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# Community-level drivers of attitudes towards immigration in Ireland

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**ABSTRACT**

Research suggests community characteristics can shape people's responses towards immigration, yet this remains unexplored in Ireland. This paper investigates the community-level drivers of immigration attitudes in Ireland, applying multilevel modelling to 2023 data on individuals' attitudes, matched to small area data on their communities, which contributes to the literature by: (a) examining how community-level factors operate in a relatively 'new immigration' context; (b) exploring how increasing international protection (IP) migration shapes attitudes, and whether different types of IP migrants are differently related to attitudes; and (c) testing innovative measures of local pressures on services (doctors, school-places, housing) using administrative data. Findings demonstrate that communities' migration characteristics (migrant-share, change in migrant-share) have no overall association with immigration attitudes. However, migrant-share has a positive association with attitudes in rural (but not urban) areas, while a larger recent increase in migrant-share has a negative association with attitudes in more (but not less) disadvantaged communities. Residential segregation is also associated with more negative attitudes, while areas with a larger share of asylum seekers (but not Ukrainian refugees) are positively associated with attitudes. Measures of pressures on services do not appear to be negatively associated with attitudes, despite featuring prominently in national immigration debates.

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Immigration; anti-immigrant sentiment; Ireland; communities; refugees and asylum seekers

## 1. Introduction and motivation

Ireland has generally maintained positive attitudes towards immigration, despite rapidly shifting from a country of emigration to one in which, according to the 2022 census, 20% of the population was born abroad. Indeed, while many countries across Europe have seen growing support for anti-immigrant parties, Ireland has been notable by the absence of similar trends. However, since 2022, there has been a perception in Ireland that this started to change after the arrival of high numbers of people seeking international protection – both refugees from Ukraine and asylum seekers. These movements,

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and a lack of capacity to manage them that resulted in visible homelessness among asylum seekers, led to a large increase in the salience of immigration in Ireland (Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024). It also led to significant tensions in some areas, with protests across the country against the opening of asylum seeker centres and multiple incidents of arson attacks on proposed centres. Throughout the period, immigration was increasingly discussed online and in right-wing media outlets, and immigration in Ireland also gained the attention of international far-right actors (see Gallagher, O'Connor, and Visser 2023). While Eurobarometer data indicates that attitudes remain positive by European standards (Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024),[1] polling data has also indicated that there were wider sentiments throughout the period that immigration to Ireland is too high.[2] The tension culminated in riots in Dublin city centre in November 2023, which caused millions of euros of damage,[3] and injured at least 12 police officers,[4] as well as multiple fire attacks and a break-in to a site in North Dublin that was being prepared for asylum seekers. Immigration also became a major discussion point in both local and general elections in 2024. While candidates running on an anti-immigration platform won some seats at local elections, they did not win any general election seats, indicating that there is not, at present, strong electoral support for these movements. This is line with prior work suggesting that in Ireland anti-immigration support is often concentrated among the politically engaged (O'Malley 2008), although the rising protests against asylum centres may reflect a political disengagement with mainstream politics in particular, rather than wholesale disengagement from politics.

Recent research in Ireland shows how immigration attitudes can be shaped by people's personal situation and views, as well as their broader national social and economic context (McGinnity, Laurence, and Cunniffe 2023; Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024). However, the local environments in which people live may also be playing a key role in shaping their attitudes, and concerns about local services and resources are often raised by communities in response to the opening of reception centres for asylum seekers. In other countries, significant research has been conducted to understand how attitudes are influenced by social contexts across various spatial units, such as the region, city or neighbourhood people live in (Kawalerowicz 2021; Mitchell 2021). For example, changes in the migrant composition of people's neighbourhoods or residential segregation appear linked with more anti-immigrant sentiment (Kawalerowicz 2021; Bjånesøy 2019; Mitchell 2021; Laurence et al. 2019). To date, however, no research has been undertaken on the topic of community-level drivers of attitudes in Ireland, as, until now, data was not available.

This paper aims to make the following contributions. Firstly, it undertakes the first test of community-level drivers of immigration attitudes in Ireland to enhance our understanding of what kinds of communities may be more/less likely to experience anti-immigrant sentiment at a time of rising anxiety around immigration. Secondly, it contributes to the wider literature on the drivers of immigration attitudes by exploring how community-level factors operate in a 'new immigration' context (Ireland) that experienced a, comparatively, relatively recent and rapid shift from a largely homogeneous society to one of diversity compared to other Western Europe countries.[5] Thirdly, the paper distinguishes between the effects of all immigration (e.g. share of migrants in an area) and the effects of international protection migration – specifically the presence of (a) refugees from Ukraine and the presence of (b) predominantly non-European asylum

seeker accommodation – to provide a more detailed understanding of how different types of immigration may elicit different responses. Fourthly, the paper tests previously unexplored, novel measures of pressures on local health services, housing, and school places in local communities to examine how they might shape immigration attitudes.

## 2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

### 2.1. Group threat and contact theories

Studies exploring how immigration is linked with people's immigration attitudes generally draw on two key theories: the contact and threat hypotheses. The threat hypothesis draws on ethnic competition theory, based on the idea that groups compete over resources in society. The threat hypothesis posits that non-migrants may perceive the out-group (immigrants) to be a threat to their material resources, such as jobs, housing, or welfare, but also a threat to their society's cultural values, such as religious beliefs or cultural traditions (Quillian 1995; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Either type of threat (material or cultural) can be real or imagined, but both perceived and real threat have the potential to affect attitudes (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). Where such perceived threats are high, anti-immigrant sentiment is predicted to increase. The contact hypothesis, meanwhile, posits that intergroup contact between migrants and non-migrants is likely to reduce anti-immigrant sentiment. Widespread evidence demonstrates that positive contact can counteract negative out-group attitudes, especially under particular conditions (such as voluntary, cooperative, common-goal-orientated contact) (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006), although where contact with immigrants is negative it can increase anti-immigrant sentiment (Laurence 2020; Laurence and Kim 2023).

### 2.2. Neighbourhood characteristics

#### 2.2.1. Migrant-share and change in migrant-share

Studies have drawn on the contact/threat theories to explore what role communities might play in shaping people's immigration attitudes. Regarding the share of migrants in an area, this has been predicted to have opposing effects on immigration attitudes. On one hand, studies suggest a larger share of migrants in an area triggers greater perceived threat among residents, as they increasingly feel either their resources or values (or both) are under threat from migrants (Quillian 1995; Schlueter and Scheepers 2010). This leads to *Hypothesis 1a*: increasing migrant-share will be linked to more negative immigration attitudes (threat). On the other hand, studies also suggest that larger shares of migrants in an area may increase opportunities for positive intergroup contact between groups, which should reduce prejudice and improve outgroup attitudes (Hjerm 2009; Wagner et al. 2003). Accordingly, *Hypothesis 1b* is: higher migrant-share will be linked to more positive immigration attitudes (contact). Of course, both processes may be in operation, exerting countervailing effects on people's attitudes (Wagner et al. 2003).

Other work, however, argues that it is not the share of immigrants in an area but the rate at which the share of migrants is increasing i.e. amount of change in migrant share (Kawalerowicz 2021; Bjånesøy 2019; Mitchell 2021; Deiss-Helbig and Reimer 2022). Here, larger recent increases in the share of migrants in an area is posited to trigger

perceptions of threat, as residents see their environments rapidly changing around them and away from the cultural composition they are 'comfortable' with, or that they expected from the neighbourhood (Bjånesøy 2019; Kawalerowicz 2021; Deiss-Helbig and Reimer 2022). In this context, Kawalerowicz (2021) theorises that the prejudice-reducing mechanisms of interpersonal contact cannot keep up with threat responses when there is rapid growth. These threat generating processes are posited to be particularly salient when previously homogeneous areas see large increases in their migrant-share, while similar increases in areas that already have an established migrant population are expected to have a weaker effect, known as the 'acculturating contexts' hypothesis (Newman 2013). *Hypothesis 2a*: larger recent increases in the migrant-share will be linked with more negative immigration attitudes (threat); *Hypothesis 2b*: larger recent increases in the share of migrants will have a stronger negative effect on immigration attitudes in areas that were previously more homogeneous (threat).

Other factors may also play a role. These include levels of national salience (which can increase the threat perception of increasing immigration; Hopkins 2010) and the countries of origin or ethnicities of migrants (i.e. cultural distance or out-group categorisation), which research has found to be important for attitudes (Hood and Morris 1997; Ha 2010; Steele and Abdelaaty 2019). However, these are beyond the scope of the present study.

