and broader multicultural acceptance can mitigate tensions (Servidio et al., 2021). However, in societies where language and culture are tightly linked to notions of national identity, persistent differences are frequently perceived as threatening (Choi et al., 2020; Sniderman et al., 2004). Research by Card et al. (2005), Choi et al. (2019, 2020), and Sniderman et al. (2004) demonstrates that such perceptions are at the root of negative attitudes toward migrants. This highlights that language, while a significant factor in public perception of migrants, is not the sole determinant of integration; broader societal attitudes towards diversity and multiculturalism play a crucial role in shaping these perceptions. The following section will integrate the key findings discussed thus far, providing a comprehensive overview of public attitudes towards immigrants and refugees.

### **1.1.7 Public Perception**

Perceptions of the social environment play a critical role in shaping individual attitudes and behaviours, influencing not only interpersonal interactions but also broader societal views (Chen et al., 2016; Rivera & Piatkowska, 2024). Grigoryev et al. (2019) highlight that individuals with a generally positive outlook on their social environment are more likely to exhibit trust and openness, whereas those with negative perceptions tend to be more cautious and sceptical. This difference in worldview helps explain why people respond differently to similar situations, emphasising the influence of individual differences in shaping behaviour (Dingemans & Wolf, 2013; Modersitzki et al., 2020). These general expectations about the social environment act as a lens through which individuals interpret specific events and guide their reactions (Chen et al., 2016). In the context of immigration, these social worldviews become particularly relevant (Rivera & Piatkowska, 2024). Sibley et

al. (2013) argue that attitudes toward immigration are not solely determined by external factors such as economic hardship or immigrant density. Instead, these factors influence individuals' broader social worldviews, which, in turn, shape their reactions to immigration (Heath et al., 2020). For example, individuals with a negative perception of the social world are less likely to support multiculturalism or universalism, leading to heightened resistance to immigration (Grigoryev et al., 2019; Rivera & Piatkowska, 2024).

The perception of immigration as a threat further compounds these dynamics (Grigoryev et al., 2019; Karreth et al., 2015; Sibley et al., 2013; Van Assche et al., 2016; Stephen & Stephen, 2000). Immigrants are frequently viewed through a competitive lens, perceived as economic rivals or contributors to crime, perpetuating negative stereotypes (Indelicato et al., 2023; Jacobs et al., 2016; Ward, 2019). However, these perceptions are often at odds with empirical evidence. For example, Fahey et al. (2019) report that many non-Irish nationalities outperform natives in education and employment, challenging the narrative of immigrants as burdens. Yet, public attitudes remain influenced by these rooted stereotypes, as seen in Western Europe and Canada, where refugees are often linked to the abuse of social programs and viewed as security threats (Jacobs et al., 2017; Lawlor & Tolley, 2017). Finally, these negative attitudes are amplified during periods of heightened migration, such as the 2015 European migration crisis. As De Coninck (2019) notes, the influx of refugees from conflict zones in Africa and the Middle East placed significant strain on European nations, intensifying public scepticism and challenging governments to balance humanitarian obligations with public opinion. This highlights how individuals' underlying social and political orientations shape public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees, leading to prejudice and resistance, especially during periods of heightened migration. The next section will delve deeper into the public perception of immigrants and refugees.

### ***1.1.7.1 Attitudes Towards Immigrants and Refugees***

Attitudes towards immigrants and refugees are a complex interplay of factors shaped by cultural, economic, political, and social influences and can vary widely across different societies, communities, and even individuals (De Coninck, 2019; Heath et al., 2020; Sibley et al., 2013; Ward & Masgoret, 2006). A key finding in this area is that attitudes are less tied to personal economic circumstances and more to broader socioeconomic concerns at the national level, particularly regarding perceived cultural or economic consequences of immigration (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). This suggests that immigration debates often reflect collective anxieties rather than individual experiences (De Coninck, 2019).

Furthermore, Creighton et al. (2022) emphasise that attitudes are shaped by social context and the desire to maintain a positive self-image. This reflects the concept of *modern prejudice*, where discriminatory attitudes are expressed in more subtle or socially acceptable forms (e.g., concerns about resource strain or cultural incompatibility) rather than overt hostility (Akrami et al., 2000). As emphasised within the framework of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), such patterns highlight how individuals strive to maintain a positive in-group identity while adhering to evolving social norms that discourage explicit prejudice. Historical and regional variations further illustrate the fluidity of attitudes (Creighton et al., 2022; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). For instance, Fussell (2014) highlights a significant shift in American perspectives, with more people now supporting increased immigration compared to the mid-20th century, although this does not necessarily amount to widespread enthusiasm for immigration. Similarly, attitudes across Europe vary: Central and Northern Europe are generally more open to migration, while Eastern Europe is less receptive, although these patterns can shift depending on political dynamics, such as the rise of far-right parties (Dekeyser & Freedman, 2021; Indelicato et al., 2023).

Media framing also plays a critical role in shaping public opinion (De Cock et al., 2018; De Coninck, 2019; Sales, 2023). Negative portrayals of immigrants, particularly Muslim migrants, are often tied to cultural tensions over values like gender, equality, and safety (D'Haenens et al., 2019; Hellwig & Sinno, 2016) and reinforced by media narratives that exacerbate fears (De Cock et al., 2018). This contributes to a broader landscape where anti-refugee violence, a Europe-wide issue, with attacks on asylum seekers and their accommodations in countries like Germany, Finland, Sweden, Greece, and the Netherlands, is underreported due to inconsistent data collection, as noted by Bozorgmehr et al. (2023) and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), (2016). Economic and demographic factors add another layer to these attitudes (De Coninck, 2019; Esses, 2021; Heath et al., 2020). McGinnity et al. (2018) show that economic cycles significantly affect perceptions, with immigration being viewed more favourably during booms and more negatively during recessions. This effect was particularly more distinct in Ireland compared to other Western European countries.

Furthermore, preference for immigrants reflects a persistent pattern of exclusion based on cultural proximity (Creighton et al., 2022; McGinnity et al., 2018). For instance, Creighton et al. (2022) discovered that Irish respondents are more inclined to hide negative emotions when race, ethnicity or EU background is highlighted, but Irish hostility is unmasked when religion (Islam) becomes apparent, while McGinnity et al. (2018) also noted a preference for immigrants from the same ethnic group, with participants being less supportive of Muslim immigrants and highly resistant to Roma immigration. While immigrants may not always be seen as a direct threat, they are often perceived as competitors for jobs, which reinforces anti-immigration sentiment among individuals facing financial difficulties or lacking higher education (Laurence et al., 2024; Gusciute, 2020). Refugees on the other hand encounter different experiences (De Coninck, 2019; McCloskey, 2022;

Mickelsson, 2024; Sipahioğlu, 2023). Refugees are increasingly seen as deserving of help; however, support is often conditional and influenced by perceived costs and nationalistic identities, which is evidenced by differences in attitudes toward Syrian versus Ukrainian refugees in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Laurence et al., 2024; Lippard & McNamee, 2021). These patterns of exclusion and shifting attitudes toward different migrant groups highlight the complex interplay between economic, cultural, and political factors in shaping public opinion.

Moreover, psychological traits and mental health variables are increasingly recognised as important determinants of public attitudes toward migrants and refugees. For example, previous research shows that empathic concern and perspective-taking are associated with lower levels of prejudice, and reduced social distance, while also promoting prosocial behaviour and social acceptance (Huth-Stöckle & Heizmann, 2025; Miklikowska, 2017; Taylor & Glen, 2019). Similarly, low self-esteem has been linked to greater opposition to immigration and social equality, while higher or positively developing self-esteem predicts more inclusive attitudes, highlighting its role in shaping intergroup relations (Fluit et al., 2022). Research has also found that education can reduce anti-immigrant sentiment by lowering negative attitudes and strengthening students' ability to resist biased or emotionally charged arguments through critical thinking (Hjerm et al., 2018; Piedade et al., 2023). Regarding mental health variables, research indicates that anxiety often arising from uncertainty about the social, economic, and communal impacts of immigration is associated with increased negative attitudes toward migrants, driven by perceived threat, risk aversion, and a heightened focus on potential negative outcomes (Bryner et al., 2014; Gadarian & Albertson, 2013; Ivlevs, 2024; Laurence et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings illustrate that deeply rooted psychological mechanisms and social structures influence attitudes towards immigrants and refugees.

Additionally, theoretical frameworks highlight how group dynamics, perceived threats, and social hierarchies shape attitudes toward immigrants and refugees and explain why individuals react differently to migration and diversity (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

### **1.1.8 Current Study**

The public's attitudes toward immigrants and refugees are shaped by a complex interplay of sociodemographic, political, psychological, social, economic, and cultural factors. While previous research has extensively studied these aspects globally, there remains a lack of localised understanding within specific contexts, such as Ireland, which has undergone significant demographic shifts in recent years. The Republic of Ireland presents a unique case due to its history of emigration, relatively recent experience as a destination for immigration, and evolving sociopolitical dynamics. Existing studies have not yet fully explored how these specific sociocultural and political characteristics influence public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. Moreover, while quantitative approaches have identified broad patterns and predictive factors, there is a need for more qualitative research to delve deeper into the lived experiences and nuanced perceptions of communities. Addressing these gaps is critical to better understanding the drivers of prejudice or acceptance, which can inform policies and interventions aimed at fostering inclusivity and social cohesion. The current study seeks to bridge this gap by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods, focusing on the Irish context to explore generalisable patterns and context-specific insights. The study aims to investigate the public's attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in Ireland. To achieve this, the study focuses on the following objectives: (1) Analysing the association between sociodemographic, political, psychological, and mental health variables in shaping attitudes toward migrants in Ireland. (2) Conducting

semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of Dublin residents' attitudes and opinions regarding immigrants and refugees within their community.

### **1.1.9 Research Questions**

#### ***1.1.9.1 Quantitative Research Questions***

1. To what extent are public attitudes toward migrants associated with demographic variables (e.g., age, nationality, education level, employment status, and income level)?
2. Are political variables (e.g., political affiliation, social dominance, trust in state, and trust in people) associated with attitudes toward migrants, accounting for the effects of demographic factors?
3. What is the role of psychological variables (e.g., empathy, self-esteem, resilience, analytic reasoning, intolerance of uncertainty, and conspiracy mentality) in association with attitudes toward migrants, accounting for the effects of demographic and political factors?
4. Are mental health variables (e.g., paranoia, levels of anxiety and depression) associated with attitudes toward migrants, accounting for the effects of demographic, political, and psychological factors?

#### ***1.1.9.2 Qualitative Research Questions***

1. What are the attitudes and opinions of residents in Dublin, regarding immigrants and refugees in their community?

## **Chapter 2. Understanding Irish Attitudes Toward Migrants: The Interplay of Demographic, Political, Psychological, and Mental Health Factors**

This chapter presents the quantitative findings from a secondary analysis of Wave 1 data from the C19PRC study, examining associations between demographic, sociopolitical, psychological, and mental health variables on public attitudes toward migrants. The study employed a correlational design, using hierarchical multiple regression analysis to assess how each set of predictor variables contributed to explaining attitudes toward migrants while accounting for prior blocks of variables. Predictor variables such as demographic factors, including age, gender, nationality, education, employment, and income, were entered first, followed by sociopolitical variables such as political ideology, social dominance orientation, and trust in state and people. Psychological variables, empathy, self-esteem, resilience, analytic reasoning, intolerance of uncertainty, and conspiracy mentality, were entered in the third block. Mental health indicators, including paranoia and a combined depression-anxiety measure, were entered last to see if they significantly predicted migration attitudes. Preliminary analyses confirmed that assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were met. The chapter reports the relative contribution of each block of variables to attitudes toward migrants, highlighting key predictors and patterns of association. This chapter aims to clarify the complex interplay between demographic, sociopolitical, psychological, and mental health factors in shaping attitudes toward migrants in Ireland.

## 2.1. Methodology

### 2.1.1 Participants and Procedure

The current study's data are from the general population living in the Republic of Ireland. The data were obtained from the Republic of Ireland arm of the Covid-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC) study (Spikol et al., 2021). The C19PRC aimed to track adult mental health and well-being in Ireland over time. Quota sampling was utilised to recruit a nationally representative sample (sex, age, and geographical location) of adults. Inclusion criteria for the data included participants who were required to be at least 18 years of age, able to complete a survey in English and a resident of the Republic of Ireland. Participants were recruited through the survey company Qualtrics, which partners with numerous online sample providers to offer a diverse respondent pool for research. The study participants were contacted by email, SMS, or app notification. Participants weren't initially given specific details about the survey to avoid bias. Once they clicked the link, they were informed about the study's purpose, data sharing, and their right to withdraw. They were also warned about potentially sensitive topics and provided with support resources. Participants gave electronic consent before each survey and were informed about data storage and GDPR compliance. The C19PRC study involved five waves of data collection. The current study used data from Wave 1, which was collected during Ireland's first lockdown in [March-April] 2020 and included 1041 participants aged 18-88 years ( $M = 44.97$ ,  $SD = 15.76$ ), the majority of whom were female, with post-secondary education, employed and in the €0-39,000 income bracket. The socio-demographic variables below in Table 1 were gathered from Wave 1 and analysed using SPSS 29.

**Table 1.***Socio-Demographic Variables of Participants.*

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-24	116	11.1
25-34	200	19.2
35-44	214	20.6
45-54	165	15.9
55-64	219	21.0
65+	127	12.2
Gender		
Female	536	51.5
Male	502	48.2
Nationality		
Yes	736	70.7
No	305	29.3
Education Level		
Did not attend post-secondary education	310	29.8
Post secondary education	731	70.2
Employment status		
Employed	614	59.0
Unemployed	427	41.0
Income level (2019)		
0 - 39,000	681	65.4
40,000 - 69,000	261	25.1
70,000 - 99,000	77	7.4

**2.1.2 Design**

This study represents a secondary analysis of the C19PRC study data. A correlational design was used to examine associations between demographic, sociopolitical, psychological, and mental health variables and attitudes towards migrants in the Wave 1 data from Spikol et al. (2021). The current study utilised a combination of demographic, sociopolitical, psychological, and mental health variables as predictors, while the criterion was attitudes towards migrants.

### 2.1.3 Materials

**Sociodemographic Variables.** Sociodemographic factors included in the regression analysis were age, gender, education level, employment status, income, and nationality. The nationality variable represented whether participants were born in Ireland, coded as  $0 = Yes$  and  $1 = No$ .

