



# PatENT

ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR MIGRANTS

## National Report: Ireland Entrepreneurial Opportunities for Young Migrants in Ireland

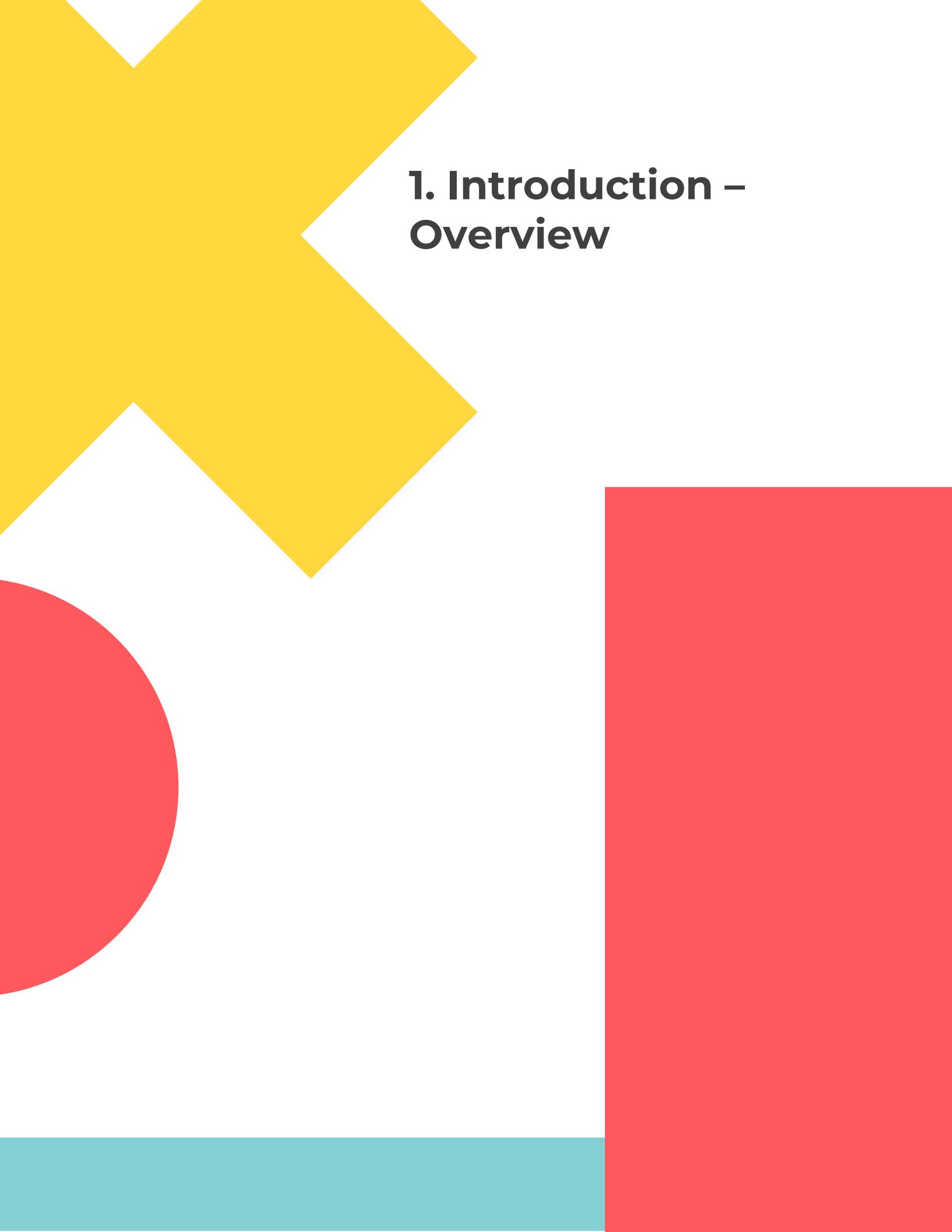
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# **1. Introduction – Overview**

This report examines the entrepreneurial landscape for young migrants (ages 18–30) in Ireland, focusing on first- and second-generation migrants, refugees, and individuals from diverse backgrounds. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of current opportunities and challenges in establishing enterprises and patenting innovative ideas, serving as a guiding tool for the development of educational hubs under the PatENT project.