#### 2.2.2. Community disadvantage, urban/rural location and pressure on local services

Of course, communities differ beyond their migrant composition, and other neighbourhood characteristics may matter for attitudes towards immigrants. Two factors have emerged from the literature as potentially playing a key role. Firstly, areas that are more socio-economically disadvantaged are believed to trigger greater perceived resource threat among residents, given more economically precarious individuals are likely to feel immigration is a particular threat to their position and resources (Oliver and Wong 2003). In addition, resources such as health, housing and other supports may indeed be scarcer in disadvantaged areas. *Hypothesis 3*: higher socio-economic disadvantage in an area will be linked with more negative immigration attitudes (threat).

Secondly, studies have identified an urban/rural divide in attitudes (Maxwell 2019; Dražanová et al. 2022; Schmidt, Jacobsen, and Iglauer 2023), suggesting urban inhabitants have more positive immigration attitudes. This may be due, for example, to higher density in urban areas increasing interaction and exposure to migrants; or, given urban areas tend to have more migrants, increasing opportunities for contact; or, that people in urban areas have different expectations of what the migrant composition of their areas should be. Alternatively, it may be because urban residents have more cosmopolitan values, being more comfortable with ethnic difference (Luca et al. 2023). Processes of self-selection may also be at work, where people with more positive immigration attitudes in general tend to move to urban areas (Maxwell 2019). *Hypothesis 4*: urban residency will be linked to more positive immigration attitudes.

Of course, community-level drivers of immigration attitudes may not operate in isolation. Instead, they may interact with one another to differentially affect people's attitudes. For example, increasing migrant-share may have a more negative impact in disadvantaged areas, where economically precarious residents may be more likely to view migrants as a

threat to their resources. Or, the migrant-share of people's neighbourhoods may have no effect in urban areas where residents may already be used to experiencing ethnic difference in their wider everyday life, or where cosmopolitan values are already higher. The effects of immigrant composition of an area (its level or change) may therefore be conditional on urban/rural location or disadvantaged status (*Hypothesis 5*).

Besides rural/urban location and area-level disadvantage, other characteristics of communities may also matter for attitudes to immigration. Drawing on ethnic competition theory, we might expect local-level pressure on – or scarcity of – services to affect attitudes, regardless of whether the area is disadvantaged or not, or in an urban or rural location. These could be, for example, pressure on school places; pressure on access to local health services, for example GPs; or pressures on local housing supply, either of rented accommodation, social housing, or houses to purchase. These issues all feature prominently in current debates in Ireland (Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024). Where pressure on services is greater, majority group members may be concerned increasing immigration may cause even more pressure, or attribute current pressures to immigration, increasing anti-immigrant sentiment. There is much less international research on this topic using specific measures of pressure, although Hooijer (2021) finds that social housing competition in a local area is associated with less support for immigrants' 'social rights',[6] and found that lower-middle-income voters become less supportive of these rights when more social housing is allocated to refugees in their municipality. We therefore hypothesise that pressure on services in the local area will be linked with more negative attitudes towards immigration (*Hypothesis 6*).

### 2.2.3. Residential segregation

Alongside the size of the migrant group in an area, studies have suggested that how groups are spread out across an area may also matter for intergroup attitudes (Kawalerowicz 2021; Laurence et al. 2019; Laurence and Goebel 2024). In segregated communities, where migrants and non-migrants are clustered in separate neighbourhoods, there are likely to be fewer opportunities for intergroup contact, and thus threat perception may be higher. In addition, community segregation may also exaggerate the perceived difference between the in-group and out-groups, or lead to perceptions that the group is larger than it is (Allport 1954). Integration may also seem more uncertain if areas take on strong out-group characteristics – where shops and schools serving minority communities may foster a sense of exclusion of the majority population – as can occur in more segregated areas (Laurence et al. 2019). However, in integrated communities, where neighbourhoods (the smaller areas within a wider community) are highly mixed, groups are likely to have more contact opportunities. This contact could be in their neighbourhoods, but also through a higher likelihood of sharing services and amenities, such as schools, civic groups, and social spaces, like parks, beaches and libraries, which are more likely to be mixed in less segregated areas. From this literature we derive *Hypothesis 7*: that higher segregation will be linked to more negative immigration attitudes.

### 2.2.4. Refugee and asylum populations in local areas

A relevant sub-section of this literature analyses the impact of new asylum seeker accommodation centres (ASCs) on local attitudes, which has returned mixed results. While studies have found positive, negative and null effects of the presence of an ASC close

by (Deiss-Helbig and Reimer 2022; Lubbers, Coenders, and Scheepers 2006; Schmidt, Jacobsen, and Iglauer 2023), these findings are often influenced by the chosen geographic level and the dependent and independent variables operationalised. In one of the early studies on this question, Lubbers, Coenders, and Scheepers (2006) found in the Netherlands that the actual presence of an ASC in the neighbourhood decreases objections to the opening of a further ASC. On the other hand, previous research has also found that proximity to refugee accommodation increased right-wing or anti-immigrant vote share, especially in rural communities (see Schmidt, Jacobsen, and Iglauer 2023; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Piil Damm 2019). Deiss-Helbig and Reimer (2022) found that while the number of asylum seekers in the neighbourhood does not lead to more negative attitudes, when the number of asylum seekers in one's own direct neighbourhood suddenly increases, attitudes towards asylum seekers deteriorate. However, there are clear contextual factors influencing this. Schmidt, Jacobsen, and Iglauer (2023) found that when they looked at Germany overall, they found a null (and very slight positive) impact of living in proximity to an ASC, but this was partly because there were opposite effects across regions. They found that in West Germany, living in proximity to several refugee shelters had a very small negative effect; in East Germany proximity had a very small positive effect, but proximity with several ASCs was associated with more negative attitudes. In Ireland, both asylum seekers and many refugees from Ukraine are housed in communal accommodation and many of them have arrived very recently. Drawing on these studies, *Hypothesis 8a* is that living in an area with a higher concentration of asylum seekers or refugees from Ukraine may be linked to more negative attitudes. While *Hypothesis 8b* is that higher concentrations of asylum seekers or refugees from Ukraine may be linked to more positive attitudes.

Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers have different statuses in Ireland. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU Temporary Protection Directive meant that people fleeing Ukraine would be automatically granted a standard set of rights. These rights included access to employment, social welfare and medical care, and suitable accommodation or, if necessary, the means to obtain housing. Asylum seekers to Ireland, who are predominantly from non-EU countries, and many from ethnic and religious minorities are (in principle) offered accommodation on arrival in asylum centres, and have restrictions regarding their employment and welfare access until their protection status has been granted.[7] Prior work also shows a preference in Ireland for European over non-European immigrants (Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024). This difference in status and baseline majority-group attitudes could lead to different reactions to greater proximity to asylum seekers and Ukrainians. Accordingly, we separately examine how both the presence of Ukrainian refugees and non-Ukrainian, predominantly non-European asylum seekers in an area are associated with immigration attitudes.

### 2.3. Summary of hypotheses

Based on the current literature, we formulate a series of hypotheses, which will be used to examine the role of contextual-level drivers of immigration attitudes in Ireland. These hypotheses are summarised below in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of hypotheses.

| Number | Hypothesis |
|---|---|
| 1a | Increasing migrant-share = more negative immigration attitudes (threat) |
| 1b | Increasing migrant-share = more positive immigration attitudes (contact) |
| 2a | Larger recent increases in the migrant-share = more negative immigration attitudes |
| 2b | Larger recent increases in the share of migrants = a stronger negative effect on immigration attitudes in areas that previously had lower share of migrants |
| 3 | Higher socio-economic disadvantage in an area = more negative immigration attitudes |
| 4 | Urban residency = more positive immigration attitudes |
| 5 | The effects of immigrant composition of an area (its level or change) will be conditional on urban/rural status of a neighbourhood or its socio-economic disadvantage |
| 6 | Pressure on services in the local area = more negative attitudes towards immigration |
| 7 | Higher residential segregation = more negative immigration attitudes |
| 8a | Living in an area with a higher concentration of (1) asylum seekers and/or (2) refugees from Ukraine = more negative attitudes (threat) |
| 8b | Living in an area with a higher concentration of (1) asylum seekers and/or (2) refugees from Ukraine = more positive attitudes (contact) |

## 3. Data and methods

### 3.1. Data sources and sample

This paper combines individual-level data on Irish attitudes towards immigration from a 2023 survey run by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (the Attitudes Survey) with 2022 Irish census data on the characteristics of the communities in which survey respondents live. Additional community-level data is linked in with Central Statistics Office data on refugees from Ukraine and DCEDIY data on international protection accommodation centres. Several sample restrictions are in place. We restrict the analysis to the sample who completed the survey via computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) (excluding telephone interviews) given the higher degree of missing information on respondents' addresses in the telephone interviews (56%) compared to the in-person interviews (0%), although it is important to note the CAPI sample is a random, nationally representative sample.[8] As we predict that processes of contact and threat from community-level processes are more salient for the majority group, we restrict our sample to Irish born individuals, who compose 82 per cent of the CAPI sample (Oliver and Wong 2003). Missing within-case data is very low in the CAPI survey (2 per cent of the Irish-born sample) and weights are applied for representativeness. This results in a final analytical sample of n = 1,210.