**Attitudes towards migrants.** A 2-item scale from the British Social Attitudes Survey 2015 (The National Centre for Social Research, 2015) was used to assess participants' attitudes towards migrants but adapted to be appropriate in an Irish context. The present study only made use of the first two items: (1) would you say it is generally bad or good for Ireland's economy that migrants come to Ireland from other countries? (2) Would you say that Ireland's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by migrants coming to live here from other countries? (Murphy et al., 2021). These items employ a 10-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 1 (extremely bad/undermined) to 10 (extremely good/enriched). Total scores for the two items used in the present study range from 2-20, with lower scores representing more negative attitudes towards migrants. The two-item version used in the present study had a Cronbach's alpha of .85, indicating good internal reliability (DeVellis, 2012).

#### 2.1.3.1 Sociopolitical Indicators

**Political Orientation.** To measure Political Orientation, the following question was raised: "*Often, politics is described in terms of 'left-wing' and 'right-wing'. Where would you place yourself on the following scale?*" which was adapted from the British Election Study 2017 (Fieldhouse et al., 2018). The scale ranged from 1 'left winged' to 10 'right winged'.

**Social Dominance.** The Social Dominance Orientation Scale is a sixteen-item scale developed by Pratto et al. (1994). The current study used a short 8-item version of this scale,

SDO7, developed by Ho et al. (2015) to assess participants' levels of social dominance orientation. The SDO7 has good criterion and construct validity (Ho et al., 2015) and demonstrated higher internal consistency in the current study (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ) than that found by Gordon (2017) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ). Participants were asked the extent to which they opposed or favoured statements such as: '*An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom*'. The SDO7 employs a Likert scale ranging from 1 'Strongly Oppose' to 5 'Strongly Favour'; scores ranging from 8-33, with higher scores endorse hierarchy-enhancing ideologies.

**Trust in State.** Trust in State Institutions was assessed by asking participants to what extent they have trust in the following institutions: (1) Dail/parliament; (2) the government; (3) the police; (4) the legal system; (5) political parties. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'completely trust' to 5 'do not trust at all'. Total scores range from 5-25 and higher scores representing no trust in state institutions. The current study found a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .89 indicating a good internal reliability (DeVellis, 2012).

**Trust in People.** For Trust in People, participants were asked to what extent they agree with the statement, '*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*' Trust in people employed a Likert scale ranging from 1, 'Most people can be trusted' to 5, 'Need to be very careful', with higher scores representing no trust in others (Murphy et al., 2021).

### ***2.1.3.2 Psychological Indicators***

**Empathy.** Identification with all humanity scale (IWAH; McFarland et al., 2012) is a 9-item self-report measure. The C19PRC study adapted the original IWAH, where the reference to 'Americans' was substituted for 'Ireland'. Participants were asked to indicate the degree of identification with three types of groups – people in my community, people from Ireland, and all humans everywhere. The three statements were presented to participants,

separately for each of the three groups, as follows: (1) How much do you identify with (feel a part of, feel love toward, have concern for)...? (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .79$ ); (2) How much would you say you care (feel upset, want to help) when bad things happen to...? (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ); and (3) When they are in need, how much do you want to help...? (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ). These statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'not at all' to 5 'very much' (McBride et al., 2021). A total score was calculated, with possible scores ranging from 9 to 45, where higher scores indicate greater empathy. Subscale scores were not used in the present analysis. The current study found a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .92, indicating good internal reliability of the IWAH (DeVellis, 2012).

**Self-esteem.** The Single-Item Self-esteem Scale (SISES; Robins et al., 2001) was used to assess self-esteem. Participants had to report the extent to which they agreed with a single statement (*'I have high self-esteem'*). The SISES is measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'not very true of me' to 7 'very true of me' with higher scores representing higher self-esteem. The SISES has been shown to have good convergent validity against other self-esteem measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Robins et al., 2001; Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2018).

**Resilience.** The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) is a 6-item scale, to measure the level of resilience in participants (Smith et al., 2008). An example item of the BRS is: *'I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times'*. The BRS was scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree', with items 2,4 and 6 reverse coded. Total scores range from 6 to 30 with higher scores representing higher resilience. The current study found a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .86, which is higher than Fung (2020) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ), indicating good internal reliability (DeVellis, 2012). The BRS also demonstrated good construct, convergent, and discriminant validity in the general population (Kyriazos et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Rey et al., 2016).

**Analytical Reasoning.** Cognitive Reflection Task of Analytical Reasoning (CRT) is a 3-item scale measuring analytical reasoning (Frederick, 2005). Participants were asked to solve the following three problems, each of which is designed to stimulate intuitively appealing but incorrect responses: (1) A bat and a ball cost £1.10 in total. The bat costs £1.00 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost? (2) If it takes five machines 5 minutes to make five widgets, how long would it take 100 machines to make 100 widgets? (3) In a lake, there is a patch of lily pads. Every day, the patch doubles in size. If it takes 48 days for the patch to cover the entire lake, how long would it take for the patch to cover half of the lake? Each problem in this scale presented a misleading clue and required participants to use analytic reasoning (or “slow thinking”; Kahneman, 2012) to avoid choosing the incorrect option suggested by the clue. The questions were multiple choice with three incorrect answers, including the misleading one, as recommended by Sirota and Juanchich (2018). The scores ranged from 1 to 19 with higher scores representing greater rational thinking. The current study found a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .68, similarly to Murphy et al. (2021) of 0.67.

**Intolerance of uncertainty.** The Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS) by Buhr and Dugas (2002), is a 12-item scale. IUS is thought to play a key role in the aetiology and maintenance of worry. The IUS demonstrates good construct validity (Birrell et al., 2011) and had good internal validity in the present study (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .87$ ). The scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1, ‘not at all characteristic of me’ to 5, ‘entirely characteristic of me’. The scores ranged from 12-84 with higher scores representing greater tendency to experience discomfort in uncertain situations.

**Conspiracy mentality.** The Conspiracy Mentality Scale (CMS) developed by Imhoff and Bruder (2014) is a 5-item scale. Conspiracy mentality can be considered a distinct political perspective, separate from established ideologies like social dominance orientation and right-wing authoritarianism. The current study found a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .84

demonstrating good internal reliability (DeVellis, 2012). The following is an example of an item from this measure: *'I think that many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about'*. Participants were scored on an 11-point scale from 1 'Certainly not 0%' to 11 'Certainly 100%' (Murphy et al., 2021). The scores range from 6-55 with higher scores representing greater belief in conspiracy theories.

### **2.1.3.3 Mental Health Indicators**

**Depression-Anxiety.** For the current study the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), and the Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) were combined under the variable *'Depression-Anxiety'*. PHQ-9 and GAD-7 were combined into a single composite measure due to their high correlation and to reduce multicollinearity in the regression model. The combined scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ). The PHQ-9, a 9-item scale by Kroenke et al. (2001) was utilised to measure depression. Participants were asked to rate the frequency of their depressive symptoms over the past two weeks using a 4-point scale: 'not at all' (0), 'several days' (1), 'more than half the days' (2), and 'nearly every day' (3). The PHQ-9 score ranges from 0 to 27, with scores of 6-9 (mild depression), 10-14 (moderate depression), and 15-27 (severe depression; Kroenke et al., 2001). The current study found a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .91, which is higher than Sun et al. (2022) of 0.84 indicating excellent reliability (DeVellis, 2012). The GAD-7 was used to assess participants' levels of generalised anxiety (Spitzer et al., 2006). The GAD-7 measures the frequency of seven anxiety symptoms, such as trouble relaxing and feeling easily annoyed, over the past week using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'not at all' to 4 'nearly every day'. The scores range from 0 to 21 with scores of 0-4 (no anxiety), 5-9 (mild anxiety), 10-14 (moderate anxiety), and 15-21 (severe anxiety; Lee et al., 2021). The GAD-7 has demonstrated strong reliability and validity (Löwe et al., 2008). The current study found a

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .94, which is higher than Dhira et al. (2021) of 0.89 indicating excellent reliability (DeVellis, 2012).

**Paranoia.** The 5-item Persecution subscale of the Persecution and Deservedness Scale (PaDS) by Melo et al. (2009) was used to measure paranoia. Participants rated their agreement with statements like *'I'm often suspicious of other people's intentions towards me'* and *'You should only trust yourself'* on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree'. The scores range from 5- 25 with higher scores indicating higher levels of paranoia. Previous research has demonstrated strong psychometric properties for the PaDS, supporting its reliability and unidimensional structure, as well as good internal consistency and construct validity across general population samples (Valiente et al., 2021). The current study found a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .83 indicating excellent reliability (DeVellis, 2012).

#### **2.1.4 Ethical Considerations**

The current study used data from the C19PRC, where consent was obtained from participants to share their data with other researchers for secondary data analysis purposes. Participants gave electronic consent before each survey and were informed about data storage and GDPR compliance. Participants were also warned about potentially sensitive topics and provided with support resources. The study received ethical approval from multiple universities' ethics committees, such as the University of Sheffield, Ulster University, and the Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee at Maynooth University [Ref SRESC-2020-2402202].

#### **2.1.5 Data Analysis**

The data were imported into SPSS 29 to conduct the statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics indicate the variables' central tendency measures and variability (e.g.,

mean, standard deviation, variance, etc.). Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether demographic, sociopolitical, psychological, and mental health variables significantly contributed to explaining attitudes towards migrants. The analysis was divided into four sequential blocks of predictor variables. The first block included sociodemographic variables (age, sex, nationality, education, employment, and income level). The second block included sociopolitical indicators (political ideology, social dominance, trust in the state, and trust in people). The third block included psychological indicators (empathy, self-esteem, resilience, analytical reasoning, intolerance of uncertainty, and conspiracy mentality). The final block included mental health indicators (depression-anxiety and paranoia). Variables entered in earlier blocks were statistically controlled for in subsequent models to assess the unique contribution of each set of predictors.

## 2.2 Results

### 2.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 below displays the descriptive statistics of sociopolitical, psychological and mental health variables.

**Table 2.**

*Descriptive Statistics of Sociopolitical, Psychological and Mental Health Variables.*

Variable	Mean	SD	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range	Min	Max	$\alpha$
Sociopolitical									
Political	5.12	1.90	3.64	.17	.59	9.00	1.00	10.00	
Social Dominance	18.36	5.24	27.50	-.22	-.73	25.00	8.00	33.00	.72
Trust in State	13.85	4.42	19.57	-.06	-.53	20.00	5.00	25.00	
Trust in People	3.38	1.04	1.08	-.09	-.58	4.00	1.00	5.00	
Psychological									
Empathy	33.49	6.85	46.86	-.42	-.15	36.00	9.00	45.00	.79
Self-Esteem	3.79	2.09	4.37	.90	-.32	7.00	1.00	8.00	
Resilience	20.02	4.79	23.03	-.27	.07	24.00	6.00	30.00	.71
Analytic Reasoning	11.41	5.66	32.09	-.89	-.77	18.00	1.00	19.00	.67
Intolerance of Uncertainty	40.28	14.98	224.52	.54	-.28	72.00	12.00	84.00	.89
Conspiracy Mentality	36.28	9.28	86.08	-.11	-.12	49.00	6.00	55.00	.84
Mental Health									
Depression-Anxiety	10.82	11.04	121.82	1.10	.48	48.00	0.00	48.00	.89
Paranoia	12.26	4.87	23.69	.27	-.66	20.00	5.00	25.00	.84

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 above indicate that political orientation ('left' or 'right'-wing) with a mean score of 5.12 (SD = 1.90) suggests the sample is relatively balanced, with no significant lean towards either side of the political spectrum. Social Dominance mean score of 18.36 (SD = 5.24) shows a slight lean towards endorsement of the dominance of one group over others. Trust in State, with a mean score of 13.85 (SD = 4.42), indicates that participants, on average, have somewhat low levels of trust in state institutions. Similarly, the Trust in People mean scores (M = 3.38, SD = 1.04) indicate participants displayed, on average, moderate levels of interpersonal trust.

In terms of psychological variables, the Empathy mean score of 33.49 (SD = 6.84) suggests that participants have the ability to understand the emotions of others. Self-esteem (M = 3.79, SD = 2.09) and resilience (M = 20.02, SD = 4.79) mean scores are moderate, suggesting participants have a balanced perception of themselves and the ability to cope with stress and adversity. The analytic reasoning mean score of 11.41 (SD = 5.66) suggests that participants display slightly higher levels of logical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The Intolerance of Uncertainty means scores (M = 40.28, SD = 14.98) indicates that participants tend not to have great difficulty coping with ambiguity or unpredictability when faced with uncertainty. A Conspiracy Mentality mean score of 36.28 (SD = 9.28) indicates that participants are less likely to endorse conspiracy theories.

Regarding mental health, a Depression-Anxiety mean score of 10.82 (SD = 11.03) suggests that participants experience relatively lower levels of anxiety or depression within the sample. A Paranoia mean score of 12.26 (SD = 4.86) indicates that participants reported slightly lower levels of paranoid thinking.

## 2.2.2 Inferential Statistics

**Table 3.**

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Model Analysing Attitudes Towards Migrants.*

	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	$\beta$	B	SE	CI 95% (B)
<b>Block 1</b>	.067***					
Age			-.11***	-.31	.09	-.49/-.12
Gender			-.07*	-.65	.28	-1.19/-.11
Nationality			.17***	1.66	.29	1.09/2.24
Education Level			.16***	1.53	.30	.95/2.12
Employment Status			.04	.36	.28	-.19/.91
Income Level (2019)			.03	.21	.22	-.23/.64
<b>Block 2 (Sociopolitical)</b>		.13***				
Political			.01	.02	.07	-.12/.17
Social Dominance			-.25***	-.21	.03	-.27/-.16
Trust in State			.14***	.15	.03	.08/.21
Trust in People			-.06	-.24	.14	-.52/.03
<b>Block 3 (Psychological)</b>		.02***				
Empathy			.13***	.09	.02	.04/.13
Self-Esteem			-.01	-.01	.06	-.14/.11
Resilience			.01	.01	.03	-.06/.07
Analytic Reasoning			-.07*	-.06	.02	-.11/-.01
Intolerance of Uncertainty			-.03	-.01	.01	-.03/.01
Conspiracy Mentality			-.09**	-.04	.02	-.08/-.01
<b>Block 4 (Mental Health)</b>		.003***				
Depression-Anxiety			-.03	-.01	.02	-.04/.02
Paranoia			.07	.06	.04	-.01/.13

Note. R<sup>2</sup> = R-squared; R<sup>2</sup> Change = Adjusted R-squared;  $\beta$  = standardized beta value; B = unstandardized beta value; SE = Standard errors of B; CI 95% (B) = 95% confidence interval for B; N = 1041; Statistical significance: \*p .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001

Hierarchical multiple regression was performed to examine whether sociodemographic, sociopolitical, psychological, and mental health variables significantly predicted attitudes toward migrants. The analysis was conducted in four blocks. The criterion variable was attitudes toward migrants. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. The minimum Tolerance value was .57, and the maximum VIF value was 1.8, indicating the assumption of multicollinearity was not violated.