### 1.1 Overview of Migrant Entrepreneurship in Ireland

Ireland has experienced a significant increase in its migrant population over the past two decades, with migrants now constituting a substantial portion of the workforce and entrepreneurial community. According to the Central Statistics Office ([www.CSO.ie](http://www.CSO.ie)),

- the population of Ireland was estimated at 5.38 million in April 2024, marking an increase of 98,700 people from the previous year. This growth was primarily driven by net migration of 79,300 individuals, the highest since 2007.
- In the 12 months leading up to April 2024, 149,200 people immigrated to Ireland, the highest figure in 17 years. Of these, 30,000 were returning Irish citizens, 27,000 were other EU citizens, 5,400 were UK citizens, and the remaining 86,800 were citizens of other countries, including Ukraine.

The foreign-born population in Ireland reached 1,211,883 in December 2024, reflecting the country's growing diversity<sup>1</sup>.

Studies indicate that immigrant entrepreneurs in Ireland often exhibit higher rates of entrepreneurial activity compared to the native population. This trend is attributed to various factors, including diverse skill sets, international networks, and a strong drive to establish economic stability in a new country. To summarise:

1. **Cooney & Flynn (2008):** In their survey, Cooney and Flynn found that 12.6% of immigrant respondents in Dublin, Ireland reported ownership or part-ownership of a business. This rate is notably higher than that of the native population. Their research also highlighted that immigrant businesses are often small-scale, concentrated in locally traded services, and tend to have low staff numbers<sup>2</sup>.
2. **OECD/European Commission (2023):** The OECD and European Commission reported that immigrants account for 20% of the 114,000 "missing entrepreneurs" in Ireland. This indicates a significant potential for entrepreneurial activity within the immigrant population that remains untapped.<sup>3</sup>
3. **Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2021:** The GEM report noted that Ireland has a high regard for successful entrepreneurs, with over 80% of the adult population holding them in high esteem. In 2021, support for an entrepreneurial career increased significantly to 67% from 55% in 2018. While this data is not exclusive to immigrants, it reflects a favourable environment for entrepreneurship in Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Ireland - Foreign-born population - 2025 Data 2026 Forecast 2010-2024 Historical](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Challenges faced by Immigrant Entrepreneurs in establishing and maintaining their businesses in Dublin.](#)

<sup>3</sup> ["Understanding Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Ireland" by Thomas M. Cooney, Martina Brophy et al.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [GEM Report reveals strong commitment to entrepreneurship in Ireland](#)



However, despite these positive indicators, migrant entrepreneurs face unique challenges that can hinder their business ventures. These challenges include limited access to funding, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with the local business environment.

## 1.2 Challenges Faced by Migrant Entrepreneurs in Ireland

While Ireland offers a conducive environment for entrepreneurship, migrant entrepreneurs encounter distinct challenges that can impede their business ventures.

### Access to Finance

- Securing financial resources is a significant hurdle for many migrant entrepreneurs. Factors such as lack of credit history, unfamiliarity with the Irish banking system, and limited collateral can restrict access to traditional financing avenues. According to a study by the OCED, ethnic minority entrepreneurs often face difficulties in accessing mainstream financial services, leading them to rely on personal savings or informal lending networks<sup>5</sup>.
- Flynn et al. (2019)<sup>6</sup>: Demonstrated that ethnic entrepreneurs in post-crisis Ireland had more difficulty accessing traditional funding channels compared to native entrepreneurs. Discriminatory lending, poor networks, and lack of formal documentation were common hurdles
- Furthermore, the dissertation research by John Hickey (2023) cited in our last section highlights that immigrant entrepreneurs in Dublin frequently operate on the margins of the dominant economy, facing greater obstacles than native enterprises, including challenges in procuring financial support.

### Language Barriers

- Proficiency in English is crucial for navigating Ireland's business landscape. Language barriers can impede understanding of legal requirements, access to support services, and effective communication with customers and partners. While some immigrant entrepreneurs possess strong English skills, others may struggle, particularly those from non-English-speaking backgrounds. This can limit their ability to engage with broader business networks and access essential information.
- However, it's noteworthy that language barriers may diminish over time. Hickey's study found that participants who had resided in Ireland for extended periods reported fewer language-related challenges, suggesting that integration and language proficiency improve with time.

### Racism and Discrimination

- Cooney and Foley<sup>7</sup> found that different ethnic groups experienced different levels of racism and discrimination in their entrepreneurial activities.