### 3.2. Scale of analysis

The spatial scale at which most community-level drivers are measured is the Small Area level (circa 65–90 households). Such a fine grained, micro-level measure of the characteristics of people's community will increase our confidence that respondents will be exposed to, for example, migrants in their community, which is important for linking people's spatial context to processes of contact and threat.[9] The exceptions to this are the measure of segregation which is measured at the Local Electoral Area (average population n = 27,800), given segregation measures compare the distribution of groups across a larger spatial scale. The following variables are also measured at the Local Electoral Area level, as

data is not available at smaller scales: the share of an area composed of refugees from Ukraine and two measures of housing affordability (the percentage of tenants who pay 40 per cent or more of their disposable income on rent and the 2021 ratio of median (buyer's) income to median purchase price). Lastly, the ratio of demand and supply for primary school places and the number of residents per available GP (estimated) are measured at the smaller Electoral Division area (average population n = 1447).

To be able to measure change over time in the share of migrants in an area, a key prerequisite is that the shape/boundaries of Small Areas does not change over time (so that any change can be attributed to migration in/out of the area). There was a small number of Small Areas that were resized between the 2011/2016 and 2022 censuses. We therefore match all Small Area 2022 census data to their equivalent 2011/2016 Small Areas for consistency in shape across censuses.[10]

### 3.3. Key variables and communities

#### 3.3.1. Outcomes

The main measure applied to capture people's attitudes towards immigration is an index generated from three key variables: 'For each of the following, please tell me if you are very positive, fairly positive, fairly negative or very negative? So how positive or negative are you … ?'

1. 'About immigration of people from other EU Member States'
2. 'About immigration of people from the Ukraine', and
3. 'About immigration of people from outside the EU or Ukraine'.

Applying factor analysis, these three indicators load strongly on to one another (minimum loading .74) and have an alpha score of .84. We therefore generate an index of positivity towards immigration, in which more positive values are associated with more positive attitudes. In the analytic sample, the scale varies from – 3.1 to +1, with a mean of – 0.15 (see Appendix Table A1).

#### 3.3.2. Independent variables

To explore the migrant composition of communities, we measure the share of migrants (people born abroad) in a Small Area in 2022, as well as a percentage point change in the share of migrants in an area between 2011 and 2022. To capture disadvantage, we generate an index of socio-economic disadvantage in 2022 (combining proportion with semi-/unskilled-occupations, proportion of households headed by lone-parents, proportion with low education, and proportion unemployed).[11] We include an indicator of whether a respondent lives in an urban or rural area.[12] We also include a measure of residential segregation (Index of Dissimilarity between migrants and non-migrants) (Massey and Denton 1988), which captures the degree of evenness with which groups are distributed across an environment.[13] This will look at how (un)evenly migrants are spread out across the Small Areas which compose an individual's larger spatial area – their Local Electoral Area.

To try to measure scarcity of housing we use two housing affordability measures: the percentage of tenants in an area who pay 40% or more of their disposable income on rent

and the 2021 Median (buyers) income to median purchase price (ratio) (Local Electoral Area level). To look at pressure on schools and services, we apply two novel measures. For pressure on primary health services, we measure the number of residences per available General Practitioner (GP) in an area. To calculate this, first, each residence was given a 'nearest GP practice'. A score was then generated for them which indicated how many other people in their catchment area (1.6 km radius) also had this GP practice as their nearest GP practice. These scores were then weighted by the number of doctors in the practice. Then the scores of everyone in the Electoral Division were averaged to the Electoral Division level. So, a higher score essentially signifies that, in that Electoral Division area, there is a higher number of people per GP, which is used as a proxy for GP workload (see Mohan, Nolan, and Lyons 2019). For pressures on schools, we calculated the ratio of demand and supply for primary schools in an area.[14]

To capture how people's experience with those seeking, or in receipt of, international protection is related to their immigration attitudes we employ two measures, which, as noted, seek to separately test the potential impact of both Ukrainian refugees and non-Ukrainian, predominantly non-European asylum seekers. Firstly, we look at the proportion of a respondent's Local Electoral Area composed of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine.[15] Secondly, we examine how the presence of accommodation for asylum seekers in respondents' Small Area is linked with respondents' immigration attitudes. This will be measured as the proportion of a Small Area composed of asylum seekers living in asylum accommodation as of 4 June 2023.[16] It should be noted that the *n* of respondents in a Small Area that contains International Protection (IP) accommodation is low ($n = 25$), given the total number of IP accommodation centres nationally is also low ($n = 191$ centres around the time of the survey).[17] In further models we also test whether the presence of an accommodation centre alone (regardless of its size), or whether the proportion of one's Small area composed of male and female asylum seekers, are differently associated with attitudes to immigration. We also test whether the presence of asylum seekers matters at larger spatial scales, including having IP accommodation in respondents' Electoral Division or Local Electoral Area matters.

Appendix Table A1 presents descriptive statistics of the individual-level and community-level covariates in the analytic sample (note the scales vary considerably). All models also adjust estimates for a full range of individual-level covariates, including respondents' gender, highest educational attainment, age, perceived financial situation, principal economic status, social class, housing tenure, gender, parental status, ethnicity, wellbeing, and whether they live in Dublin. These results are excluded from the results tables but available in Appendix Table A2.

### 3.4. Methodology and analytic approach

As survey respondents are clustered within space, we need to correct standard errors for the clustering of individuals within communities. We therefore estimate random-intercept multilevel linear models, with individuals nested in Small Areas and, where higher-level spatial measures are used, in Local Electoral Areas as well. All models are weighted to be nationally representative. We build up our models in a stepwise fashion (all models contain full individual-level controls), beginning with (1) migrant-share, then adding in

(2) change in migrant share (2011–2022), (3) community disadvantage and urban/rural identifier, (4) segregation, (5) the ratio of demand and supply for primary school places, number of residents per available GP (estimated), ratio of 2021 median (buyers) income to median purchase price, and the percentage of tenants who pay 40% or more of their disposable income on rent, before finally adding in (6) proportion of refugees from Ukraine in an area and the presence of IP accommodation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Migrant share, neighbourhood disadvantage and rural area

To assess whether local context is important for attitudes in Ireland, we calculated the intraclass correlation (ICC). In the null model, the ICC shows that around 20% of total variance in attitudes is attributable to differences between small areas, with the remaining 80% attributed to individual differences. Table 2 shows the results of a series of two-level multilevel models (individuals nested in small areas), with full individual-level controls (see Appendix Table A2 for full individual-level results). Model 1 demonstrates there is no overall association between the share of migrants in a Small Area and people's positivity towards immigration. The percentage point change in

**Table 2.** Association between immigrant attitudes and migrant composition, disadvantage, and urban/rural living.

| | Model 1 Immigration positivity | Model 2 Immigration positivity | Model 3 Immigration positivity | Model 4 Immigration positivity | Model 5 Immigration positivity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Community-level variables:* | | | | | |
| Migrant share (2022) (SA) | 0.272 | 0.321 | | 0.030 | −0.376 |
| | (0.290) | (0.306) | | (0.319) | (0.345) |
| Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) | | −0.322 | 0.549 | −0.248 | −0.374 |
| | | (0.533) | (1.145) | (0.542) | (0.475) |
| Migrant share (2011) (SA) | | | 0.307 | | |
| | | | (0.316) | | |
| Migrant share (2011) (SA) * Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) | | | −2.219 | | |
| | | | (4.719) | | |
| Community disadvantage (SA) | | | | −0.131*** | −0.098** |
| | | | | (0.034) | (0.036) |
| baseline – lives in urban area (SA) | | | | ref. | ref. |
| Lives in rural area | | | | −0.171* | −0.399** |
| | | | | (0.071) | (0.138) |
| Migrant share (2022) * Rural area (SA) | | | | | 1.492* |
| | | | | | (0.728) |
| Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) * Community disadvantage (SA) | | | | | −1.585** |
| | | | | | (0.518) |
| Constant | −1.040*** | −1.050*** | −1.053*** | −0.855*** | −0.769** |
| | (0.238) | (0.239) | (0.241) | (0.248) | (0.245) |
| Observations | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 |
| AIC | 3137.860 | 3139.442 | 3141.070 | 3129.388 | 3121.927 |
| BIC | 3290.811 | 3297.492 | 3304.218 | 3297.634 | 3300.370 |