**Block 1.** Six sociodemographic variables (gender, age, nationality, education, employment status, and income) were entered. This model explained 6.7% of the variance in attitudes toward migrants,  $F(6,957) = 11.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .067$ . *Age, Gender, Nationality, and Education* significantly associated with the criterion variable of *Attitudes Towards Migrants*.

**Block 2.** Four sociopolitical variables (political ideology, social dominance, trust in state, and trust in people) were added. This model explained an additional 13% of variance,  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $F \text{ change}(4,953) = 37.68$ ,  $p < .001$ . *Social dominance and Trust in state* were significant predictors.

**Block 3.** Six psychological variables (empathy, self-esteem, resilience, analytic reasoning, intolerance of uncertainty, and conspiracy mentality) were added. This model explained an additional 2% of variance,  $R^2 = .02$ ,  $F \text{ change}(6,947) = 4.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . *Empathy and conspiracy mentality* were significant predictors.

**Block 4:** Two mental health variables (depression-anxiety composite and paranoia) were added. This model explained an additional 0.3% of variance,  $R^2 = .003$ ,  $F \text{ change}(2,945) = 1.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . No mental health variables were significant predictors.

The overall regression model was statistically significant  $F(18,945) = 14.63, p < .001$ , suggesting that the predictors collectively contributed to the prediction of the dependent variable and accounting for 21% of the variance in attitudes toward migrants. Standardized coefficients indicated that social dominance ( $\beta = -.25$ ) was the strongest predictor, with higher levels associated with more negative attitudes. Being female ( $\beta = -.07$ ), older age ( $\beta = -.11$ ), born in Ireland ( $\beta = .17$ ), and having lower education ( $\beta = .16$ ) were also associated with negative attitudes. Distrust in the state (as indicated by higher scores on the state trust measure;  $\beta = .14$ ), higher empathy ( $\beta = .13$ ), better analytic reasoning ( $\beta = -.07$ ), and lower conspiracy-minded thinking ( $\beta = -.09$ ) contribute to the prediction of more positive attitudes toward migrants.

## 2.3 Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate how socio-demographic, political, psychological, and mental health variables contribute to shaping attitudes toward migrants in Ireland. The data were obtained from the Republic of Ireland arm questionnaire of the Covid-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC) study. The study employed a hierarchical regression analysis, introducing four blocks of variables: (1) socio-demographic characteristics, (2) political factors, (3) psychological traits, and (4) mental health variables. The first block revealed that socio-demographic factors, specifically age, gender, nationality, and education level, were significantly associated with attitudes toward migrants, highlighting the demographic divides in public attitudes. It was found that being female, older age, born in Ireland, and of lower education levels were associated with negative attitudes toward migrants. When political factors were introduced in the second block, social dominance and trust in the state emerged as significant predictors, suggesting that individuals with higher social dominance orientation and institutional trust tend to hold negative attitudes towards migration. The third block, incorporating psychological traits, showed that empathy and conspiracy mentality played a crucial role, indicating that higher empathy and lower conspiratorialism are significantly associated with positive attitudes. Finally, including mental health variables in the fourth block revealed no significant associations, suggesting that psychological distress or well-being was not significantly associated with attitudes toward migrants.

The study's findings align with previous research on socio-demographic variables associated with attitudes toward migrants. The findings suggest that being Irish, female, older, and having lower education levels are associated with an increased likelihood of holding negative attitudes toward migrants, which is consistent with prior research (Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2021; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018). Previous

studies indicate that older age is commonly associated with more restrictive attitudes toward immigration, often attributed to cohort differences, lower openness to social change, and greater perceived threat (Laurence et al., 2024; Schotte & Winkler, 2018). Similarly, education is regularly found to have a liberalising effect, with higher educational attainment being linked to more tolerant attitudes toward immigrants in many contexts (Umansky et al., 2025; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018). Regarding gender, previous research indicates mixed findings. For example, several studies report that women are more favourable toward immigration, linked to higher empathy and prosocial orientations; other analyses find gendered patterns that depend on the type of immigrant group or policy question, indicating that men and women may respond differently to perceived neediness or economic versus cultural threat (Kobayashi & Tanaka, 2024; Lancaster, 2020; Ponce, 2017; Tan et al., 2021).

Moreover, the finding that individuals born in Ireland exhibit more negative attitudes toward migrants aligns with SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), where individuals categorise themselves into social groups and favour their in-group while exhibiting bias against out-groups. This suggests that national identity may play a role in shaping perceptions of migrants, reinforcing a sense of group distinction and intergroup bias (Grigoryev et al., 2019). Similarly, the present study found that higher levels of social dominance orientation (SDO) were associated with more negative attitudes toward migrants. This aligns with previous literature showing that individuals higher in SDO, defined as a preference for intergroup hierarchies and inequality, tend to favour hierarchical societal structures and hold exclusionary views toward immigrants (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Esses, 2021; Kupper et al., 2010; Lippens et al., 2022; Sidanius & Pratto, 1994, 1999). Such attitudes are often explained by perceptions of migrants as competitors for resources and status (Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

In addition, the findings of the present study indicate that participants with distrust in state institutions exhibited more positive attitudes toward migrants, a finding that contrasts with previous research linking institutional distrust to more negative attitudes toward migration (Danaj et al., 2018; Erisen & Vasilopoulou, 2022; Laurence et al., 2024; McLaren, 2016). Meanwhile, existing Irish research predominantly indicates the opposite relationship. For instance, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has documented that, in Ireland, higher institutional trust correlates with more favourable attitudes toward immigrants (Laurence et al., 2024). One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that individuals distrusting state institutions may also be more critical of government policies and narratives surrounding migration, leading them to adopt a more sympathetic stance towards migrants as a counter-position. Alternatively, this pattern could reflect broader disillusionment with governance, where dissatisfaction with state institutions extends to an awareness of structural inequalities that disproportionately affect migrant communities. While Irish studies on this particular disparity are limited, broader European research provides some insights. For example, Halapuu et al. (2013) examined European attitudes and found that in certain contexts, distrust in institutions can lead to solidarity with marginalised groups, including migrants, especially when state institutions are perceived as ineffective or unjust. Conversely, those who trust the state may be more likely to attribute societal issues to immigration, reinforcing the scapegoating effect. This suggests that institutional distrust may not always translate into negative attitudes toward migrants but, in some cases, may foster critical awareness of systemic inequities. Given the contradiction between these findings and existing Irish research, further research is needed to explore the contextual factors shaping this relationship within Ireland's sociopolitical landscape.

The role of empathy as a positive predictor of attitudes toward migrants aligns with additional studies suggesting that higher empathy reduces perceived differences between

groups, fostering more positive attitudes towards migrants, reducing prejudice and out-group bias (Cortland et al., 2017; Huth-Stöckle & Heizmann, 2025; Verkuyten et al., 2017; Swart et al., 2022). Similarly, lower levels of conspiracy-minded thinking were associated with positive attitudes towards migrants, which aligns with additional research suggesting higher conspiracist ideation is associated with generalised prejudice (Jolley et al., 2019; Martini et al., 2021). Lastly, the lack of a significant association between mental health variables and attitudes toward migrants diverges from some prior additional research, which suggests that mental health factors like stress or anxiety can lead to negative attitudes towards migrants (Martini et al., 2021; Page-Gould et al., 2008; Pinillos-Franco & Kawachi, 2021). At the same time, Pinillos-Franco and Kawachi (2021) found that favourable attitudes toward immigrants are generally associated with better self-reported health, but this relationship has shifted over time, potentially due to changes in the socio-economic composition of those with negative attitudes. While higher socio-economic status among individuals with negative attitudes may offset some health disadvantages, research also suggests that engaging in anti-immigrant discourse can have detrimental effects on psychological and emotional well-being. Within the current study, this finding may reflect nuances in the sample or context (e.g., post-pandemic).

Furthermore, unlike in many other countries, where right-wing ideology is strongly associated with anti-migrant attitudes (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011; Dekeyser & Freedman, 2021; Mudde, 2012), the current study found no significant association between political ideology (Left Wing vs. Right Wing) and attitudes toward migrants in Ireland. This suggests that attitudes toward migration in Ireland do not follow the conventional left-right political divide and that individuals with both liberal and conservative self-identifications can hold either pro- or anti-migrant views. One possible explanation is that migration-related concerns in Ireland are often shaped more by social and economic factors such as housing shortages

and public service strain rather than ideological positions (Laurence et al., 2024). This highlights the need for future research to explore the unique sociopolitical landscape in Ireland and the extent to which social, economic, or cultural factors shape attitudes toward migration beyond traditional political affiliations. Similarly, trust in people was not significantly associated with attitudes toward migrants. However, trust is often linked to more favourable attitudes towards migrants; greater trust can lead to a more welcoming attitude (Mitchell, 2021; Výrost & Dobeš, 2019). This might be attributable to the “Trust in People” variable reflecting generalised trust rather than trust in specific groups, which could be more relevant to attitudes toward migrants.

However, the lack of association with income level, employment status, and self-esteem in the present study should be mentioned. This pattern is consistent with prior research showing that objective economic indicators such as income and labour-market position often display weak or inconsistent relationships with anti-immigrant attitudes once factors such as education, identity, and political ideology are taken into account (Dražanová et al., 2023; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Meltzer, 2021). Rather than reflecting actual economic circumstances, negative attitudes toward migrants tend to be shaped more strongly by subjective perceptions of threat, including concerns about competition or societal change (Esses et al., 2001; Laurence et al., 2024). Similarly, the non-significant effect of self-esteem aligns with mixed findings in the literature: while some studies report that lower self-esteem may be associated with greater prejudice (Fluit et al., 2022), effects are typically small and highly context-dependent. Taken together, the absence of significance for income, employment, and self-esteem suggests that socio-psychological factors such as empathy, social dominance, and perceived threat play a more influential role in shaping attitudes toward migrants than structural economic variables or general self-evaluative traits.

In addition, the various predictors of attitudes towards migrants used in the present study only accounted for 20% of the variance in this outcome. This finding highlights the need for future research to explore contextual factors such as social settings (e.g., family and friends), exposure to immigrants, access to diverse news sources, or the role of other unexplored socioeconomic factors to better understand the remaining variance in attitudes toward migrants. These findings have significant implications for society, interventions, and future research, particularly in addressing attitudes toward migrants, which are discussed below and in chapter 4.

### **2.3.1 Strengths and Limitations**

The current study has several notable strengths alongside its limitations. A key strength is the use of the C19PRC dataset, a nationally representative survey, which provides a large and diverse sample, increasing the generalisability of the findings within Ireland. The study employed a comprehensive, multidimensional framework, incorporating socio-demographic, political, psychological, and mental health variables within a single hierarchical regression model, allowing for a nuanced understanding of factors shaping attitudes toward migrants. The study also contributes novel insights in the Irish context. For example, the finding that lower trust in state institutions was associated with more positive attitudes toward migrants contrasts with previous Irish research and highlights potential contextual or sociopolitical mechanisms worthy of further exploration. Similarly, the finding that political ideology (left vs. right) was not a significant predictor underscores Ireland's unique political landscape regarding attitudes toward migrants.

However, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences. The data utilised were not originally collected with the specific objectives of this study in mind. Thus, the investigation of some additional potentially relevant factors was outside the feasibility of

this thesis. Furthermore, more specific tools may have been used to measure certain variables. For example, “trust in specific groups” rather than “generalised trust” could be more relevant to attitudes toward migrants. Additionally, collected data were self-reports and may be vulnerable to social desirability bias.

### **2.3.2 Implications of the Findings**

The findings indicate that certain demographic factors, such as lower levels of education and older age, are associated with more negative attitudes toward migrants. While this suggests that interventions aimed at fostering openness to diversity may be particularly relevant for these groups, the mechanisms through which attitudes can be shifted require further exploration. Prior research suggests that education plays a key role in reducing perceived threats associated with migration (Borgonovi & Pokropek, 2019). However, the extent to which educational initiatives can meaningfully alter attitudes remains an open question. Future research should investigate which types of educational interventions, such as curriculum changes or public awareness campaigns, are most effective in this regard and whether their effects persist over time.

Similarly, the strong association between empathy and more positive attitudes toward migrants highlights its potential as a factor in reducing prejudice (Cortland et al., 2017; Verkuyten et al., 2017). However, whether empathy can be effectively cultivated through specific interventions and whether such interventions would lead to lasting changes in migration attitudes remains uncertain. Some research suggests that exposure to migrants and intercultural dialogue programs can foster empathy and mutual understanding (Albrecht et al., 2020), but the effectiveness of such programs may vary by context. Further research is needed to assess whether similar approaches would generalise to the Irish context and whether they could have unintended consequences, such as reinforcing pre-existing biases or resistance among certain groups.

Moreover, the findings suggest that individuals with higher social dominance orientation tend to hold more negative attitudes toward migrants, consistent with previous research (Esses, 2021). While efforts to challenge dominance-based worldviews, such as promoting intergroup contact and inclusive education, have been proposed as ways to reduce prejudice (Albarello et al., 2020), the feasibility and effectiveness of such approaches remain uncertain. Addressing deeply rooted ideological beliefs, and social hierarchies may require broader structural and cultural changes rather than targeted interventions alone.

Finally, the absence of a significant association between political ideology and attitudes toward migrants in Ireland suggests that migration opinions do not align with the conventional left-right divide observed in many other countries (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011; Dekeyser & Freedman, 2021; Mudde, 2012). Instead, concerns about migration in Ireland may be shaped more by social and economic factors (Laurence et al., 2024). Similarly, the lack of a clear relationship between generalised trust and migration attitudes indicates that different dimensions of trust, such as trust in government versus interpersonal trust, may play distinct roles in shaping public perceptions. Future research should investigate these complexities, exploring how Ireland's unique sociopolitical landscape influences migration attitudes and whether specific ideological or trust-related factors have a more nuanced effect than broad political categorisation suggests (Mitchell, 2021; Výrost & Dobeš, 2019). A deeper understanding of these dynamics could help inform policies that foster social cohesion while addressing the structural concerns that underlie public anxieties about migration.

### **2.3.3 Future Research**

This study highlights several areas for future research. The cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, emphasising the need for longitudinal or experimental studies to assess how socio-demographic, political, and psychological factors influence migration attitudes over time. Given the strong link between empathy and positive attitudes, future

research should evaluate whether empathy can be effectively cultivated through structured interventions and whether such efforts generalise to the Irish context. Similarly, while education appears to shape migration attitudes, further studies should examine which educational initiatives are most effective and whether their impact is lasting.

The study also found that social dominance orientation predicts anti-migrant attitudes, suggesting a need to investigate strategies for reducing dominance-based worldviews. Future research should assess the feasibility of interventions like intergroup contact and inclusive education.