### Regulatory and Legal Challenges

- Navigating the regulatory environment in Ireland can be complex, especially for those unfamiliar with the legal system. This includes understanding tax obligations, employment laws, and business registration processes. The lack of tailored support and guidance

<sup>5</sup> OECD. Inclusive Entrepreneurship Policy Country Assessment Notes: Ireland 2022-23. 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Flynn A, Birdthistle N, McCarthy J, Silas MAS. Examining ethnic entrepreneurs' funding access in post-crisis Ireland. Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. 2019;7(2):7-30

<sup>7</sup> [Future Potential of Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Ireland | IntechOpen](#)



exacerbates these challenges. Hickey's research indicates that immigrant entrepreneurs often rely on informal sources, such as Google searches or advice from acquaintances, to comprehend regulatory requirements, highlighting a gap in accessible official resources.

### **Social and Cultural Integration**

- Building a customer base and establishing trust within the community can be challenging for migrant entrepreneurs, particularly if they face societal biases or lack established networks. Cultural differences may affect business practices, marketing strategies, and customer relations. A study by the European Commission emphasises that gaining the trust of Irish customers is a significant challenge for immigrant entrepreneurs, often more so than language barriers.
- Additionally, anti-social behaviour and crime in certain areas can disproportionately affect immigrant-owned businesses. Hickey's study reports instances where entrepreneurs faced theft, harassment, and inadequate law enforcement responses, further complicating their efforts to integrate and succeed.
- Jones & Ram (2021)<sup>8</sup>: The transitional nature of immigrant entrepreneurship often leads to marginalization unless embedded within host economies



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<sup>8</sup> Jones T, Ram M. Immigrant entrepreneurship in world-historical perspective: A transitional phenomenon? The Palgrave Handbook of Minority Entrepreneurship. 2021;195:195-221

### **1.3 Opportunities for Migrant Entrepreneurs in Ireland**

While migrant entrepreneurs in Ireland face distinct challenges, the national entrepreneurial landscape also presents significant opportunities, particularly for young migrants aged 18 to 30. Ireland's expanding economy, supportive business environment, and increasing recognition of the value of diversity contribute to conditions in which migrant-led enterprises can succeed. These opportunities arise from a combination of demographic shifts, policy initiatives, active community-based support structures, and access to Ireland's growing innovation ecosystem. For first- and second-generation migrants with entrepreneurial aspirations, the country offers meaningful pathways to establish, grow, and innovate in a wide range of sectors. This section explores the key enabling factors that support migrant entrepreneurship in the Irish context.

#### **1.3.1 Demographic and Market Opportunities**

Ireland's migrant population has grown steadily, with over 1.2 million foreign-born residents recorded in 2023. This growing diversity has created vibrant multicultural communities, particularly in urban centres such as Dublin, Cork, and Limerick. These communities represent both consumer markets for culturally specific products and services, and potential support networks for new businesses.

Young migrants bring multilingual skills, transnational social networks, and exposure to global business practices. These attributes offer a competitive edge, particularly in export-focused enterprises or industries where cultural agility and linguistic diversity are valued.

#### **1.3.2 Favourable Entrepreneurial Environment**

Ireland consistently ranks as one of the most pro-business environments in the EU. It offers a low corporate tax rate, streamlined company registration procedures, and strong protections for intellectual property. According to the 2021 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), over 80% of Irish adults see entrepreneurship as a good career choice, and 67% expressed confidence in their entrepreneurial capabilities.

This cultural support is reflected in government-backed initiatives that promote entrepreneurship as a viable path for migrants. Migrant entrepreneurs can benefit from Ireland's positive societal attitudes toward start-ups, which reduce stigma and encourage risk-taking.

### **1.4 Patents in Ireland**

The Intellectual Property Office of Ireland ([IPOI](#)) is the official Irish government body responsible for intellectual property (IP) rights, including patents, designs, trademarks and copyright. In relation to patents, if your idea is an invention that has a technical solution, you can get exclusive rights to the invention with a patent.

In Ireland, patents are governed by the Patents Act 1992, as amended (the Irish Patents Act). The Patents Rules 1992, as amended, prescribe related procedural rules. Ireland has no specialist patent court, but patent proceedings are generally heard in the Commercial List of the Irish High Court.

According to the IPOI, patents protect technological advances. New or improved products or processes are eligible for patents. A patent confers upon its holder, for a limited period, the right to exclude others from exploiting (making, using, selling, importing) the patented invention, except with the consent of the owner of the patent. A patent is a form of 'industrial property',



which can be assigned, transferred, licensed or used by the owner.

Patents are territorial and give an exclusive right in the country where the patent has been granted as long as the patent is renewed each year through the payment of a renewal fee, e.g. **an Irish patent is only valid in Ireland** (Republic of Ireland only).