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; $p$ values = $+ p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Sample restricted to Irish-born CAPI respondents. Models are weighted and also control for respondents' gender, highest educational attainment, age, perceived financial situation, principal economic status, social class, housing tenure, gender, parental status, ethnicity, wellbeing, and whether they live in Dublin. SA = Small Area level; ED = Electoral Division level; LEA = Local Electoral Area level; CONST = Parliamentary constituency level. See Appendix Table A2 for full individual-level results.

migrant share (between 2011 and 2022) also has no overall association with immigration attitudes (Model 2). Some research has found that the impact of a change in migrant share may depend on the proportion of migrants initially in the area (Newman 2013). So, in Model 3 we test the 'acculturating contexts' hypothesis to see whether the impact of change (2011–2022) in migrant share depends on the share of migrant population residing in the area in 2011 (substituting the 2022 migrant share measure with the 2011 migrant share), via an interaction term between the two. However, the interaction-term is not significant (Model 3).

We next add in community disadvantage and the urban/rural indicator (Model 4). We find that residents in communities with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage are less positive about immigration. We also see that people living in rural areas report less positivity towards immigration than urban dwellers. Lastly, we explore whether any relationship between the migrant composition of an area (share and change) and immigration attitudes may depend on other characteristics of the community. Model 5 demonstrates there is a significant, negative interaction between the change in migrant share and disadvantage, suggesting larger recent increases in the share of migrants in an area (from 2011 to 2022) have a more negative effect on immigration attitudes in more disadvantaged communities. There is also a significant, positive interaction between living in a rural (compared to urban) area and the share of migrants in the area. This suggests the migrant share in an area has a more positive impact on immigration attitudes in rural areas.[18]

Figures 1 and 2 explore these interactions in more detail. Turning first to the interaction between change in migrant share and disadvantage, Figure 1 plots the predicted marginal scores of people's positivity towards immigration, looking at the relationship between change in the share of migrants from the 5th to the 95th percentiles and people's immigration attitudes. It shows this relationship for low disadvantage areas (5th percentile) and high disadvantage areas (95th percentile). We see that in low-disadvantage areas, larger increases in the migrant share (between 2011 and 2022) are associated with somewhat more positive attitudes towards immigration. However, residents in high-disadvantage communities that experience larger increases in migrant-share (2011–2022) have much more negative views. In other words, community disadvantage appears to condition how people react to changes in the share of migrants in their communities.[19] The association between increasing migrant-share and the index of immigration attitudes in more disadvantaged areas in particular appears substantively significant in comparison to two well-established predictors of attitudes in the literature. The difference in attitudes between areas that experienced a 5 per cent reduction in migrant share and a 15 per cent increase is around 0.6 (on the index of immigration attitudes). The is larger than the difference in attitudes between individuals with primary education and those with tertiary education (0.43). It is also similar to the difference in attitudes across people's subjective financial situation (a gap of 0.64 between those who feel they are 'making ends meet' with 'great difficulty' compared to 'very easily').

Are migrants more likely to have moved to disadvantaged communities? In this sample, this is not the case – in fact the migrant share has increased most between 2011 and 2022 in areas that are least disadvantaged.[20] This is also consistent with Fahey et al. (2019), in their analysis of the full population of Ireland using 2016 Census data. They found migrants were not more likely to be living in disadvantaged

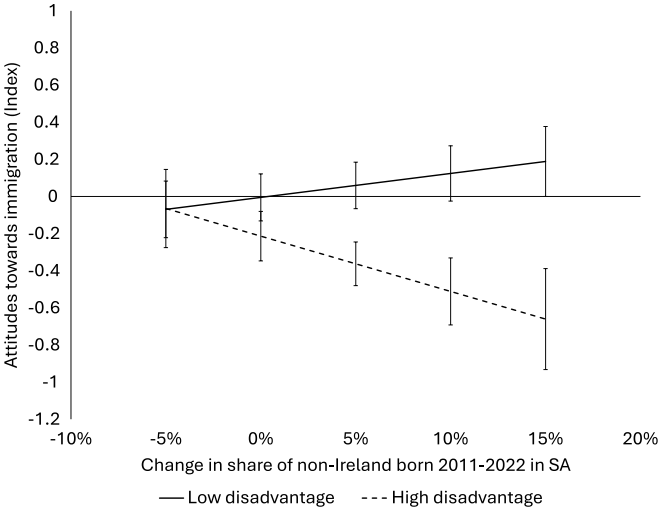


**Figure 1.** Predicted positivity towards immigration following a change in migrant share in more disadvantaged communities (dashed line) and less disadvantaged communities (solid line). Notes: based on Model 5, Table 2; 95% confidence intervals.

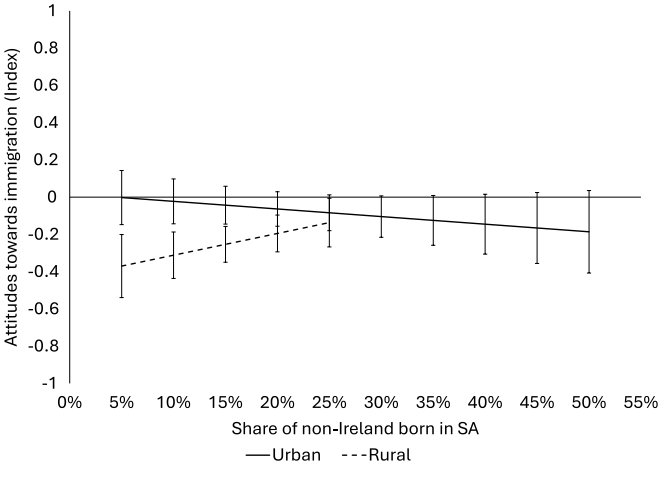


**Figure 2.** Positivity towards immigration following a change in migrant share in rural communities (dashed line) and urban areas (solid line). Notes: based on Model 5, Table 2; 95% confidence intervals.

areas in the country as a whole. What these authors did find is that migrants were more likely to be living in areas with a high concentration of rental properties.

Figure 2 also plots the predicted marginal scores of people's positivity towards immigration. However, this time it looks at the relationship between the *share* of migrants in an area (not change), from the 5th to the 95th percentile, and people's immigration attitudes. It subdivides this relationship by urban and rural status. We find that among people who live in urban areas the share of migrants has no association with their immigration attitudes. In rural areas, however, we see that residents living among a low share of migrants report more negative attitudes towards immigration compared to urban

dwellers. However, as the share of migrants increases in rural areas, people's attitudes towards immigration are increasingly positive, and in rural communities with 25 per cent migrant share there is essentially no difference in attitudes between urban and rural areas. Migrant-share therefore has a positive relationship with immigration attitudes but only in rural areas. The association between migrant-share and attitudes appears somewhat substantively significant, compared to well-known predictors of immigration attitudes in the literature. The difference in the index of attitudes between rural residents in an area composed of 5 per cent migrants and 25 per cent migrants is around 0.3 points. This is similar to the difference in attitudes between individuals with a primary education and a post-secondary education (0.313). It is also slightly larger than the difference (0.26) in attitudes between individuals who report they are 'making ends meet' 'with great difficulty' compared to 'with some difficulty' (their subjective financial situation).