Furthermore, the unexpected finding that distrust in state institutions correlated with more positive migration attitudes challenges existing literature and warrants further examination. Future research should explore whether this reflects solidarity with marginalised groups or dissatisfaction with governmental policies. Since the predictors of migration attitudes included in this study explained only 20% of the variance in this outcome, further research should explore the influence of social networks, media exposure, and other contextual factors. Additionally, the absence of a link between political ideology and migration attitudes in Ireland suggests that concerns about migration may be driven more by economic and social factors than by traditional left-right divides. Future studies should explore this distinction, as well as different dimensions of trust (e.g., institutional vs. interpersonal trust) and their impact on public opinion. Finally, future research should consider cross-cultural comparisons to determine whether Ireland's unique political and social context influences its attitudes toward migration, setting it apart from broader European trends. By employing diverse methodological approaches and exploring underexamined social and political influences, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of migration attitudes.

### **Chapter 3. Community Perspectives on Immigration: Exploring Attitudes Toward Immigrants and Refugees in Dublin**

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative part of the study, which aimed to explore attitudes and opinions toward immigrants and refugees in Dublin. Constructivist epistemology was applied in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and reflections. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns and themes. This approach emphasises how individual experiences, societal narratives, and broader structural factors interact. Five overarching themes emerged from the data: Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment, Attitudes Towards Diversity, Barriers to Integration, Economic and Public Service Considerations, and Irish Identity. These themes reflect how participants emphasise the roles of both direct intercultural experiences and broader societal influences. Quotes from participants are used throughout to highlight these viewpoints. Overall, this chapter provides a thorough description of participants' views and demonstrates how qualitative data can reveal the complex and contextual factors shaping attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. It provides a basis for understanding the interplay between personal experience and societal influences, complementing the quantitative findings presented in the previous chapter.

## 3.1 Methodology

### 3.1.1 Design

The qualitative research design adopted a constructivist epistemological perspective, using semi-structured interviews to acquire data. Constructivism assumes that knowledge and meaning are co-constructed through social interaction, rather than discovered as objective facts (Fagan, 2010; Fosnot, 1996). This perspective acknowledges that participants interpret their experiences through their own social and cultural contexts, and that the researcher also plays an active role in shaping how knowledge is produced (Fagan, 2010; Fosnot, 1996). This approach was particularly appropriate for the current study, which sought to explore how individuals construct and express their attitudes toward immigrants and refugees within the Irish social context. By adopting a constructivist stance, the study recognised that participants' views were not fixed but influenced by their experiences, interactions, and broader societal discourses. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Braun et al., 2022) was selected as the most appropriate method of analysis, given the focus on understanding participant perspectives and prioritising their experiences over applying a generalised theoretical framework. This approach highlights the importance of researcher reflexivity, adaptability, and active engagement in the analytic process, enabling the researcher to acknowledge the subjectivity and diversity of participants' experiences while reflecting on their own influence and potential biases (Braun et al., 2022). The primary researcher is an immigrant living in Ireland and navigating a social climate marked by recent protests and disturbances related to immigrants and refugees, and the researcher was acutely aware of the potential for their own experiences and perspectives to shape the research process. Data was collected from October 2024 until December 2024.

### ***3.1.1.1 Researcher Positionality***

As an immigrant living in Ireland, the researcher's positionality was closely connected to the study's focus on attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. This perspective provided valuable contextual understanding but also carried the potential for bias in how participants' views were interpreted. In line with Olmos-Vega et al. (2022), reflexivity was viewed as an active and ongoing process of examining how the researcher's identity, assumptions, and social positioning intersected with methodological and analytical decisions. To minimise this, the researcher consciously maintained a neutral stance throughout interviews, engaging openly with participants who held both positive and negative attitudes toward immigration to ensure a balanced representation of perspectives. Reflexivity was practiced through continuous self-awareness and regular discussions with the research supervisor, which helped identify assumptions and refine recruitment strategies. These meetings also informed targeted efforts to include participants with diverse viewpoints, strengthening the credibility and transparency of the research process.

### **3.1.2 Participants**

The population of interest for this study included residents of Dublin, as Coolock, an area in North Dublin, which had been a site of significant protests and disturbances related to the housing of asylum seekers. The former Crown Paints site in Coolock was one of the largest anti-immigration protests nationwide, exploding into a riot in the summer of 2024 (Coughlan & McDonald, 2024; Lally & McGreevy, 2024). These events included violent protests, confrontations with Gardaí, property damage, and ongoing community tensions concerning immigration and refugee issues. The site has been set on fire multiple times, even in the new year of 2025 (Foy, 2025). Convenience sampling was employed to focus on Dublin residents. The recruitment strategy targeted individuals over the age of 18 who expressed an interest in sharing their opinions and attitudes regarding immigrants and

refugees. The exclusion criteria consisted of individuals who were either not residents of Dublin or under the age of 18. Twenty-one individuals agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews with 14 females, 7 males, and a mean age of 30.43 years (SD = 9.61). In addition, three participants were personal contacts of the researcher who had expressed interest in the study after learning about it informally. These individuals were recruited using the same procedures as all other participants: they received the participant information sheet, provided informed consent, and were assured that participation was voluntary and confidential. No participant was approached in a way that might create pressure to participate.

The participants' willingness to engage provided valuable insights into community perspectives on immigration and refugee issues. Recruitment involved a participation post uploaded to online platforms (LinkedIn, Facebook, etc.; Appendix A), ensuring diverse representation within the targeted area, where participants varied in age and gender. Potential participants were asked to email the researcher if they were interested in taking part in the study. Once participants expressed their interest, a Qualtrics link was sent via email with the information (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C) to be completed. The researcher then reached out to participants via email to set a time and date for the one-on-one interviews to take place.

### **3.1.3 Materials**

Once participants received the Qualtrics link, they were asked the following demographic questions: "How old are you?"; "What gender do you identify as?" and "What is your nationality?". The demographic variables below in Table 4 were gathered from participants and analysed using SPSS 29. The semi-structured interview schedule was designed to explore participants' thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about immigrants and refugees in their community. The questions were developed based on a review of existing

literature on immigration attitudes and community tensions based on social, economic, political, and cultural factors. The initial draft of the interview schedule was sent to the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. To ensure the interview schedule was clear and relevant, it underwent several stages of refinement. The final draft was reviewed and refined by the research supervisors, who provided feedback on the clarity and sensitivity of the questions. The final interview schedule (Appendix E) consisted of 15 questions, including potential probing to encourage more profound responses from participants. The flexibility of the semi-structured format allowed for follow-up questions tailored to participants' responses, fostering in-depth conversations (Howitt & Cramer, 2016). No formal pilot study was conducted; however, the first interview was reviewed and discussed with a supervisor, leading to minor refinements in the interview schedule. As the changes were minimal, the data from the first interview were included in the final dataset.

#### **3.1.4 Procedure**

All interviews took place on Microsoft Teams and were audio recorded, transcribed, and then checked for errors. The interviews lasted between 15 and 25 minutes each, with a mean of 19 minutes. Afterwards, participants were sent a debrief sheet (Appendix D) via email, which explained the objectives of the study, provided the researcher's contact email, and included supportive resources if needed (i.e., in case participants became distressed as a result of participating in the study).

#### **3.1.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number 39177) on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2024 for the study (Appendix F). The interviews concerned a topic, which might have been sensitive to some participants. The study could be upsetting to some by discussing immigration, refugees, and recent social tensions, which may evoke strong emotions in participants, including anger, fear, sadness,

and discomfort. Participants may also experience challenges in confronting their own biases and reflecting on broader societal issues. However, precautions were taken to ensure minimal distress to participants. The ethical guidelines followed were outlined in the Psychological Society of Ireland's Code of Professional Ethics (2019) and the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee. Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study and were required to give informed consent. All data was collected and handled confidentially and securely. Moreover, if interviews caused distress, participants were provided the opportunity to take a break or stop the interview entirely. Additional support information (e.g., AWARE, Samaritans, etc.) and the researchers' contact details were provided at the end of the interviews via a debrief sheet in case the participants wished to follow up with them after the study was finished. All the data gathered during the research was stored on a password-protected computer, and as per the institution guidelines, to be stored for ten years and then destroyed.

### **3.1.6 Data analysis**

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was the planned strategy for this study. The six-step RTA model of Braun and Clark (2006) and Braun et al. (2022) guided the examination of the data. This version of thematic analysis is an update of the original thematic analysis but with a stronger emphasis on the researcher's subjectivity and the interpretive nature, aligning closely with the core tenets of social constructivism, which emphasise that meanings are not inherent in data but are actively constructed through social interactions and interpretations (Byrne, 2021). The data were analysed in an inductive manner, without previously created codes. The six steps consist of familiarisation, coding, initial theme generation, reviewing and developing themes, refining, defining and naming themes, and producing the report on the defined themes (Braun et al., 2022). Familiarisation is the process of "getting to know" the data, which involves repeatedly reviewing textual,

audio, or visual data while taking notes of interesting elements to explore further. Coding consists of the researcher closely examining the data and labelling relevant features with codes related to the research question. Initial theme generation is where the researcher groups similar codes to identify potential patterns around a core concept, with the initial groupings being sufficient for the moment. Reviewing and developing themes is when the researcher refines or revises initial themes to ensure they accurately capture meaningful patterns in the data, considering both individual themes and the overall analytic story. Defining and naming themes consists of refining themes by writing brief definitions that capture their scope and core concept, followed by assigning a name that reflects their interpretative meaning. The final step involves writing the analysis, combining data extracts with the researcher's commentary to tell the story of each theme. A semantic analysis of the coding was conducted to provide answers to the research question, and latent coding was also utilised to build on semantic coding to identify and include underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations. This systematic method identifies, examines, and reviews data in themes and patterns (Howitt & Cramer, 2016). The data were thematically analysed using the NVivo 14 software. A thematic mind map was also created to provide a visual overview of themes and subthemes (see Figure 1).

## 3.2 Results

### 3.2.1 Qualitative Analysis

Demographic variables for the sample (N=21) are presented below (Table 4). The majority of participants were between 25 and 34 years old (42.9%) with a majority of females and Irish participants.

**Table 4.**

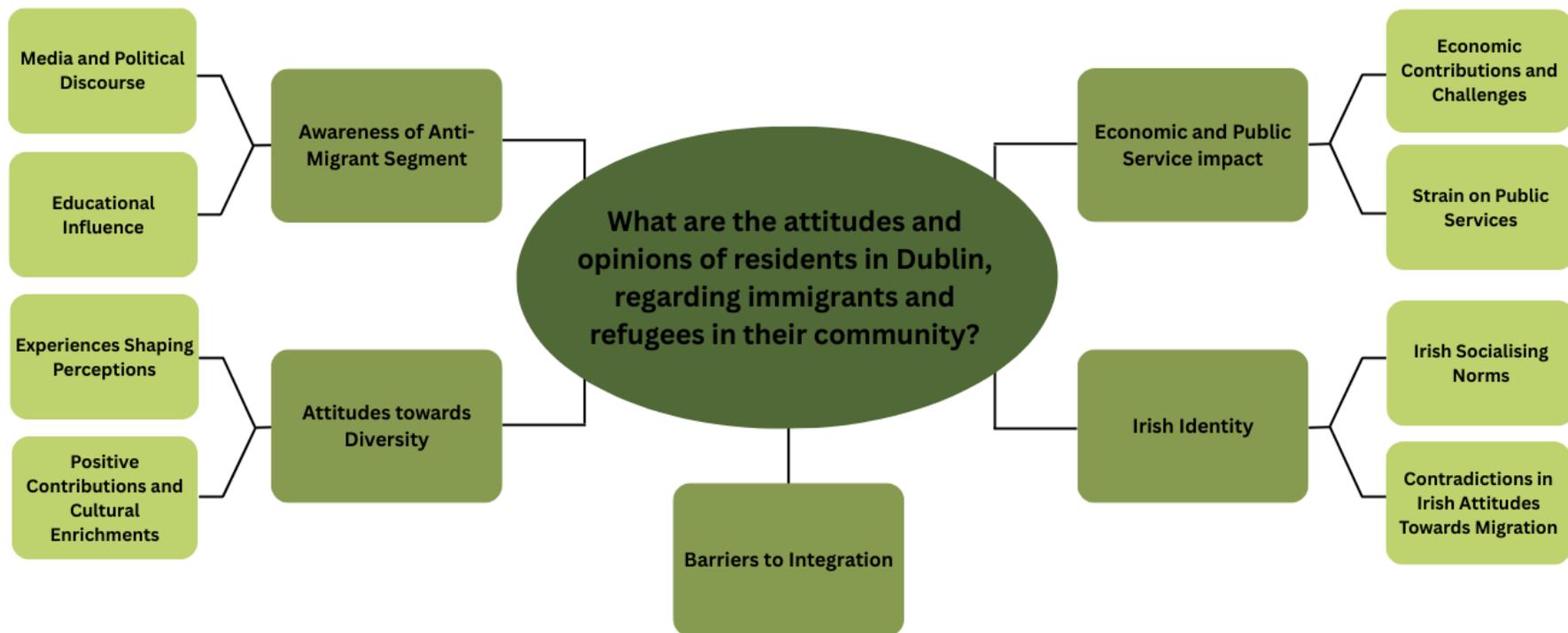
*Sample Demographics*

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-24	7	33.3
25-34	9	42.9
35-44	2	9.5
45-54	3	14.3
Gender		
Female	14	66.7
Male	7	33.3
Nationality		
Irish	13	61.9
Non-Irish	8	38.1

Braun et al. 's (2022) reflective thematic analysis was employed to explore the overarching research question: What are the attitudes and opinions of residents in Dublin regarding immigrants and refugees in their community? Participants answered a set of premeditated questions on several topics, such as social, economic, political, and cultural factors. The questions were coded and analysed inductively through the six steps of reflective thematic analysis: familiarisation, coding, initial theme generation, reviewing and developing themes, refining, defining and naming themes, and producing the report on the defined themes. After the coding was completed and themes were finalised, five main themes were initiated with several subthemes on the research question. Figure 1 below displays the thematic map on the final reflective thematic analysis with five main themes and subthemes.