If you are seeking protection in other countries outside of Ireland, you can apply for a patent in that country. Alternatively, you can apply to the European Patent Office or use the Patent Co-operation Treaty system. In European applications via the EPO, Ireland showed a significant rise in applications filed in 2022 compared to 2021 up 12.8% <https://www.epo.org/about-us/annual-reports-statistics/statistics/2022/statistics/patent-applications.html#tab2>

In order to be granted a patent, an invention must be:

- New
- Something that can be made and used in industry including agriculture.
- Have an inventive step – An invention is considered as involving an inventive step if it is not obvious to a person skilled in that area of technology, having regard to the state of the art.

Patent protection can be applied to a wide range of inventions such as appliances and mechanical devices, biological and chemical inventions and computer related inventions

## **2. Institutions, helpful programmes, tools and support centres**

- for founders and entrepreneurs with a migrant background (national, regional and/or private initiatives)

Ireland offers a broad and evolving ecosystem of public, private, and non-profit institutions that support entrepreneurship, including services specifically tailored for individuals with a migrant background. These resources span training, funding, legal advice, mentoring, integration assistance, and regulatory guidance. This section outlines the key national and regional initiatives that assist young migrant entrepreneurs (ages 18 to 30), first and second generation, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

## 2.1 National and Regional Institutions Supporting Migrant Entrepreneurs

### Centralised Online Resource: "Which Support is for You?" Tool

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment offers a central online gateway titled "Which Support is for You?", which helps entrepreneurs identify the most suitable state supports and agencies for their business needs. It is especially useful for first-time founders, including migrants, who may not be familiar with the Irish business ecosystem. The platform allows users to explore support options based on:

- Business stage (idea, early-stage, scaling)
- Sector
- Location
- Type of support needed (funding, training, export assistance, etc.)

It links to key programmes and agencies such as:

- Enterprise Ireland
- Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)
- Microfinance Ireland
- InterTradeIreland
- IDA Ireland
- Údarás na Gaeltachta

The tool is accessible at [enterprise.gov.ie/which-support-is-for-you](https://enterprise.gov.ie/which-support-is-for-you) and is considered one of the most comprehensive entry points for everyone including migrants seeking business support in Ireland.

### Business in the Community Ireland – EPIC Programme

The **EPIC Programme (Employment for People from Immigrant Communities)** is run by Business in the Community Ireland. It is a free employment and integration initiative tailored to the needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. The programme helps participants address common barriers to employment and entrepreneurship in Ireland, such as unfamiliarity with Irish professional standards, limited local work experience, and interview skills.

Key supports include:

- One-to-one career guidance
- Online and in-person workshops
- CV and cover letter training aligned with Irish standards
- Work experience placements
- Integration and confidence-building sessions

The EPIC Programme is particularly effective as a first step toward self-employment, by strengthening employability and business-readiness for newly arrived migrants.



## Citizens Information

The [Citizens Information website](#) serves as a comprehensive public resource for those setting up a business in Ireland. It offers clear explanations of legal requirements, tax obligations, types of business structures (e.g., sole trader, limited company), insurance considerations, and rights and liabilities for the self-employed. The site also links to specialised documents, such as:

- *Sources of Information on Starting a Business*
- *Self-employment and Unemployment*
- *Grants and State supports for small businesses*

This portal is essential for migrant founders needing legal and financial clarity when starting out.

## Back for Business Programme

The **Back for Business** programme is an initiative designed to foster and support entrepreneurial activity among returned emigrants or those returning to live in Ireland. It offers a peer-support network, mentoring, and business development workshops to assist participants in establishing and growing their businesses in Ireland. [BfB-Brochure-Nov2022.pdf](#)

## Irish Refugee Council – Business & Entrepreneur Incubator Project

The **Irish Refugee Council** runs the **Business & Entrepreneur Incubator Project**, which supports people in Ireland from a migrant background by recognizing their entrepreneurial potential and assisting in the early stages of starting up businesses. The programme provides pre-employment training, English language training, mentoring, and supported work experience opportunities.

[Home - Pathways to Progress](#)

## Open Doors Initiative

The **Open Doors Initiative** offers opportunities for people from a migrant background to find employment. In collaboration with partners, it provides several online courses across various areas such as CV building, interview skills, project management, digital marketing, and general upskilling.