### 4.2. Segregation, service pressures, and protection applicants

In this next section, we analyse how other community-level characteristics are linked with immigration attitudes. Table 3 shows the results from a three-level multilevel linear regression model (with individuals nested within Small Areas nested within Local Electoral Areas),[21] with full individual-level controls (although not shown in the table – see Appendix Table A2). Model 1 (Table 3) adds residential segregation into the model. We find that individuals living in Local Electoral Areas in which migrants and non-migrants are more unevenly spread across the area (segregated areas) report more negative attitudes towards immigration. However, Model 2 shows no significant associations between immigration attitudes and number of residences per GP (although significant at the $p < .1$ level) (Electoral Division), percentage of tenants who pay 40% or more of their disposable income on Rent (Local Electoral Area), or 2021 ratio of median (buyers) income to median purchase price (Local Electoral Area).[22] We do find a significant association between the ratio of demand and supply for primary schools and immigration attitudes (Electoral Division). However, this is positive, suggesting where there is greater demand for primary schools, attitudes are more positive. In addition, the AIC and BIC scores suggest adding these additional variables (Model 2) does not improve the model fit.[23]

In Model 3, we explore whether having more people seeking, or in receipt of, international protection in one's community is associated with residents' attitudes. We observe no association between the share of refugees from Ukraine in Local Electoral Areas and people's immigration attitudes.[24] However, we do find that the share of a Small Area that is composed of non-Ukrainian, predominantly non-European asylum seekers is positively associated with immigration attitudes (using the number (not share) of asylum seekers yields a similar relationship).[25] Interestingly, a binary measure of whether there is IP accommodation present or not in one's neighbourhood has a positive but non-significant association with people's immigration attitudes. It is instead the share (or number) of one's neighbourhood that is composed of IP applicants that is significant. It may also be the case that while a larger share of IP applicants in people's immediate neighbourhood (Small Area-level) is positively associated with immigration attitudes, the presence of IP accommodation in people's broader locality could be

**Table 3.** Association between immigrant attitudes and segregation, service pressures, and refugees from Ukraine and asylum seekers in area.

| | Model 1 Immigration positivity | Model 2 Immigration positivity | Model 3 Immigration positivity |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Community-level variables*: | | | |
| Migrant share (2022) (SA) | −0.408 | −0.425 | −0.499 |
| | (0.356) | (0.353) | (0.357) |
| Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) | −0.446 | −0.342 | −0.007 |
| | (0.402) | (0.421) | (0.453) |
| Community disadvantage (SA) | −0.071+ | −0.090* | −0.101** |
| | (0.038) | (0.04) | (0.038) |
| baseline – lives in urban area (SA) | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Lives in rural area | −0.447** | −0.449** | −0.427** |
| | (0.149) | (0.146) | (0.149) |
| Migrant share (2022) * Rural area (SA) | 1.575* | 1.494* | 1.259+ |
| | (0.696) | (0.655) | (0.657) |
| Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) * Community disadvantage (SA) | −1.447** | −1.265** | −0.991* |
| | (0.502) | (0.477) | (0.417) |
| Residential segregation (LEA) | −1.333* | −1.524* | −1.555* |
| | (0.678) | (0.642) | (0.641) |
| Ratio of demand and supply for primary schools (ED) | | 0.210* | 0.215** |
| | | (0.082) | (0.082) |
| Number of people per GP (ED) | | 0.000+ | 0.000+ |
| | | (0) | (0) |
| Percentage of Tenants who Pay 40% or More of Their Disposable Income on Rent (LEA) | | −0.01 | −0.01 |
| | | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Ratio: 2021 Median (buyers) income to median purchase price (LEA) | | 0.191 | 0.088 |
| | | (0.873) | (0.971) |
| Arrivals from Ukraine as percentage of the population (LEA) | | | 0.007 |
| | | | (0.027) |
| Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA) | | | 0.893** |
| | | | (0.297) |
| Constant | −0.433+ | −0.65 | −0.621 |
| | (0.241) | (0.409) | (0.424) |
| Observations | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 |
| AIC | 3104.056 | 3102.934 | 3102.921 |
| BIC | 3292.696 | 3311.967 | 3322.151 |

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; $p$ values = $+p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Sample restricted to Irish-born CAPI respondents. Models are weighted and also control for respondents' gender, highest educational attainment, age, perceived financial situation, principal economic status, social class, housing tenure, parental status, ethnicity, wellbeing, and whether they live in Dublin. SA = Small Area level; ED = Electoral Division level; LEA = Local Electoral Area level. See Appendix Table A2 for full individual-level results.

differently related to their attitudes. However, testing demonstrated that the share of people's Electoral Division or their Local Electoral Area composed of IP applicants has a weaker positive or non-significant relationship with people's immigration attitudes.

Potentially, community-level factors could exhibit heterogeneous relationships with immigration attitudes based on individuals' personal characteristics. A full treatment of all possible cross-level relationships is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we tested several cross-level interactions where we perceived the strongest theoretical links to be between variables. Primary school pressures may matter more for individuals with younger children in the household. Health pressures may matter more for older individuals with greater demand for such services. Housing pressures may be more salient for people who do not own their homes or are not in social housing. Migrant share/change in migrant share may matter more for more economically precarious individuals, who may experience a greater perceived threat to their resources. Lastly, migrant

share/change in migrant share may matter more for older individuals who perhaps have less experience of ethnic diversity. However, we identified little evidence of significant heterogeneity in level-2 associations with individuals' immigration attitudes by their personal (level 1) characteristics (see Supplementary Online Appendix S.1 for full results).

## 5. Discussion

This paper considers, for the first time, the role of community characteristics in shaping immigration attitudes in Ireland, a 'new immigration country', that experienced a recent rapid increase in asylum seekers and refugees in the year prior to the survey. In line with much of the literature, residents living in areas with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage report more negative attitudes towards immigration (evidence for *Hypothesis 3*) while those living in more urban areas report more positive attitudes (evidence for *Hypothesis 4*). At the same time, contrary to some studies, there is little evidence of an overall association between the immigrant composition of people's local areas and their immigration attitudes. Firstly, the share of immigrants in people's neighbourhoods, in and of itself, has neither a positive nor negative significant association with immigration attitudes (evidence against *Hypotheses H1a* or *H1b*). Secondly, there is also no evidence that a larger increase in the share of migrants between 2011 and 2022 in an area, in and of itself, is associated with more negative attitudes towards immigration, nor does it have a stronger impact in areas that initially had a low migrant share (evidence against *Hypotheses 2a and 2b*).

What we do observe, however, is that how the immigrant composition of an area is associated with people's immigration attitudes depends on other characteristics of the area (evidence for *Hypothesis 5*). Larger recent increases in the share of migrants (2011–2022) are positively related to immigration attitudes in areas with lower levels of socio-economic disadvantage but negatively related to immigration attitudes in areas with higher disadvantage. Regarding the migrant-share in an area, in urban areas, migrant-share has no association with immigration attitudes. In rural areas with a low migrant-share, immigration attitudes are more negative than among urban residents. However, an increasing migrant-share has a positive association with immigration attitudes in rural areas, and in rural communities composed of 25 per cent migrants there is essentially no difference in attitudes between urban and rural areas.

Taken together, these results provide mixed support for the theoretical framework of contact and threat as applied to Ireland. The results show no support for negative processes of threat linked to the *size* of the local migrant population. The results do find conditional support for positive processes of contact linked to a larger migrant-share but only in rural areas. This could be because urban residents have less neighbourhood-centric lives, with greater spatial mobility (e.g. more access to public transport) meaning people are more likely to encounter people from a wider spatial area than rural residents. As such, even residents of neighbourhoods with a low migrant-share in urban areas may be more familiar with ethnic diversity if such diversity exists across their wider urban region. They may also have more opportunities for intergroup contact in their wider spatial lives, such as in workplaces, social settings, their children's schools, and amenities. Rural areas, however, are generally less diverse than urban areas and residents tend to have tighter spatial lives. Accordingly, the share of migrants in their

neighbourhoods may be a much better determinant of their exposure to ethnic difference, as well as their contact opportunities. Therefore, a larger share of migrants in rural neighbourhoods may be a key driver of opportunities for contact, yielding the observed positive association. At the same time, research suggests that people with more liberal attitudes tend to move to urban areas (Maxwell 2019; Dražanová et al. 2022). Therefore, the lack of an association for migrant share in urban areas may partly be driven by some urban residents already having more positive attitudes towards immigration, and thus being unaffected by the local share of migrants.