**Figure 1**

*Five themes were identified from the analysis, with several subthemes therein: Themes; Awareness of Anti-Migrant Segment, Attitudes towards Diversity, Barriers to Integration, Economic and Public Service impact, and Irish Identity. Sub-themes; Media and Political Discourse, Educational Influence, Experiences Shaping Perceptions, Positive Contributions and Cultural Enrichments, Economic Contributions and Challenges, Strain on Public Services, Irish Socialising Norms, and Contradictions in Irish Attitudes Towards Migration.*



**Table 5.**

*Example Codebook Reflexive Thematic Analysis.*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Description Subtheme</b>	<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Representative Quotes</b>
Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment	Participants reflect on perceptions of the prevalent anti-migrant sentiment within Dublin, influenced by media, political rhetoric, and education.	Media and Political Discourse	Media bias, misinformation, and fearmongering amplify negative stereotypes and societal divisions.	Scapegoating  Political manipulation	<i>“Oh yeah. Maybe not mainstream media as much but social media. I think they do spread a lot of fake news and propaganda, which is pushed to Irish people as a form of fearmongering.” Participant 22</i>
		Educational Influence	The role of education in addressing prejudice, critical thinking in shaping attitudes towards migrants	Need for media literacy  Lack of political education	<i>“I do think a lot of less educated people would be more unaccepting. I think it gets less and less as you go up through the level of education, as they would be more accepting as education goes up.” Participant 3</i>

### **3.2.1.1 Theme 1: Awareness of Anti – Migrant Sentiment**

Participants reflected on perceptions of the prevalent anti-migrant sentiment within Dublin. The analysis identified two key subthemes: *Media and Political discourse* and *Educational Influence*. These perceptions were linked to several influential factors, including misinformation, media coverage, political rhetoric, and the role of education.

#### **3.2.1.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Media and Political Discourse**

Participants highlighted the media's tendency to distribute misinformation, bias, and sensationalism, significantly influencing public opinion and fostering negative stereotypes. They raised concerns about biased news coverage, fearmongering, and sensationalist reporting, which amplify societal fears, perpetuate xenophobia, and deepen social divisions. Media narratives often frame immigrants, particularly refugees, as scapegoats for systemic challenges like housing shortages and economic pressures, deflecting attention from the root causes of these issues. Social media was identified as a harmful tool, facilitating the rapid spread of misinformation, fake news, and propaganda. Participants expressed frustration at how social media platforms create echo chambers, reinforcing prejudiced views and promoting anti-immigrant sentiment. Many participants associated these perceptions with events such as the violent riots and the ongoing anti-immigrant marches against refugee asylum and immigrant settlement in Dublin.

*“Like what happened last year as well in the city centre, it was all misinformed that the immigrants or the refugees caused this huge problem, but in fact, it was actually mainly white Irish probably unemployed people. So, the fear-mongering is real, and it's coming through the media.” Participant 2*

*“Yeah, I think the media definitely influences those attitudes because, from my experience, the media generally portrays a rather negative image of immigrants and refugees. The media tends to focus on the disadvantages of them entering Ireland as*

*opposed to the advantages, such as the lack of housing, and blame immigrants or refugees for it. So, I think definitely the media portrays a rather negative picture of immigrants and refugees.” Participant 17*

In addition, participants emphasised the use of fearmongering and manipulative rhetoric by politicians, who often exploit public anxieties to scapegoat immigrants for broader societal problems. This tactic not only embeds xenophobic attitudes but also distracts from effectively addressing systemic issues. Participants indicated increasing polarisation in Irish political narratives, influenced by global trends from the US and UK, further undermining democratic processes and public trust. Participants stressed the need for unbiased media coverage, trustworthy reporting, and inclusive political narratives to counteract these harmful trends and promote a more cohesive society.

*“I think it’s very, very easy, especially for politicians, to scapegoat problems. “The reason that this is happening is because of immigration or an influx of people who don’t necessarily belong to a region”, and I think as humans, maybe we look for a really, really simple solution to really, really complex problems and it’s way easier to blame as opposed to accept fault in our own like norms or cultural means. So, I think politicians definitely have a huge influence on how people perceive immigrants or refugees.” Participant 18*

*“There’s a very specific side of politics in Ireland that is anti-immigration, and that’s stupid. The US is so influential, and you know, obviously, in the last couple of weeks, you’ve heard so much about it: the election, Trump’s stances on immigration, and how immigrants are bad. I have definitely seen people talk about how they would vote for Trump over here, and they agree because the US is so influential. I feel like certain types of people in Ireland will absolutely follow what he says.” Participant 11*

### **3.2.1.1.2 Subtheme 1.2: Educational Influence**

Participants reflected the critical role of education in shaping societal attitudes, fostering critical thinking, and addressing anti-immigrant sentiments. They identified the lack of media literacy, political education, and general knowledge about immigration as significant contributors to prejudice and exclusion in Dublin. Education was seen as a powerful tool for challenging misinformation and promoting inclusivity, but participants also acknowledged systemic challenges that limit its potential. Unequal access to quality education and the perception that less educated individuals are less accepting were reported as barriers to achieving social cohesion. Participants emphasised the need for educational reforms to equip individuals with critical thinking skills and the ability to identify and challenge misinformation.

*“Education also plays a big part in how people perceive immigrants and refugees.*

*This semester, we did a module on diversity and inclusion, and a lot of that was about the integration of refugees and immigrants into society. So, I think the more people are educated about successful integration, the more positive their attitudes towards some might turn. That will be my hope at the end of the day.” Participant 17*

### **3.2.1.2 Theme 2: Attitudes Towards Diversity**

Participants reflect on various societal attitudes toward immigrants and refugees, including positive contributions, multiculturalism, generational differences, and ambivalence. The analysis identified two key subthemes: *Experiences Shape Perceptions* and *Positive Contributions and Cultural Enrichment*. These subthemes reflect a range of sentiments, from different perceptions to acceptance and cultural enrichment of the contributions made by immigrants and refugees in Dublin.

### 3.2.1.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Experiences Shape Perceptions

Participants indicated that cultural, generational, and personal differences are shaped by direct experiences, upbringing, and social identity, resulting in a wide range of attitudes from empathetic understanding to unconscious bias and cultural anxiety. Participants expressed that older generations were perceived as more likely to hold conservative or resistant views toward immigrants and refugees. In contrast, younger generations were perceived as more open and tolerant due to greater exposure to multicultural environments, such as diverse schools and communities. Participants also suggested that older generations were more inclined to trust media and political narratives.

*“Like the experience of being in a country that has more immigrants than it used to is probably a lot different... So, I think it’s, mostly just experience of like multiculturalism has probably increased a lot, at least like from like 80s to the 2000s.” Participant 12*

Participants also highlighted the critical role of personal experiences in shaping societal attitudes. They reported that individuals with limited or no direct interaction with immigrants or refugees often held ambivalent or opposing views. In contrast, positive personal experiences were reported as fostering empathy and inclusion. A lack of exposure, however, was reported to perpetuate stereotypes and heighten cultural anxieties. Participants emphasised the importance of promoting intercultural interactions and cultural exchanges to promote informed perceptions.

*“People I met that have racist views or that lean more towards the right wing are those that never interacted with the people they hate on directly, but they just hear and read about them, and as soon as people start interacting with other cultures will realise, they are not unlike us, they have different traditions, but they are similarities where just human.” Participant 7*

In addition, participants described ambivalence within the Irish population's attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. While many reported overall compassion and solidarity, particularly for Ukrainian refugees, they also reported expressions of xenophobia and exclusionary sentiments, such as "Ireland is full" claim. Participants attributed these prejudices to a lack of understanding and fears of displacement. They suggested this shows the increasingly polarised and problematic attitudes toward immigrants and refugees within Irish society.

*"I think things have gotten a little probably a bit more heated and polarised. I think in the last couple of years which is really unfortunate..." Participant 14*

#### **3.2.1.2.2 Subtheme 2.2: Positive Contributions and Cultural Enrichment**

Participants frequently expressed experiences that portrayed immigrants as valuable contributors to society, highlighting empathy, intercultural communication, and inclusivity. Many participants highlighted positive personal interactions with immigrants, which played a crucial role in shaping their favourable perspectives. These experiences often challenged pre-existing attitudes and fostered empathy and understanding. Participants emphasised how genuine relationships with immigrants fostered warmth, mutual respect, and a sense of connection. Many stressed the importance of positive interactions in developing a shared sense of community and belonging, benefiting both immigrants and native Irish individuals. There was also a broad recognition of immigrants' positive impact on Irish society, particularly in contributing to a multicultural environment.

*"Wealth is built from community, sharing, knowledge, diverse perspectives, and diverse experiences. Once we open our minds to understand and accept our differences, I think Ireland will experience a different level of growth as a nation."*  
*Participant 6*

In addition, participants acknowledged that Dublin is increasingly becoming a multicultural hub where immigrants contribute to society through various means, including innovation, culture, and workforce in various sectors. They stressed the cultural benefits of immigration, reporting that immigrants add to the vibrancy of Irish society through diverse traditions, festivals, cuisine, and arts. Many participants acknowledged that multiculturalism strengthens the city's identity and promotes a sense of shared community. Participants frequently highlighted the significant role of cultural enrichment, describing how immigration has broadened Irish culture, particularly through food, festivals, and intercultural exchange. They viewed diversity as a strength that could help build a more inclusive future. This cultural enrichment was seen as beneficial to Irish culture and a key factor in shaping a diverse and dynamic society.

*“I also see a lot culturally. I’ve been able to be friends with so many immigrants whose culture still celebrates such big nights here. So, they would organise, whether it be an art thing, a dance thing, whatever it is, and you get to see that culture and see how people are still loving their culture while being here in Ireland and bringing Irish people to be involved in that as well, which I absolutely love.” Participant 5*

### **3.2.1.3 Theme 3: Barriers to Integration**

Participants indicated how the general Irish population perceives and responds to the integration of refugees and immigrants into Irish society. Participants highlighted the barriers surrounded by systemic obstacles, cultural conflicts, and social misunderstandings, creating complicated dynamics affecting individuals and communities. Participants indicated that cultural differences play a significant role in complicating immigrants' and refugees' integration, which can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Cultural differences point to the struggles immigrants and refugees face in conforming their cultural heritage with the norms and values of the host country. For many, this involves navigating unfamiliar societal

expectations, addressing stereotypes, and balancing traditional practices with new ways of life. Participants suggested that mutual understanding is critical but not always achieved. For instance, the cultural shock and language barriers experienced by immigrants and refugees highlight the profound dissonance that can occur when adapting to new environments where traditional notions of identity and belonging are challenged.

*“I would have told you no, everyone’s roughly the same, but the more I hear about immigrants’ experience, the more I hear about the different culture shocks that they experienced moving here. Then I realised some things about my culture that I took as a given, just like the way people are. And I’m like, oh, no, that’s actually an Irish thing. So, I think more so than before, I’d be inclined to say that there are some pretty big cultural differences.” Participant 12*

In addition, participants emphasised the challenges that refugees and immigrants face in accessing employment or the types of employment available. The barriers that prevent refugees from employment and lower-wage career or service sectors illustrate how systemic inequities, skill mismatches, and discriminatory hiring practices marginalise migrants. This prevents them from achieving economic self-sufficiency and reduces their ability to integrate into Irish society.

*“I think if we gave a little bit more opportunities to refugees because most of them can’t work, we could actually benefit from their knowledge as well. But at the moment, I don’t think this is going to go ahead and give them more rights, which could help them economically.” Participant 2*

#### **3.2.1.4 Theme 4: Economic and Public Service Impacts**

Participants reflected on the significance of the economic and infrastructural effects of immigration. The analysis identified two key subthemes: *Economic Contributions and Challenges* and *Strain on Public Services and Systemic Issues*. These subthemes reflect a

range of views, from concerns about economic strain and resource competition to recognising immigrants' positive contributions to addressing labour shortages and supporting economic growth. Participants emphasised the need to distinguish between the impact of immigration and underlying systemic issues affecting public services.

#### **3.2.1.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Economic Contributions and Challenges**

Participants highlighted a wide range of perspectives regarding the economic effects of immigration and refugee migration. Some participants perceived immigrants and refugees as an economic drain. Others recognised the positive economic contributions of immigrants, and some were concerned about the exploitation of immigrant labour. Participants who viewed immigrants, especially refugees, as a potential economic drain highlighted the strain on public services and concerns about the impact of refugee accommodation on local communities. Specific worries included competition for housing and resources, as well as the perceived burden on the Irish economy due to refugee influx.

*“Yeah, I mean, for sure, there’s a strain. There’s a huge problems with housing and health services. These are infrastructural issues more than anything else and we have seen certainly even back since the Celtic tiger days in the early 2000s, a huge influx of immigrants, and then in more recent times, refugees, unfortunately into the country. This is naturally a larger population is putting in additional strain on services, but the services are not built for purpose.” Participant 14*

However, many participants acknowledged immigrants' significant positive economic contributions in Dublin. A key point included immigrants' essential role in filling labour shortages, particularly in sectors with high demand, such as healthcare. Immigrants were also seen as vital to sustaining workforce levels and economic growth by taking up jobs that locals may be unwilling to fill. The entrepreneurial spirit of immigrants was also mentioned, with references to their role in creating new businesses.

*“My mom works in a hospital, and a lot of the nurses there are immigrants. I would have worked in retail for a long time, and a lot of people with whom I would have worked there would have been immigrants, even in academia... Similarly, as I’ve gotten a little bit older, I’ve probably worked with more people who would be immigrants in research. So, it’s nice to see that people are spreading out into all industry areas, as opposed to just the lowest sections.” Participant 18*

In addition, participants raised concerns regarding the potential exploitation of immigrant labour, the unequal treatment, and the lack of opportunities, emphasising the need for policy changes to ensure fair wages, improve working conditions, and protect immigrant workers from unfair treatment. This reflects a nuanced understanding of both the opportunities and challenges immigration poses in the economic domain. Participants also reported a lack of diversity in higher-level professions, highlighting barriers to improvement for immigrants and refugees.

*“I think if you’re looking at the higher-up jobs, it would be the same. There isn’t a lot of diversity, like a lot of white Irish people. If you look at the lawyers in Ireland, for example, you don’t see immigrants or refugees represented in those spaces much.*

*Participant 1*

#### **3.2.1.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Strain on Public Services**

Participants raised significant concerns regarding the strain on public services, particularly in areas such as housing and healthcare. They attributed this strain to the influx of refugees and immigrants, though they clarified that these issues existed independently of immigration.

*“The homeless crisis is not because of refugees or immigrants coming into the country. It’s because the government hasn’t built enough houses, especially social houses.” Participant 9*

In addition, participants argued that immigrants are unfairly scapegoated for systemic issues such as inadequate infrastructure and government shortcomings in addressing housing shortages and homelessness. Participants criticised the direct provision system, emphasising the need for reform and better support for refugees. Participants advocated for improved public services and well-functioning infrastructure to accommodate Irish residents, immigrants, and refugees.

*“I do understand that we have a shortage of housing. So, it is difficult to find the appropriate housing for those people who come here and also the direct provision system as well is also something that needs to be looked at and I think scrapped as well because I think it’s a system that’s not really fit for purpose.” Participant 18*

### **3.2.1.5 Theme 5: Irish Identity**

Participants reflected on Irish identity, highlighting cultural norms and social dynamics that shape interactions between Irish people, immigrants and refugees. Two key subthemes emerged: *Irish Socialising Norms* and *Contradictions in Irish Attitudes Towards Migration*. These subthemes provide insight into how cultural characteristics and historical identity influence the social cohesion and integration of immigrants and refugees in Dublin.