[Home - Open Doors Initiative](#)

## Nasc – The Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre

**Nasc**, based in Cork, is an independent, non-governmental organization that works to protect the rights of migrants and refugees in Ireland. They provide information and advice to migrants, including support for those interested in entrepreneurship, by offering legal advice and assistance in navigating the Irish business environment. [Home | Nasc | Migrant & Refugee Rights](#)

## Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)

The **Migrant Rights Centre Ireland** is a voluntary organization advocating for migrant rights in Ireland. They support migrants in low or minimum wage and less regulated work, who are at higher risk of poor and exploitative working conditions. MRCI provides access to rights and entitlements, information, case work, and campaigns for policy changes that benefit migrant workers and entrepreneurs. [Migrant Rights Centre Ireland - providing support for migrant workers](#)

## Immigrant Council of Ireland

The **Immigrant Council of Ireland** is a non-governmental organization and independent law centre that advises migrants on their rights while advocating for increased migrant protections. They provide information on immigration-related issues, support vulnerable migrants, and facilitate public engagement with the integration of immigrants, which can be beneficial for migrant



entrepreneurs seeking to understand their rights and the legal landscape in Ireland. [Home](#) | [Immigrant Council of Ireland](#)

### **BusinessRegulation.ie**

**BusinessRegulation.ie** is a government-run portal designed to help individuals and businesses identify which regulations apply to their operations. It is particularly useful for migrant entrepreneurs unfamiliar with Irish business compliance, offering information on:

- Licensing requirements
- Sector-specific regulations
- Employment law
- Health and safety obligations
- Environmental regulations

It also provides interactive tools for understanding what legal steps are necessary depending on business type. [BusinessReg - Business Regulation](#)

### **IDA Ireland**

The **Industrial Development Authority (IDA Ireland)** focuses on attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) but also supports overseas entrepreneurs who wish to establish innovative businesses in Ireland. While not aimed specifically at migrants, the IDA offers:

- Guidance on starting and scaling a business in Ireland
- Access to grants for high-growth ventures
- Information on property and site selection
- Introductions to local business networks

Young entrepreneurs with globally scalable ideas and significant investment potential can leverage IDA services to integrate into Ireland's high-tech ecosystem. [Ireland's Foreign Direct Investment Agency](#) | [IDA Ireland](#) | [IDA Ireland](#)

### **Enterprise Ireland**

**Enterprise Ireland** is a leading national agency responsible for supporting Irish businesses to start, grow, and expand into international markets. Its High Potential Start-Up (HPSU) supports are accessible to migrant entrepreneurs and include:

- Feasibility funding
- Innovation vouchers
- Start-up mentoring
- Market research and export planning tools
- Investment opportunities

Enterprise Ireland also facilitates training and pitching opportunities for innovative start-ups through accelerator programmes and international partnerships. [Helping Irish Business Go Global](#) | [Enterprise Ireland](#)

### **Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)**

Ireland's **Local Enterprise Offices**, based in each county, provide accessible services to businesses with 10 or fewer employees. LEOs are often a first stop for migrant entrepreneurs at the early idea or set-up stage. Available supports include:

- Free or subsidised *Start Your Own Business* courses
- One-on-one business advice
- Access to micro-enterprise grants
- Mentoring programmes



- Trading Online Voucher Scheme
- Local networking events

#### Local Enterprise Office

LEOs are increasingly involved in migrant integration through enterprise, such as the recent *Fingal Ukrainian Business Start-Up Programme*, which is seen as a model for further migrant-specific initiatives. [Budding Ukrainian entrepreneurs complete business start-up programme | Fingal County Council](#)

#### **2.2 Immigration-Linked Support: Start-Up Entrepreneur Programme (STEP)**

The **Start-Up Entrepreneur Programme (STEP)** is designed for non-EEA nationals wishing to start innovative businesses in Ireland. Applicants must:

- Have secured minimum funding of €50,000
- Present a high-potential business plan in manufacturing or internationally traded services
- Intend to create 10 jobs and reach €1 million in revenue within 3–4 years

Businesses must be less than five years old and headquartered in Ireland. STEP is not applicable to retail, personal services, or catering businesses.

In return, successful applicants receive:

- Permission to reside and work in Ireland
- A pathway to business scaling and integration into the Irish economy
- Access to support via Enterprise Ireland and associated networks

The programme is highly relevant for skilled young migrants who meet the funding and innovation criteria, particularly in STEM, software, medtech, or fintech sectors. [Start-up Entrepreneur Programme \(STEP\) - Immigration Service Delivery](#)



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