The results also find conditional support for negative processes of threat linked to larger recent *changes* in the share of migrants in one's neighbourhood, but only in more disadvantaged areas. This suggests that whether residents perceive recent increases in the local share of migrants as a threat depends on the socio-economic status of their communities. Prior work suggests that rapid changes in the share of immigrants can stimulate perceptions of threat when residents are suddenly exposed to a 'more unfamiliar and culturally diverse social landscape', and before longer-term processes of contact have had a chance to operate (Newman 2013, 378; Kawalerowicz 2021). Research also suggests that disadvantaged environments can lead residents to view immigrants as a threat to their social and economic positions given their greater precarity in society (Oliver and Mendelberg 2000). Together, these findings suggest that threat-generating processes of disadvantaged environments can exacerbate the posited threat-generating processes of rapid changes in immigration, leading to incoming migrants being viewed as a particular threat, relative both to those experiencing migrant change in less disadvantaged areas, or those in disadvantaged areas experiencing less migrant change.

The positive association between recent increases in migrant-share and immigration attitudes in less disadvantaged areas is more of a puzzle. While it provides evidence in favour of the contact hypothesis, prior work suggests processes of contact take longer to emerge (Newman 2013; Laurence and Kim 2023). One possibility is that the type of immigrants who can move into less disadvantaged areas (e.g. higher status, professionals) have different characteristics to those who need to move into more disadvantaged areas, differentially affecting residents' perceived threat. For example, research has shown that different types of migrants may affect attitudes differently (Ha 2010; Hood and Morris 1997). An alternative possibility is that intergroup contact may emerge faster in less disadvantaged areas, which may have more amenities, such as parks, social spaces, or community groups, which lead to more opportunities for positive contact.

The paper also tested novel indicators of local-level pressures on, or scarcity of, services and whether these were associated with attitudes to immigration. These included pressure on local health services (GP access), demand for primary schools and pressures on housing supply (indicated by measures of housing affordability). In general, we found no association between these indicators and attitudes to immigration, with one exception (evidence against *Hypothesis 6*). In areas of high demand for primary school places, attitudes to immigration are more positive. This may be because the measure reflects more desirable areas to live in, where pressure on school places tends to be greater. Alternatively, this measure might be acting as a further proxy measure for level of urbanity, which we know is positively associated with immigration attitudes. These measures are also captured at varied spatial scales (from the Electoral Division to Local Election Area), which may also influence the results, as discussed below. However, these

findings on service pressures could also suggest that common narratives of negative immigration attitudes relating to pressure on services do not necessarily require scarcity in one's local community to impact immigration attitudes. Instead, both individuals experiencing local pressures but also individuals learning about them in society could be equally affected, in line with the demonstrated impact of socio-tropic concerns (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). Accordingly, the actual level of pressure may matter far less than perceived pressures.

The findings show that immigration attitudes are more negative in areas with higher levels of residential segregation (evidence in support of *Hypothesis 7*), in line with other studies showing more negative attitudes towards immigration and ethnic outgroups in more segregated areas (Kawalerowicz 2021; Laurence et al. 2019). This conforms to the posited obstacles segregated environments may impose on opportunities for positive contact between migrants and non-migrants, and how they might affect potential perceptions of the size of migrant groups or the threat they pose, undermining immigration attitudes.

Regarding the presence of people seeking/receiving international protection in an area, we observe no association between the share of refugees from Ukraine in respondents' wider Local Election Area and their immigration attitudes. This could mean that the large increase in refugees from Ukraine is not affecting people's attitudes (although it could also be a consequence of the larger spatial scale at which this variable is measured, as discussed below). However, we do observe that respondents living in Small Areas composed of a higher share (or larger number) of non-Ukrainian, predominantly non-European asylum seekers in international protection accommodation report more positive immigration attitudes (evidence in support of *Hypothesis 8b*). As outlined above, prior work has found mixed results for the presence of asylum centres on residents' attitudes (Deiss-Helbig and Reimer 2022; Lubbers, Coenders, and Scheepers 2006; Schmidt, Jacobsen, and Iglauer 2023). We find that, at least for those respondents living in the same neighbourhood as an asylum centre in Ireland, immigration attitudes tend to be more positive, in line with contact theory, suggesting that proximity may lead to contact. This appears somewhat at odds with recent high-visibility protests and arson attacks against the housing of asylum seekers in communities across Ireland. However, it may suggest that such protests do not reflect the attitudes of most residents in these communities, especially in areas where there are already asylum seeker centres. In areas without these centres, it is possible that protests occur in response to plans to house asylum seekers but that after asylum seekers are located to an area, attitudes may improve over time. This is in line with the theory that threat operates quickly to create negative attitudes, while contact takes longer to counteract this effect (Kawalerowicz 2021). The finding is also interesting given, as noted, people in Ireland are more positive towards European and Ukrainian immigration than non-European/non-Ukrainian immigration, suggesting proximity to asylum seekers could have been associated with more negative attitudes compared to Ukrainians (Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024). One possibility is that because attitudes towards asylum seekers start from a lower baseline, processes of contact with proximity is linked with greater improvements in attitudes. Some caution regarding these results is required, however, given the number of respondents in a Small Area containing accommodation for asylum seekers in the sample is low. This reflects the fact that, at the time of the

survey, there were only around 190 Small Areas that contained asylum accommodation in Ireland,[26] and the CAPI sample used in this study was a representative sample of only $n = 1{,}500$ individuals. As such, further research is required with a larger sample to strengthen confidence in this finding. Lastly, there was no consistent evidence of heterogeneity in how community characteristics are associated with immigration attitudes among different socio-demographic groups.

In spite of these insights, there are some limitations to this research. Firstly, the main limitation is that the data are cross-sectional, preventing stronger tests against endogeneity bias. For example, processes of neighbourhood selection, whereby residents more averse to immigrants may select out of areas with larger migrant populations, may bias the observed migrant-share relationships, or whereby people with more liberal attitudes move to urban areas (Maxwell 2019; Dražanová et al. 2022). Secondly, the current study focuses on the overall share of migrants in an area. However, previous research indicates that migrants from different countries of origin may have different effects on people's immigration attitudes (Mitchell 2021). Future research will therefore consider whether the share of migrants from different regions may have different associations with residents' attitudes. In addition, the data did not contain measures of intergroup contact. One explanation for the lack of an overall association between migrant-share and people's attitudes is that increasing immigration triggers processes of both contact and threat, with the former suppressing the latter, resulting in a null overall association.

Thirdly, the study sought to measure the characteristics of respondents' local environment at as small a spatial scale as possible. For indicators which draw on Irish Census data, this is the Small Area. This is also the case for presence and size of asylum seeker accommodation. However, as noted, for other indicators (e.g. share of residents spending 40 per cent of their income on rent) the data is only available at a larger spatial unit such as the Local Electoral Area. Previous research has found that in some cases, the choice of geographic level may influence findings. It may be that some of the null findings are driven by the spatial scale at which they are measured. In particular, the data capturing the presence of refugees from Ukraine in an area can only be measured at the larger, Local Electoral Area level, which could be driving the different findings of its association with immigration attitudes compared to the presence of asylum seekers (measured at the Small Area level).[27]

In addition, in relation to the novel measures of pressures on services and amenities, the variables used in this paper attempted to measure realistic threat (e.g. access to GPs, school places and housing). However, this does not necessarily capture *perceived* threat, which may not follow realistic threat. Exploring the relationship between people's *perceptions* of pressure on services in their local area and *actual* measures of pressure, such as those used in this paper, as well as the impact of both of these on immigration attitudes, could be an interesting avenue for future research. In addition, the factors we analysed did not enable us to look at perceived cultural threat, which has been found to be influential in previous research (McKay, Thomas, and Kneebone 2012; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). As the importance of cultural versus economic threat has been found to differ in different countries (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014), this would be an interesting aspect of attitudes to understand in Ireland. We also know from previous research in Ireland that people may overstate their support for immigration in a socially desirable way (Creighton, Fahey, and McGinnity 2022), particularly in face-to-face surveys (Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024). Lastly, although we tested several theoretically

salient cross-level interactions, we did not undertake an exhaustive test into whether community-level characteristics exhibit heterogeneous relationships with immigration attitudes among different groups of individuals. Furthermore, additional interrelationships between community-level characteristics could also be present e.g. increasing migrant-share may have a stronger negative association with attitudes in more segregated areas (e.g. Laurence et al. 2019). Future research will be better able to understand these potential interrelationships more fully.

Lastly, we are only able to test the study's relationships at a single point in time when the survey was conducted (April 2023). Prior research shows how the effects of local immigration can depend on the salience of immigration-related issues in the wider society (Hopkins 2010). Recent research shows significant increases in immigration salience in Ireland over the period of the survey, and as such, the current findings could be contingent on the period of analysis (Laurence, McGinnity, and Murphy 2024).