#### **3.2.1.5.1 Subtheme 5.1: Irish Socialising Norms**

Participants stressed the difficulty of forming deeper connections and the social isolation many immigrants and refugees might experience. They mentioned various challenges in forming friendships with Irish people, emphasising the close-knit nature of Irish communities and group-centric social dynamics. While many described Irish people as friendly and hospitable on the surface, deeper friendships were perceived as difficult to establish. Additionally, some participants mentioned neutral or positive interactions with immigrants and refugees but highlighted a sense of social isolation due to limited genuine connections.

*“Like our culture, we separate ourselves into groups and stick to our groups; yeah, people tend to stick to the group. I think that’s just part of our culture. I’ve heard someone describe that before it was an international student, who said that: a challenging part of coming to Ireland is, it’s very difficult to find friends because they have already formed their groups, and it’s very hard to get into the group.”*

*Participant 13*

### **3.2.1.5.2 Subtheme 5.2: Contradictions in Irish Attitudes Towards Migration**

Many participants reflected on the contradiction between Ireland’s history of emigration and current attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. Despite the history of Irish people seeking opportunities abroad, participants indicated wariness or reluctance toward newcomers in Dublin. However, Irish cultural norms, particularly friendliness, hospitality, and community spirit, were acknowledged as strengths that could foster greater inclusion. Cultural traditions, such as the pub culture and “living for the weekend” mentality, were reported as representing Irish life. Participants identified the drinking culture in Ireland as both a barrier and a potential route to forming friendships, with pubs playing a central role in Irish social life. While these traditions contribute to social cohesion among locals, they can also act as barriers for immigrants and refugees unfamiliar with such traditions. Regional differences in social attitudes were also mentioned, with participants suggesting that Dublin’s south side is perceived as having fewer social tensions than the north side.

*I think, unfortunately, there seems, well, in my opinion anyway, there seems to be a growing consensus of kind of a lot of implicit xenophobia that’s it’s really prevalent across the nation, which is really, really counterintuitive given the history that we have of going to different countries being welcomed and like it’s really sad for the place that’s like the land of a million welcomes to kind of have this really, really*

*negative perception of immigrants, which is just fuelled partly by ignorance.”*

*Participant 18*

### 3.3 Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the attitudes and opinions of residents in Dublin regarding immigrants and refugees. The data were obtained through a semi-structured interview approach with residents from Dublin. The qualitative study answered the overall research question: What are the attitudes and opinions of residents in Dublin regarding immigrants and refugees in their community? A reflexive thematic analysis was utilised to examine the data and identified five themes with corresponding subthemes: (1) Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment, (2) Attitudes Towards Diversity, (3) Barriers to Integration, (4) Economic and Public Service, and (5) Irish Identity. The first theme consists of *Media and Political discourse* and *Educational influence* subthemes. The second theme identified two subthemes: *Positive Contributions and Cultural Enrichment* and *Experiences Shaping Perceptions*. No subthemes were identified within the third theme. The fourth theme consists of *Economic Contributions and Challenges* and *Strain on Public Services and Systemic Issues*. The final theme identified two subthemes: *Irish Socialising Norms* and *Contradictions in Irish Attitudes Towards Migration*. These themes and subthemes illustrate a complex interplay of attitudes and perspectives shaped by personal experiences, cultural dynamics, and socio-political contexts.

The findings highlight both expected and surprising elements. Themes such as *Attitudes Towards Diversity*, *Barriers to Integration*, and *Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment* reflect the spectrum of attitudes, ranging from acceptance to apprehension. The *Awareness of Anti – Migrant Sentiment* theme, driven by misinformation and scapegoating, was expected given Dublin's housing crisis and the growing influence of polarised politics and media narratives (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Ekman, 2019; Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018). Both SIT and ITT align with this theme as perceived threats, both realistic and symbolic, shape negative attitudes toward immigrants and refugees by

influencing ingroup or outgroup dynamics and broader societal perceptions, as evidenced by participants' reflections on the impact of biased narratives (Stephan & Stephan, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The subtheme of *Media and Political discourse* highlights participants' concerns about biased reporting, fear-mongering, misinformation, scapegoating, and fuelling negative stereotypes about immigrants and refugees. This aligns with previous research, which points out that the media often perpetuates stereotypes and biases, particularly through sensationalism (Haw, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2016; Ekman & Krzyżanowski, 2021) and that political actors exploit anxieties to reshape narratives (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011; Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Marfouk, 2018; Strang & Quinn, 2019). While most previous studies rely on survey-based analyses of media and political discourse (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Jacobs et al., 2016; Marfouk, 2018), this study employs a reflexive thematic analysis of interviews to explore how individuals perceive and interpret these influences in their daily lives.

Participants' reflections suggest that exposure to biased narratives may shape attitudes and influence broader societal perceptions of immigration. In addition, unlike previous research that focuses on how media constructs immigrant stereotypes (Haw, 2019; Jacobs et al., 2016), this study shifts the focus to how individuals perceive and engage with these narratives. It highlights how participants critically engage with and resist biased media and political discourse, suggesting that media literacy, public scepticism, and personal agency play key roles in moderating the impact of these narratives. These findings emphasise the need for interventions that promote critical media literacy, providing individuals with the skills to recognise misinformation and challenge biased narratives. Future research could explore how different forms of media consumption influence perceptions of immigration and whether greater public awareness can mitigate the impact of negative discourse.

*Educational influence* highlights the impact of education on opinions and attitudes within society. Participants viewed education as a powerful tool for challenging

misinformation and promoting inclusivity but noted systemic barriers, including unequal access and gaps in media literacy, political education, and immigration knowledge. This aligns with previous studies, which indicate that individuals with higher levels of education hold much more positive attitudes about immigration (Creighton et al., 2022; Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018). Previous research indicates that education is often linked to greater tolerance and openness to diversity. It also argues that higher-educated individuals feel less economically threatened by immigration due to greater financial security (Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018). However, others argue that this link may stem from a tendency to express socially desirable views rather than true tolerance (Creighton et al., 2022). This perspective is supported by findings indicating that the positive impact of education on attitudes diminishes when responses are anonymous, suggesting that social desirability bias may influence the views reported (Creighton et al., 2022). While the current study supports the impact between education and positive migrant attitudes, it also highlights an important nuance that is often overlooked: education's impact is not uniform across all individuals, as systemic barriers may prevent access to the information and critical thinking skills necessary to challenge misinformation. Unlike previous research, which focuses primarily on the correlation between education and migrant attitudes, this study emphasises the role of media literacy and political education as key factors in shaping attitudes. While prior studies focus on survey-based analyses of self-reported attitudes, this study takes a qualitative approach, allowing for a deeper exploration of how participants perceive and experience these barriers. These findings suggest that while education is a crucial factor in shaping public attitudes toward immigration, its effectiveness depends on equitable access and the content of educational initiatives. Future research should further explore whether targeted interventions in media literacy and political education could enhance the role of education in fostering more inclusive attitudes toward migrants.

Furthermore, the *Positive Contributions and Cultural Enrichment* subtheme, rooted in personal interactions, aligns with existing research suggesting that intercultural engagement fosters empathy and reduces prejudice (Grigoryev et al., 2019; Verkuyten et al., 2017; Swart et al., 2022). This theme aligns with SIT, as personal experiences with the out-group can challenge rigid in-group or out-group distinctions and foster greater inclusivity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Similarly, in *Experiences Shaping Perceptions* subtheme participants emphasise the influence of cultural, generational, and personal experiences in shaping attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. This aligns with previous research suggesting individual differences in social environments shape behaviour (Chen et al., 2016; Grigoryev et al., 2019; Modersitzki et al., 2020). For example, individuals who perceive the world as dangerous or highly competitive were more likely to endorse discrimination against immigrants (Grigoryev et al., 2019). Previous studies have shown that direct, personal contact with individuals from diverse backgrounds leads to greater empathy, understanding, and openness, thus reducing prejudice and promoting social cohesion. For instance, Grigoryev et al. (2019) found that intercultural contact increased positive attitudes toward out-group members, especially when participants had opportunities for sustained, meaningful interactions. Similarly, Verkuyten et al. (2017) highlighted the role of intergroup contact in reducing negative stereotypes and fostering positive attitudes. However, while these studies suggest a direct and positive link between intercultural engagement and attitudes toward migrants, this study explored participants' lived experiences, highlighting how personal experiences with immigrants and refugees, particularly through cultural exchange programs or community-based initiatives, influence individuals' perceptions. For example, one participant noted that *"... I've been able to be friends with so many immigrants whose culture still celebrates such big nights here. So, they would organise, whether it be an art thing, a dance thing, whatever it is, and you get to see that culture and see how people are still loving*

*their culture while being here in Ireland and bringing Irish people to be involved in that as well, which I absolutely love*” (Participant 5). Similarly, Participant 6 noted, *“Wealth is built from community, sharing, knowledge, diverse perspectives, and diverse experiences. Once we open our minds to understand and accept our differences, I think Ireland will experience a different level of growth as a nation”*. These accounts demonstrate that direct, meaningful engagement with immigrants can foster empathy, promote cultural understanding, and challenge preconceived notions. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on survey-based data, the current study captured nuanced reflections and lived experiences often overlooked in large-scale quantitative studies. This suggests that cultural enrichment may reduce prejudice and shape favourable attitudes toward immigration. This finding encourages a deeper exploration of the role of informal, everyday intercultural interactions.

Moreover, the *Barriers to Integration* theme highlights key obstacles such as cultural differences, language barriers, and limited access to quality employment, which aligns with previous research suggesting that integration can provide opportunities for migrants, but it can also expose them to more prejudice and discrimination (Schaeffer & Kas, 2024; Steinmann, 2019). SDT provides an explanation for this dynamic, as dominant groups may seek to maintain their privileged position by resisting full integration of migrant communities (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For instance, Steinmann (2019) found that migrants who attain higher levels of integration, such as securing stable employment or educational success, face greater discrimination, as their visibility in competitive job markets or public life challenges existing social hierarchies. Similarly, Schaeffer and Kas (2024) highlight that integration processes can provoke exclusionary reactions from host communities, particularly when migrants are perceived as economic or cultural threats. While previous studies primarily examine these dynamics from the perspective of migrant experiences or large-scale societal trends, this study offers insight into how the Irish public perceives these barriers. Participants

acknowledged that while integration is widely encouraged, systemic inequalities such as employment discrimination, insufficient language support, and cultural misunderstandings continue to limit genuine inclusion. These findings emphasise that barriers to integration are not solely experienced by migrants but are also recognised by the wider population, highlighting a disconnect between national integration policies and public perceptions of their effectiveness.

The theme of *Economic and Public Service Impact* highlights widespread concerns about immigration exacerbating resource strain, such as in housing and healthcare. While these anxieties are common in migration discourse, previous research indicates that anxieties tend to arise during economic strain, resulting in perceptions of migrants as competitors for limited resources (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018), which also aligns with ITT, as perceived resource competition fuels negative attitudes toward migrants (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). For example, McGinnity et al. (2018) found that public attitudes toward immigration become more negative during economic downturns, particularly when housing or welfare resources are under strain. Similarly, Dorn and Zweimüller (2021) highlight that public concerns over migration-related pressures often overshadow evidence showing that immigrants contribute positively to the economy through taxation and labour force participation. However, unlike previous studies that primarily focus on the perceived competition between migrants and native populations, this study highlights a more nuanced perspective. Participants acknowledged that systemic issues such as inadequate infrastructure and inefficient governance are the root causes of service shortages rather than blaming immigrants exclusively. This aligns with Boyle and MacCarthaigh (2011), who emphasise the need for a multifaceted approach to improving public service delivery, encompassing systemic productivity enhancements, robust governance frameworks, and streamlined public service capacity. Furthermore, while past studies rely heavily on large-scale surveys to assess

public concerns (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Laurence et al., 2024), the findings capture individual reflections, offering deeper insight into how individuals rationalise economic concerns in relation to migration. These findings suggest that while anxieties over resource strain persist, public discourse may be shifting toward a greater awareness of systemic shortcomings, challenging the assumption that immigration alone is the primary cause. This may help explain the unexpected quantitative finding that lower trust in government was associated with more positive attitudes toward migrants. Participants' reflections indicate that dissatisfaction with state institutions can foster critical awareness of systemic inequalities, leading some individuals to adopt a more sympathetic stance toward immigrants.

An unexpected finding in the study centred around *Irish identity*, where participants described Irish people as being friendly on the surface but noted that forming meaningful friendships was more challenging. This observation highlights a contrast between Ireland's outward reputation for hospitality and the reality of deeper social integration for immigrants and refugees. SIT explains this by highlighting how national identity can create implicit exclusionary boundaries, reinforcing social distinctions between Irish natives and migrant communities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Other research highlights how Ireland's identity has long been connected to a history of emigration, particularly before the economic boom of the 1990s when the country had a very small foreign-born population, however, since the early 1990s, Ireland has become increasingly diverse (McGinnity & Kingston, 2017). The current study builds on this by indicating that despite Ireland's history of emigration and growing diversity, attitudes toward immigrants remain complex. Participants noted a contradiction between the perception of Irish friendliness and implicit xenophobia, reflecting indifference toward deeper social integration. This aligns with McGinnity et al. (2018), who found that economic cycles heavily influence perceptions of immigration. Immigration tends to be viewed more favourably during periods of economic prosperity and more negatively during

recessions. Additionally, previous research highlights a pattern of exclusion based on cultural proximity, with a preference for migrants from similar ethnic or cultural backgrounds (Creighton et al., 2022; McGinnity et al., 2018). However, in contrast to previous studies that primarily rely on large-scale survey data to assess attitudes toward immigrants, this research focuses on individuals' lived experiences as they navigate social integration. While surveys provide valuable insights into broad trends in public opinion, they often fail to capture the more nuanced, everyday experiences of implicit exclusion and social indifference shared by the participants in this study. This suggests that beyond economic considerations, interpersonal and cultural dynamics play a crucial role in shaping migrant experiences in Ireland. By emphasising these nuances, this study challenges assumptions about Irish hospitality and stresses the importance of social barriers rather than purely economic ones.

### **3.3.1 Limitations**

Several limitations should be acknowledged within the study. The sensitive nature of the interview topic may have led some participants to withhold certain information if they felt uncomfortable sharing it. It is also possible that individuals holding less socially acceptable or more negative views about immigration chose not to participate, which may have influenced the overall balance of perspectives represented in the findings. While reflective thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method, the positionality of the researcher (immigrant living in Ireland) may have impacted the findings. Although efforts were made to remain objective, the risk of biases cannot be entirely eliminated. To minimise this, the researcher engaged in continuous reflexive practice, keeping notes on personal assumptions and reflections throughout data collection and analysis. In addition, a structured and transparent analytic process was followed, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis guidelines, to ensure that interpretations were grounded in participants' accounts rather than the researcher's preconceptions. Similarly, including a

significant proportion of non-Irish participants may have introduced diverse perspectives and biases into the data, potentially affecting the representability of the findings. Since the experiences and views of non-Irish individuals may differ considerably from those of Irish nationals, this could lead to systematic bias. Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise the importance of sample homogeneity in qualitative research, so this factor should be carefully considered when interpreting the results. This study specifically examined the experiences of residents in Dublin. While these findings provide valuable insights into this urban context, they do not claim to represent the opinions and attitudes of all residents of Ireland.

Moreover, some participants were familiar with the researcher and aware of her positionality, their responses may have been shaped by social desirability or a reluctance to express negative views, potentially affecting the authenticity and tone of the accounts provided. Additionally, although the qualitative component aimed to capture participants' personal opinions and attitudes, many framed their responses in terms of broader societal views rather than their own perspectives, which may have impacted the understanding of individual experiences. The composition of the qualitative sample may also have affected the findings. The sample was predominantly female, which introduces the possibility of gender-related bias in the perspectives captured. Although men are often associated with more overt or aggressive forms of anti-immigrant hostility (Dancygier et al., 2019; Liebe & Schwitter, 2020), results from Study 1 of this thesis indicated that women were significantly more likely to hold negative attitudes toward migrants. This suggests that the gender imbalance in the qualitative sample may have shaped the themes that emerged, potentially amplifying certain viewpoints while limiting others. Additionally, several participants were university students, and higher education levels are often associated with more liberal or pro-immigration attitudes, which may have shaped the perspectives represented in the data

(Cavaille & Marshall 2019; Dražanová, 2025). Therefore, the study's ability to fully explore certain dynamics of the topic may be limited by the underrepresentation of male participants.

### **3.3.2 Implications**

This study offers valuable insights into public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in Dublin, highlighting the complex and multi-dimensional nature of these perspectives. The findings, developed through RTA, emphasise the ways in which participants construct and negotiate meaning around migration within their social, political, and cultural contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The themes identified reflect socially constructed understandings rather than objective realities, reinforcing the importance of critical engagement with dominant narratives on migration. The findings highlight the role of media and political influence in shaping public perceptions of immigrants and refugees. Participants expressed concerns about biased reporting, misinformation, and fear-mongering, which contribute to negative stereotypes. These findings emphasise the importance of promoting media literacy initiatives to equip individuals with the critical skills needed to assess information sources and counteract misinformation (Neag et al., 2022; Stoddard et al., 2021). In addition, the findings emphasise the significant role of education in challenging misinformation and fostering inclusivity, but participants also pointed to gaps in political education, media literacy, and public understanding of immigration. Previous research indicates that higher levels of education are associated with more positive attitudes toward immigration, as education helps reduce perceived threats and fosters inclusivity (Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018). Promoting educational initiatives that enhance understanding of immigration and cultural diversity could contribute to a more informed and accepting society by addressing misconceptions.

Moreover, the findings highlight key barriers to migrant integration, including language difficulties, cultural differences, and employment challenges, which can create both

opportunities and risks of discrimination (Schaeffer & Kas, 2024; Steinmann, 2019). The study reveals that, despite Ireland's reputation of friendliness, hospitality and history of emigration, immigrants and refugees still face challenges to social integration. This is due to close-knit social networks and contradictory attitudes toward migration which still limit inclusion for immigrants and refugees. Economic conditions further shape public perceptions, affecting attitudes toward immigration (McGinnity & Kingston, 2017; Creighton et al., 2022). These findings emphasise the importance of fostering intercultural dialogue programs and community initiatives that facilitate meaningful social connections between native residents and migrants, ultimately reducing prejudice and strengthening societal cohesion (Grigoryev et al., 2019; Verkuyten et al., 2017). Schools, workplaces, and community organisations can promote mutual understanding by implementing structured programs encouraging interaction, such as language exchange programs, mentorship initiatives, and intercultural events. Workplace diversity and inclusive hiring practices can also strengthen social bonds, further bridging gaps between immigrants, refugees and Irish natives. However, this is most effective when accompanied by meaningful inclusion and a sense of belonging, as diversity without inclusion may not lead to genuine social cohesion. By creating opportunities for positive engagement, these initiatives can help cultivate empathy, challenge stereotypes, and foster a more cohesive and inclusive society.

Additionally, concerns about immigration placing a strain on public services, such as housing and healthcare, were evident in participant responses. Participants acknowledged that these challenges stem from systemic issues rather than immigration, linking public service strain to governance and resource distribution rather than migration levels (Boyle & MacCarthaigh, 2011; Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021). These findings emphasise that addressing these concerns requires a multifaceted policy approach that enhances service efficiency; instead of scapegoating immigration, governments should focus on structural improvements

in public service delivery. Policies that ensure equitable access to housing, employment, and social services for Irish natives, immigrants and refugees could help reduce societal tensions.

### **3.3.3 Future Research**

Future research should address the limitations of this study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Exploring the impact of education and intercultural programs could provide valuable insights into sustaining positive social dynamics. Expanding the qualitative sample to include a more balanced representation of genders, particularly male participants, would provide a more nuanced understanding of gender-specific experiences. Similarly, future studies could aid from a more homogenous sample of participants in terms of nationality or include explicit comparisons between Irish nationals and non-nationals to explore cultural and contextual influences on the findings. Research should also be conducted in diverse geographic locations across Ireland (e.g., rural vs. urban areas) to determine the generalisability of these Dublin-based findings to the broader Irish population.

Furthermore, future research designs should focus on eliciting more personal experiences and opinions regarding migration, moving beyond general societal observations. For example, in-depth narrative interviews or other qualitative techniques that encourage reflection on individual lived experiences rather than abstract viewpoints could be particularly valuable. Future research may also explore the implications of researcher positionality in qualitative analyses through multi-researcher triangulation to reduce subjective bias (Carter et al., 2014). This approach may also help mitigate desirability bias that could arise from participants' familiarity with researchers. Of the total participants, three were personal contacts of the researcher, while the remainder were recruited through social media posts. Overall, future research should aim to enhance the understanding of this complex and sensitive topic by employing diverse qualitative methodologies and examining

experiences within specific contexts and communities. This deeper exploration may contribute to a richer understanding of the factors that shape attitudes toward immigrants and refugees, ultimately informing the development of more effective and contextually relevant interventions and policies.

## **Chapter 4. General Discussion**

## 4.1 Discussion

The present study investigated public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in Ireland through two complementary approaches: (1) a quantitative analysis examining socio-demographic, political, psychological, and mental health predictors of attitudes toward migration, and (2) a qualitative exploration of Dublin residents' attitudes and opinions towards immigrants and refugees in their community. By integrating both approaches, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing migration attitudes in Ireland. The quantitative analysis, using data from the Republic of Ireland arm of the Covid-19 Psychological Research Consortium (C19PRC) study, applied hierarchical regression analysis across four blocks of variables: (1) socio-demographic characteristics, (2) political factors, (3) psychological traits, and (4) mental health variables. Socio-demographics (age, gender, nationality, education level) significantly predicted migration attitudes, reflecting divisions in public sentiment. Political factors showed that social dominance orientation and trust in the state were key predictors, with higher social dominance linked to negative attitudes and lower trust in state institutions unexpectedly associated with more positive attitudes toward migrants. Psychological traits revealed empathy, and a lower conspiracy mentality correlated with more positive attitudes. Mental health factors were not significantly associated with attitudes towards immigrants. In addition, the qualitative study, based on semi-structured interviews with Dublin residents, identified five overarching themes: (1) Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment, (2) Attitudes Towards Diversity, (3) Barriers to Integration, (4) Economic and Public Service, and (5) Irish Identity. In *Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment*, participants acknowledged the anti-migrant sentiment fueled by biased media and political discourse through misinformation, fearmongering, scapegoating and the lack of education on immigration. In *Attitudes Towards Diversity*, participants expressed positive experiences with immigrants and highlighted their contributions to a more

multicultural society. *Barriers to Integration* highlight language difficulties, cultural differences, and employment challenges presented as obstacles to social inclusion. In *Economic and Public Service*, participants expressed that concerns regarding the strain on resources due to immigration were particularly common, especially in relation to housing and healthcare. Within *Irish Identity*, participants highlighted a significant contradiction: Although Ireland is seen as a welcoming nation, achieving deeper social integration remains challenging for immigrants.

#### **4.1.1 Global considerations**

Both studies present key insights into the factors that shape attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. The first study identifies several important elements: demographics, empathy, social dominance, and trust. In contrast, the second study focuses on personal experiences, cultural dynamics, and systemic influences that contribute to these perceptions. Additionally, both studies emphasise the significant role of misinformation, education, and social integration in shaping public perceptions of immigrants and refugees. The findings suggest that socio-demographic factors, misinformation, political narratives, media coverage, and personal experiences collectively influence attitudes toward migrants among the Irish public.

The findings indicate that education and intercultural engagement are essential for fostering positive attitudes. At the same time, systemic challenges, such as housing shortages and the strain on public services, often lead to negative perceptions. Previous research supports these findings, indicating that higher levels of education are associated with more positive attitudes toward immigrants (Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018), while intercultural engagement fosters empathy and reduces prejudice through meaningful social interactions (Grigoryev et al., 2019; Verkuyten et al., 2017; Swart et al., 2022). Additionally, systemic challenges, such as housing shortages and strained public services, have been shown

to contribute to negative perceptions of immigration, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty (Dorn & Zweimüller, 2021; Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the findings provided several important insights and introduced new perspectives. The first study highlighted an unexpected association between institutional distrust and more positive attitudes toward migrants. This contrasts with previous findings that indicated institutional distrust is linked to negative attitudes toward migration (Danaj et al., 2018; Erisen & Vasilopoulou, 2022; Laurence et al., 2024; McLaren, 2016). However, Halapuu et al. (2013) noted that in certain contexts, distrust in institutions can foster solidarity with migrants, especially when state institutions are perceived as ineffective or unjust. This finding aligns with the second study, which revealed that participants recognised systemic issues such as inadequate infrastructure and inefficient governance as the root causes of service shortages rather than placing the blame solely on immigrants. This suggests that systemic issues and ineffective governance may contribute to declining trust in institutions, leading individuals to critique these structural shortcomings rather than scapegoating migrant populations.

Moreover, the first study identified social dominance orientation as a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward migrants, reinforcing previous research that links higher social dominance with opposition to immigration (Bizumic & Duckitt, 2012; Esses, 2021; Kupper et al., 2010; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The second study expanded on this by highlighting contradictions within Irish identity. While Ireland is known for its hospitality, there exists a simultaneous underlying xenophobia and social indifference, making it challenging for migrants to integrate meaningfully. This observation aligns with McGinnity and Kingston (2017), who argue that exclusionary attitudes persist despite Ireland's history of emigration and increasing diversity. Additionally, prior research indicates a pattern of exclusion based on cultural proximity, where there is a preference for migrants from similar

ethnic or cultural backgrounds (Creighton et al., 2022; McGinnity et al., 2018). Together, these findings suggest that ideological predispositions, such as social dominance, along with broader societal contradictions, contribute to barriers to migrant integration. This reinforces the complex interplay between national identity, cultural biases, and attitudes toward migration.

Further, the first study challenged conventional assumptions by finding no significant association between political ideology and attitudes toward migration in Ireland. This contrasts with prior research, which often links right-wing ideology to stronger anti-migrant sentiment (Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011; Dekeyser & Freedman, 2021; Mudde, 2012). One possible explanation is that migration concerns in Ireland are shaped more by economic and social factors than by ideological divisions (Laurence et al., 2024). This finding aligns with the second study, where participants highlighted how political rhetoric manipulates public anxieties, often scapegoating migrants for broader systemic failures. Many participants observed that Irish political discourse is increasingly influenced by global polarisation trends, particularly from the US and UK, further embedding divisive narratives and eroding public trust in governance. These findings suggest that rather than ideological positioning, attitudes toward migration in Ireland may be shaped by a combination of economic pressures, governance challenges, and the strategic use of fear-based rhetoric in political discourse.

The findings of both studies reinforce and refine current explanations of attitudes toward immigration when considered alongside the theoretical frameworks outlined in the introduction. The quantitative findings indicate that Irish-born participants expressed more negative attitudes towards immigrants, consistent with SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), indicating a degree of ingroup favouritism. However, qualitative findings demonstrated that national identity did not universally translate into outgroup bias. For example, several participants framed Irish identity as inclusive or culturally open, suggesting that strong

ingroup identification can coexist with positive views of immigrants. This complicates a more deterministic interpretation of SIT that assumes ingroup identification inevitably produces outgroup derogation.

ITT (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) was largely supported in the present study, as the qualitative findings showed that concerns about resource strain and contributions continue to shape attitudes toward migrants. However, the results also challenge aspects of the theory, as many participants attributed resource strains to government failures rather than to migrants. Similarly, the quantitative finding that lower trust in the state was associated with more positive attitudes suggests that perceived threat does not automatically translate into anti-immigrant sentiment. In addition, the absence of significant associations between income level, employment status, and attitudes toward immigrants challenges the assumption that material conditions directly shape threat perceptions. These findings indicate that subjective interpretations, rather than objective environmental threat, play a central role in shaping attitudes, refining rather than refuting ITT.

Similarly, SDT (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) was largely supported, as findings from the qualitative study indicated that higher Social Dominance Orientation predicted more negative attitudes toward migrants. However, qualitative findings challenged this as some participants endorsed conditional restrictions, driven not by hierarchy motives but by perceived barriers to integration, such as cultural differences, language challenges, and limited access to employment. Participants noted that systemic inequalities, including discrimination and insufficient support, constrain genuine integration, suggesting that opposition to migration can reflect practical concerns rather than dominance motives alone. These findings refine SDT by highlighting that while hierarchy-maintenance drives some negative attitudes, pragmatic and structural considerations also play a key role. Overall, the findings reinforce these theories' core principles while demonstrating that attitudes toward migrants are shaped

by a more complex interplay of identity, perceived threat, and sociopolitical reasoning than the theories alone fully capture.

#### **4.1.2 Limitations**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The quantitative study, while comprehensive, relied on self-reported survey data, which may be subject to social desirability and response biases. Additionally, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between predictors and migration attitudes. While valuable in capturing nuanced perspectives, the qualitative study was conducted exclusively in Dublin, meaning the findings may not reflect migration attitudes in rural areas or other regions of Ireland. The predominantly female sample may have also limited the exploration of certain dynamics. Additionally, the sensitive interview topic may have led to information withholding. Researcher positionality and the inclusion of many non-Irish participants may have introduced biases. Sample heterogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2022), potential desirability bias due to researcher familiarity, and some participants framing responses as societal rather than personal views further constrain the findings.