Taken together, these findings provide original insights into the role of communities, as well as new measures of community-strain (e.g. pressures on services and amenities), in shaping immigration attitudes in a novel context (Ireland) that has experienced a rapid transition from homogeneity to diversity. The findings also shed light on the role communities might be playing in understanding the recent rise in anxiety around immigration and anti-immigrant activities in Ireland. Of particular note is the contrast between the positive immigration attitudes of residents in areas that contain more asylum seekers living in international protection accommodation but the negative attitudes in disadvantaged areas that have experienced a larger recent change increase in immigration. This suggests it is less likely to be the growing proximity to increasing numbers of asylum seekers that is driving recent anxiety, but instead, the rapid changes in immigration coupled with growing economic precarity, in a wider context of high-immigration salience, that is playing a more significant role.

## Notes

1. See also Standard Eurobarometer 101 – Spring 2024.
2. The Irish Times/Ipsos B&A opinion poll – 2–6 February, 2024.
3. Burke, S. (2024) 'Anatomy of the Dublin riots: Counting the cost, one year on from night of violence' (Irish Independent, 26 November)
4. Department of Justice (2023) 'Response to parliamentary question 54620/23' (12 December)
5. Ireland was historically a source of labour migrants, rather than a destination and therefore historically experienced significantly less immigration than other Western European countries. Ireland transitioned to a country of net immigration (with more people immigrating than emigrating) only in the 1990s (although there was a period in the 1970s where this was also the case and it was also reversed for several years during the recession starting in 2008). This historic context is why we refer to Ireland as a 'new immigration' country (*see* Mac Éinrí and White 2008; De Haas, Castles, and Miller 2020).
6. Support for Immigrants' Social Rights, is measured using an item that asks individuals if they agree, agree/disagree with the following statement: 'Legally residing foreigners should be entitled to the same social security as the native-born population'. The term 'social security' is used in a broad sense to refer to government policies that promote a decent standard of living for everyone.
7. In 2023, due to intense pressure on the accommodation system for asylum seeker, not all could be offered accommodation (Potter et al. 2025).

8. The Equality survey undertook a split mode approach, where a random sample of individuals was surveyed using CATI and a random sample of individuals was surveyed using CAPI.
9. We also test whether findings differ when measuring communities' migrant characteristics and socio-economic disadvantage at larger spatial scales (Electoral Division and Local Election Area) compared to the Small Area level (see below).
10. To explore whether this approach affected our findings we also ran all our analyses using 2022 census data measured using the 2022 Small Area level and found results highly consistent with the results reported here. The only variable for which we could not replicate analysis at the 2022 Small Area level was the urban/rural identifier as the definition substantially changed across censuses. In this sensitivity analysis we therefore continued to use the 2016 measure of urban/rural location.
11. Minimum loading .63; Alpha score .77. An alternative measure of disadvantage in an area commonly used in Ireland is the HP index of disadvantage (http://trutzhaase.eu/services/hp_deprivation_index/) (Haase and Pratschke 2018). This includes similar community characteristics, but also demographic characteristics, which are not so relevant for this analysis. We tested both our own constructed index and the HP Index and the results were substantively identical. Results are available from the authors.
12. These follow the 2016 census definitions for small areas, aggregated to two categories. Urban areas are Cities, Satellite Urban Towns, Independent urban towns. Rural areas are: Rural areas with high urban influence; Rural areas with moderate urban influence and Highly rural/remote areas. See https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-urli/urbanandrurallifeinireland2019/introduction/ In the analytic sample around one third or respondents (35 per cent) live in rural areas.
13. See also Fahey et al. 2019 for an application of this measure to investigate residential patterns of migrants in Ireland using the 2016 Census.
14. This is based on a model that allocates which primary school children from an Electoral Division (ED) would go if the only considerations were school size and travel time. A comparison is made between the total number of children that would go to each school (from all EDs) to the number of places available. The figures get summarised at ED level based on the scores at the schools the children go to from that ED. Values of less than 1 imply there are more places than children wanting to go to the schools, while more than one implies more demand than supply.
15. For convenience, we refer to this group as 'refugees from Ukraine' throughout this paper.
16. Data on the numbers of Ukrainian refugees in an area are only available at the larger, Local Electoral Area-level.
17. 7 May 2023.
18. We tested a full range if interaction models between all the community-level variables in Table 2 but only the two outlined were significant, therefore the others were excluded.
19. We also tested whether measuring migrant composition, migrant change, and socio-economic disadvantage at larger spatial scales (the ED and LEA) lead to differing findings. However, both migrant composition and change remained non-significant at larger spatial scales and disadvantage was non-significant when measured at larger scales.
20. This is true regardless of the measure of disadvantaged used – the socio-economic status measure used in the analysis or the HP index of deprivation. Results from the authors are available on request.
21. Technically, Table 3 (Models 7 and 8) contains community-level measures at five different levels. Individuals nested in Small Areas nested in Electoral Districts nested in Local electoral Areas nested in constituencies. In practice however, there is very little nesting going on, with most Electoral Divisions containing only one Small Area. In addition, substituting the Local electoral Area level for the constituency level does little to affect the results. Therefore, we apply the three-level model discussed above.
22. As noted by Mohan, Nolan, and Lyons (2019), this measure captures the supply of GPs per residence and variation in this across Electoral Divisions. However, these areas may also

differ in terms of healthcare need ('demand' for healthcare) and thus not always reflect 'capacity bottlenecks' (see discussion section).

23. We also tested whether the share of a respondent's Small Area who volunteer or the turnout in a respondent's constituency mattered for immigration attitudes but found no associations.
24. To be sure, any association between share of refugees from Ukraine in the LEA and people's attitudes could be being captured in the measures of 2022 Census migrant share and change in migrant share, given around 20,000 refugees from Ukraine had arrived in Ireland by the time of the 2022 Census (3 April 2022). However, we ran models excluding Small Area census migrant composition variables but include share of refugees from Ukraine in the LEA and the association was still not significant.
25. Testing showed some evidence of a quadratic relationship between IP applicant share and immigration attitudes, with the positive association increasing more at higher shares of IP applicants. However, the low n of Small Areas (n = 25) suggests some caution is required in interpreting this finding and we therefore reported the linear association.
26. Based on the data we received from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in 2023.
27. Information on the number of refugees from Ukraine at small-area level would allow us to test this.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Ethical approval

The study uses secondary data collected by the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), Ireland (https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/bd151-survey-on-people-in-irelands-attitude-towards-diversity/). Consent to participate in the study and consent to publish based on the data was handled by DCEDIY during the data collection process (contact research@equality.gov.ie for details). No individuals are identifiable in the study.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Descriptive statistics of individual and community-level variables in analytic sample.

| INDIVIDUAL LEVEL | Categories | N of cases | Proportion |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Categorical individual-level variables* | | | |
| A. GENDER | Male | 582 | (48.1%) |
| | Female | 628 | (51.9%) |
| | 16–19 | 50 | (4.1%) |
| Age categories | 20–24 | 84 | (6.9%) |
| | 25–34 | 157 | (13.0%) |
| | 35–44 | 229 | (18.9%) |
| | 45–54 | 223 | (18.4%) |
| | 55–64 | 200 | (16.5%) |
| | 65+ | 267 | (22.1%) |
| Highest education qualifications | Primary | 77 | (6.4%) |
| | Secondary | 460 | (38.0%) |
| | Post-Secondary | 269 | (22.2%) |
| | Tertiary | 404 | (33.4%) |
| Current employment situation | In work | 654 | (54.0%) |
| | Unemployed/seeking work | 47 | (3.9%) |
| | Looking after family | 122 | (10.1%) |
| | Retired | 273 | (22.6%) |
| | LLTI/Student/Other | 114 | (9.4%) |
| Subjective social class | Working class | 587 | (48.5%) |
| | Middle class | 545 | (45.0%) |
| | Don't know | 78 | (6.4%) |
| Housing tenure | Owns | 867 | (71.7%) |
| | Social housing | 168 | (13.9%) |
| | Rent privately | 108 | (8.9%) |
| | Live rent-free/Other/Refused | 67 | (5.5%) |
| Family status | No children | 400 | (33.1%) |
| | Only children 18+ | 421 | (34.8%) |
| | Has children under 18 | 389 | (32.1%) |
| Ethnicity | White Irish | 1,202 | (99.3%) |
| | Irish Traveller | 5 | (0.4%) |
| | Any other white background | 1 | (0.1%) |
| | Other background | 2 | (0.2%) |
| Lives in Dublin | No | 912 | (75.4%) |
| | Yes | 298 | (24.6%) |