#### **4.1.3 Implications**

Despite these limitations, the study has important implications. The findings highlight the critical role of education and intercultural engagement in fostering positive attitudes toward migrants. Policymakers should consider integrating targeted educational initiatives and community-based intercultural programs to challenge misinformation and reduce prejudice. For example, Catalano and Morales (2022) found that Arts and Community-Based (ACB) interventions effectively promote intercultural education by de-centering dominant identities, cultivating empathy, and providing a common language among learners.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of addressing systemic challenges, such as housing shortages and strained public services, which contribute to negative

migration attitudes. Policymakers should focus on broader structural reforms rather than allowing migration discourse to be shaped by political scapegoating.

#### **4.1.4 Future Research**

Future research should address the limitations of this study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees. A longitudinal design could be employed to examine changes over time and establish causal relationships, offering insights into attitudes towards immigrants and refugees and how these attitudes can be influenced over time. Similarly, exploring the impact of education and intercultural programs could provide valuable insights into sustaining positive social dynamics. Expanding the qualitative sample to include more diverse geographic regions, a balanced gender distribution, and potentially more homogenous samples regarding nationality could provide a more nuanced understanding of public sentiment and cultural or contextual influences. Future studies could also explore the unexpected association between institutional distrust and positive migration attitudes, examining whether this reflects broader critiques of governance rather than direct support for migrants. Given the non-significance of political ideology in this study, future research should investigate the role of factors like economic insecurity and media narratives in shaping migration attitudes in Ireland. Future research may also explore the implications of researcher positionality in qualitative analyses through multi-researcher triangulation to reduce subjective bias (Carter et al., 2014), as the researcher's identity as a migrant may also have introduced social desirability bias. Overall, future research should aim to develop a more well-rounded understanding of this complex and sensitive topic by utilising diverse methodologies, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and by including a broader and more representative range of participants. This may enhance the validity and generalisability of findings and contribute to developing effective interventions and policies to foster social inclusion and reduce prejudice.

#### **4.1.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively explore public attitudes toward immigrants and refugees in Ireland. The quantitative findings highlight the complex interplay of socio-demographic, political, and psychological factors in predicting attitudes toward migrants. Qualitative insights revealed the complex interplay of factors shaping public perceptions of migrants, including misinformation, media narratives, broader societal structures, personal experiences, cultural influences, and systemic challenges. While these findings provide important insights, critical questions remain unanswered. Future research should explore the long-term impact of intercultural engagement, the role of economic fluctuations and media narratives in shaping migrant attitudes, and additional socio-political factors contributing to these perceptions. Addressing these complexities requires a multi-faceted approach that fosters inclusivity and mitigates systemic challenges without reinforcing migrant scapegoating. By acknowledging this study's limitations, including potential biases in self-reported data, the influence of researcher positionality, and the cross-sectional nature of the study, future research can build on these findings with more refined methodologies. Longitudinal studies, gender-balanced samples, and cross-cultural comparisons could further advance understanding in this area. Ultimately, this research highlights the need for evidence-based policies, education, and social integration initiatives to foster more informed and constructive discourse on attitudes toward migrants in Ireland.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Recruitment post



**Maynooth  
University**  
National University  
of Ireland Maynooth

## *Interview study*

**Do you live in Dublin & are over 18?**

**We want to hear from you!**

I'm Mia Jansens a MSc psychology student at Maynooth University.  
I am currently recruiting participants for an interview study  
on attitudes and opinions on immigrants and refugees.

If you would like to be involved.

Please contact me on: [Mia.Jansens.2025@mumail.ie](mailto:Mia.Jansens.2025@mumail.ie)



## **Appendix B: Information sheet interviews**

### **Purpose of the Study.**

I am Mia Jansens ([Mia.jansens.2025@mumail.ie](mailto:Mia.jansens.2025@mumail.ie)), a postgraduate student, in the Department of Psychology, Maynooth University.

As part of the requirements for Research Masters, I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Dr Michael Daly, Professor Philip Hyland ([Philip.Hyland@mu.ie](mailto:Philip.Hyland@mu.ie)) and Dr. Joanna McHugh Power ([Joanna.McHughPower@mu.ie](mailto:Joanna.McHughPower@mu.ie)).

The study wants to explore the opinions and attitudes towards immigrants and refugees among people who live in Dublin and the potential impact these opinions have on the community.

**Who has approved this study?** This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from 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 an interview which will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and will be audio recorded.

**What information will be collected?** Participants name, age, consent and answers to interview questions will be collected. However, only answers to the interview question will be used with the research. Participants' identity will remain private.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked because you are a resident of Dublin, who wants to share their opinions about immigrants and refugees and are over the age of 18. If you are not a resident living in Dublin, under the age of 18 and do not want to share their opinions about immigrants and refugees, you are exempt from taking part in this study.

**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 at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Maynooth University or the researcher.

**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, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by the researcher.

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 law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'*

**What will happen to the information which you give?** 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 (Mia Jansens). Manual data will be shredded confidentially and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by (Mia Jansens) in Maynooth University.

**What will happen to the results?** The research will be written up and presented as a thesis. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?** I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part, but it is possible that talking about your experience may cause some distress.

**What if there is a problem?** At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you experience any distress following the interview, you may contact the Aware Support Line on 1890 303 302 or [supportmail@aware.ie](mailto:supportmail@aware.ie) and Samaritans on 116 123 or [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). You may contact my supervisors Philip Hyland ([Philip.Hyland@mu.ie](mailto:Philip.Hyland@mu.ie)) and Dr. Joanna McHugh Power ([Joanna.McHughPower@mu.ie](mailto:Joanna.McHughPower@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:  
[Mia.jansens.2025@mumail.ie](mailto:Mia.jansens.2025@mumail.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**

## Appendix C: Consent sheet interviews

I.....(Name) agree to participate in Mia Jansens's research study titled 'What are the specific attitudes and opinions of residents in Dublin, regarding immigrants and refugees in their community?'

Please select the appropriate statements below.

- The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me verbally and in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.
- I am participating voluntarily.
- I confirm that I am 18 years or older.
- I give permission for my interview with Mia Jansens to be audio-recorded.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data.
- It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access them on request
- I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet.
- I agree to the quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.
- I do not agree to the quotation/publication of extracts from my interview.
- I agree that my data, once anonymised, will be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive.
- I do not agree that my data once anonymised, will be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive.
- I understand that after the 31st of December 2024, I can no longer withdraw data since it will be anonymised.

Date of Today

Participant Name in Block Capitals

Add Signature (Name and Surname)

Confirm

 I'm not a robot  reCAPTCHA  
Privacy - Terms

## Appendix D: Debrief sheet interviews

### Debrief Sheet

#### Thanks for Participating!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The research looked at opinions and attitudes towards immigrants and refugees.

We hope that you felt that your voice was heard during this interview. If you feel that partaking in this interview has raised some issues for you, please consider contacting some of the support services listed below, or speak to a friend, family member or professional.

#### Aware:

The Aware Support Line 1890 303 302  
Available Monday – Sunday, 10am to 10pm.  
Email for support at: [supportmail@aware.ie](mailto:supportmail@aware.ie)

#### Samaritans:

Call on: 116 123  
Available 24hrs a day, 365 days a year. Free to call.  
Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

If you have concerns about the way in which the research was conducted, you can contact the Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee ([research.ethics@mu.ie](mailto:research.ethics@mu.ie)), or the research team, below.

Researcher: Mia Jansens

Email: [Mia.Jansens.2025@mumail.ie](mailto:Mia.Jansens.2025@mumail.ie)

Supervisor: Professor Philip Hyland and Dr Joanna McHugh Power

Email: [Philip.Hyland@mu.ie](mailto:Philip.Hyland@mu.ie) and [Joanna.McHughPower@mu.ie](mailto:Joanna.McHughPower@mu.ie)

## Appendix E: Interview schedule

### Revisions after First Interview

After conducting the first interview, minor adjustments were made to the interview schedule to improve clarity and flow:

[Topic 1] Question 2 moved up from question 6.

[Topic 3] Question 1 and 2 split into two separate questions.

I am Mia Jansens a student in MSc in research Psychology at Maynooth University. I am speaking with you today to get a better understanding of your personal experience or view on attitudes towards immigrants and refugees.

Before starting, I would like to define immigrants and refugees.

- Immigrants are individuals who move to a country where they are not citizens, often intending to settle there permanently. They may migrate for various reasons, including economic opportunities, education, and political reasons.
- Refugees are a specific subset of immigrants who are forced to leave their country due to persecution, conflict, or other circumstances. They often cannot or will not return to their country of origin due to fear of persecution.

Your answers will be treated as confidential. I will not include your name or any other information that could identify you in any reports I write. The data will be stored according to the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules on a password-protected computer and destroyed ten years after the completion of the study. This interview is expected to last for approximately 15-20 minutes. Do you have any questions?

#### **Topic #1: Social Factors/**

- How well do you think Irish people generally get on with each other?
- How do you think Irish people feel about immigrants and refugees?
- In your typical week, how many people, on average, would you chat to/interact with who are who are not from Ireland? *NB if needed, prompt beyond Northern Ireland/not from island of Ireland*
  - Of these, are these majority immigrants or also refugees
  - What have these interactions or chats been like? *good, bad, neutral?*
- How inclusive do you think Irish people are towards immigrants or refugees?

#### **Topic #2: Economic Factors**

- Are there any particular areas of Irish life that you think have been impacted by immigration or refugee migration? *Probes: the economy; public services.*

#### **Topic #3: Political Factors**

- Do you think politicians have an influence on the opinion of Irish people towards immigration? If so, how?
- Do you think the media has an influence on the opinion of Irish people towards immigration? If so, how?
- Do you think other people or groups outside of Ireland influence public opinion here in Ireland on immigration and refugees? If so, how? *Probe: opinion on immigration than actual quantity*

#### **Topic #4: Cultural Factors**

- How similar or dissimilar do you think Irish way of life is compared to immigrants or refugees.
  - Probes: building community, cultural differences.
- Do you think immigrants or refugees have an influence on the identity of Dublin? If so how so?
  - How do you feel about this influence?

#### **Final Section**

- Is there anything else you can think of which might influence how people feel about immigrants and refugees? Or anything else you would like to share?
- Do you have any questions for me?

## **Appendix F: Ethical approval**

Dear Mia Jansens,

Your Ethics Review has been now been approved:

- Ethics Review ID: 39177
- PI: Mia Jansens
- Title: What are the specific attitudes and perceptions of residents in North Dublin, regarding immigrants and refugees in their community?

Please login to RIS in order to view the application and review it.

**Appendix G: Codebook reflexive thematic analysis.**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Description Subtheme</b>	<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Representative Quotes</b>
Awareness of Anti-Migrant Sentiment	Participants reflect on perceptions of the prevalent anti-migrant sentiment within Dublin, influenced by media, political rhetoric, and education.	Media and Political Discourse	Media bias, misinformation, and fearmongering amplify negative stereotypes and societal divisions.	Scapegoating Political manipulation	<i>“Oh yeah. Maybe not mainstream media as much but social media. I think they do spread a lot of fake news and propaganda, which is pushed to Irish people as a form of fearmongering.” Participant 22</i>
		Educational Influence	The role of education in addressing prejudice, critical thinking in shaping attitudes towards migrants	Need for media literacy Lack of political education	<i>“I do think a lot of less educated people would be more unaccepting. I think it gets less and less as you go up through the level of education, as they would be more accepting as education goes up.” Participant 3</i>
Attitudes Towards Diversity	Participants reflect on societal attitudes, ranging from positive views of multiculturalism to				

	<p>generational and experiential differences.</p>	<p>Experiences Shaping Perceptions</p>	<p>Generational, and personal differences are shaped by direct experiences and shape empathy or bias towards migrants.</p>	<p>Generational differences</p> <p>Lack of exposure fostering stereotypes</p> <p>Positive personal interactions fostering empathy</p>	<p><i>“I think personal experiences is probably very important. Some people might have had negative or positive experiences with individuals who are immigrants or refugees. As a result, that might have been their first encounter with a person from that race or ethnicity and that could have like definitely changed or improved the perception of people from that area going forward.” Participant 18</i></p>
		<p>Positive Contributions and Cultural Enrichment</p>	<p>Immigrants’ contributions to Irish society, culture, and enhancing multiculturalism.</p>	<p>Positive intercultural experiences</p> <p>Benefits of multiculturalism</p>	<p><i>“In terms of my views, I think it’s good to have people coming in because it makes the country more diverse and multicultural. So, you get to learn from other people’s cultures, and they also learn from your culture.” Participant 17</i></p>
<p>Barriers to Integration</p>	<p>Participants identify obstacles to the integration of immigrants and refugees, shaped by systemic and cultural factors.</p>			<p>Cultural shock</p> <p>Navigating societal expectations</p> <p>Language barriers</p>	<p><i>“Even after years, it can be difficult to feel part of the new culture, as there’s pressure to adopt new norms and identities, which can negatively impact their mental health and well-being. While Ireland is open to diverse cultures, there is an expectation that immigrants should adjust to our ways of living which I</i></p>

*don't think I agree with.”  
Participant 20*

Economic and Public Service Impacts	Participants discuss the economic and infrastructural effects of migration, highlighting challenges, contributions, resource strain and competition.	Economic Contributions and Challenges	Immigrants fill labour shortages but face exploitation and unequal treatment.	Labour shortages filled by immigrants  Barriers to career advancement	<i>“I think we benefit quite a lot from immigration, and you know, if you look at many of our services, you see a lot of really educated and skilled people coming to Ireland and bringing over really important skill sets.” Participant 3</i>
		Strain on Public Services	Strain attributed to systemic failures rather than immigrant or refugee influx.	Housing crises and governmental responsibilities  Inadequate infrastructure	<i>“The homeless crisis is not because of refugees or immigrants coming into the country. It's because the government hasn't built enough houses, especially social houses.” Participant 9</i>
Irish Identity	Participants explore how Irish cultural norms and historical context shape attitudes towards immigrants.	Irish Socialising Norms	Challenges in building deeper connections due to	Difficulty forming friendships	<i>“Unless you know somebody already, you know, this is a friend of a friend. They need to meet your mutual. That's how you become</i>

group-centric dynamics.

Close-knit Irish communities

*friends, but when you just come on a night out and you're making friends with more Irish people, I'd say it's more difficult to create a genuine connection.” Participant 8*

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Contradictions in Irish Attitudes Towards Migration

Contractions in Ireland’s emigration history and current attitudes. Irish cultural norms strengthen and hinder inclusion with regional differences.

Regional differences in attitudes

Historical context of emigration

*“Irish culture in itself includes drinking culture. I do not think many Irish people know how to have fun when they're not drinking. So, I can imagine if some religious groups or cultures don't drink, it can be difficult to adapt.” Participant 3*

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