| | Mean | Min | Max | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Continuous individual-level variables* | | | | |
| Index: general attitudes towards immigration | −0.13 | −2.968 | 0.936 | 0.925 |
| Financial difficulty (Scale) | 3.672 | 1 | 6 | 1.199 |
| Subjective well-being index | 0.077 | −3.68 | 1.295 | 0.878 |
| COMMUNITY LEVEL | | | | |
| Community disadvantage (SA) | 0.11 | −1.85 | 3.89 | 0.95 |
| Migrant share (2022) (SA) | 0.18 | 0.02 | 0.63 | 0.11 |
| Migrant share (2011) (SA) | 0.16 | 0.01 | 0.72 | 0.11 |
| Change in migrant share (2011–2022) (SA) | 0.02 | −0.33 | 0.33 | 0.06 |
| Segregation (LEA) | 0.26 | 0.14 | 0.39 | 0.06 |
| Ratio of demand and supply for primary schools (ED) | 1.34 | 0.54 | 3.24 | 0.38 |
| Number of people per GP (ED) | 1343.43 | 352.00 | 5160.00 | 733.13 |
| Percentage of Tenants who Pay 40% or More of Their Disposable Income on Rent (LEA) | 19.12 | 6.50 | 30.70 | 5.36 |
| Ratio: 2021 Median (buyers) income to median purchase price (LEA) | 0.27 | 0.17 | 0.42 | 0.05 |
| Arrivals from Ukraine as percentage of the population (LEA) | 1.42 | 0.17 | 10.58 | 1.41 |
| Number of IP applicants in an area (SA) | 1.82 | 0.00 | 319.00 | 16.83 |
| Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA) | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.79 | 0.07 |
| Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA): Men | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.70 | 0.06 |
| Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA): women | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.01 |
| IP accommodation in Small Area | N | Proportion | | |
| No | 1,185 | 97.90% | | |
| Yes – IP accommodation | 25 | 2.10% | | |
| Urban | 790 | 65.30% | | |
| Rural | 420 | 34.70% | | |
| N (unweighted) Individuals | 1,210 | | | |
| N (small areas) | 503 | | | |
| N (Electoral Divisions) | 285 | | | |
| N (Local Electoral areas) | 111 | | | |

Note: CAPI sample with Irish-born only and those not missing on any covariates. Unweighted.

**Table A2.** Full model results predicting immigration attitudes.

| | Model 1 Immigration positivity | Model 2 Immigration positivity | Model 3 Immigration positivity | Model 4 Immigration positivity | Model 5 Immigration positivity | Model 6 (1) Immigration positivity | Model 7 (2) Immigration positivity | Model 8 (3) Immigration positivity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Individual-level variables* | | | | | | | | |
| baseline – male | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Female | −0.031 | −0.032 | −0.032 | −0.026 | −0.02 | −0.023 | −0.024 | −0.021 |
| | (0.054) | (0.055) | (0.054) | (0.054) | (0.054) | (0.064) | (0.064) | (0.063) |
| baseline – Aged 16–19 | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| 20–24 | 0.085 | 0.082 | 0.081 | 0.09 | 0.102 | 0.144 | 0.137 | 0.137 |
| | (0.172) | (0.172) | (0.172) | (0.17) | (0.167) | (0.144) | (0.148) | (0.149) |
| 25–34 | 0.058 | 0.057 | 0.055 | 0.069 | 0.061 | 0.098 | 0.083 | 0.078 |
| | (0.171) | (0.172) | (0.172) | (0.17) | (0.163) | (0.144) | (0.146) | (0.147) |
| 35–44 | −0.027 | −0.029 | −0.034 | −0.011 | −0.009 | 0.039 | 0.039 | 0.029 |
| | (0.179) | (0.179) | (0.181) | (0.179) | (0.173) | (0.164) | (0.168) | (0.169) |
| 45–54 | 0.119 | 0.115 | 0.11 | 0.113 | 0.125 | 0.162 | 0.158 | 0.149 |
| | (0.175) | (0.175) | (0.176) | (0.175) | (0.169) | (0.155) | (0.156) | (0.156) |
| 55–64 | 0.155 | 0.152 | 0.146 | 0.15 | 0.159 | 0.191 | 0.195 | 0.181 |
| | (0.163) | (0.163) | (0.164) | (0.162) | (0.157) | (0.157) | (0.159) | (0.157) |
| 65+ | 0.017 | 0.011 | 0.004 | 0.029 | 0.03 | 0.049 | 0.055 | 0.034 |
| | (0.186) | (0.186) | (0.187) | (0.186) | (0.181) | (0.162) | (0.168) | (0.162) |
| baseline – Primary education | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Secondary | 0.149 | 0.15 | 0.148 | 0.16 | 0.164 | 0.165 | 0.167 | 0.168 |
| | (0.138) | (0.138) | (0.137) | (0.136) | (0.133) | (0.125) | (0.12) | (0.121) |
| Post-Secondary | 0.313* | 0.316* | 0.316* | 0.320* | 0.330* | 0.319* | 0.321* | 0.319* |
| | (0.154) | (0.154) | (0.153) | (0.151) | (0.149) | (0.133) | (0.129) | (0.129) |
| Tertiary | 0.430** | 0.434** | 0.432** | 0.415** | 0.414** | 0.392** | 0.391** | 0.388** |
| | (0.154) | (0.154) | (0.153) | (0.152) | (0.149) | (0.145) | (0.142) | (0.142) |
| Baseline – In work | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Unemployed/seeking work | −0.296+ | −0.293+ | −0.298+ | −0.293+ | −0.29 | −0.271 | −0.284 | −0.283 |
| | (0.173) | (0.174) | (0.174) | (0.175) | (0.176) | (0.184) | (0.186) | (0.184) |
| Looking after family | 0.028 | 0.033 | 0.03 | 0.032 | 0.035 | 0.023 | 0.03 | 0.028 |
| | (0.101) | (0.101) | (0.102) | (0.103) | (0.102) | (0.117) | (0.118) | (0.118) |
| Retired | 0.04 | 0.044 | 0.044 | 0.024 | 0.034 | 0.073 | 0.073 | 0.076 |
| | (0.099) | (0.098) | (0.098) | (0.099) | (0.097) | (0.114) | (0.114) | (0.113) |
| LLTI/Student/Other | 0.085 | 0.084 | 0.082 | 0.083 | 0.073 | 0.086 | 0.075 | 0.075 |
| | (0.108) | (0.108) | (0.108) | (0.107) | (0.105) | (0.095) | (0.098) | (0.099) |
| Subjective financial security | 0.136*** | 0.137*** | 0.138*** | 0.123*** | 0.122*** | 0.122*** | 0.127*** | 0.129*** |
| | (0.029) | (0.029) | (0.03) | (0.03) | (0.029) | (0.028) | (0.028) | (0.027) |

(*Continued*)

**Table A2.** Continued.

| | Model 1 Immigration positivity | Model 2 Immigration positivity | Model 3 Immigration positivity | Model 4 Immigration positivity | Model 5 Immigration positivity | Model 6 (1) Immigration positivity | Model 7 (2) Immigration positivity | Model 8 (3) Immigration positivity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| baseline – Working Class | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Middle class | −0.014 | −0.015 | −0.016 | −0.027 | −0.034 | −0.027 | −0.025 | −0.025 |
| | (0.062) | (0.062) | (0.062) | (0.062) | (0.062) | (0.073) | (0.074) | (0.074) |
| Don't know | 0.081 | 0.083 | 0.084 | 0.066 | 0.058 | 0.049 | 0.057 | 0.059 |
| | (0.098) | (0.099) | (0.099) | (0.097) | (0.096) | (0.096) | (0.095) | (0.096) |
| baseline – Owns home | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Rent from local authority/housing assoc. | 0.09 | 0.092 | 0.094 | 0.163+ | 0.152 | 0.13 | 0.126 | 0.129 |
| | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.093) | (0.093) | (0.086) | (0.084) | (0.085) |
| Rent privately | 0.04 | 0.039 | 0.037 | 0.017 | 0.038 | 0.051 | 0.064 | 0.066 |
| | (0.108) | (0.108) | (0.108) | (0.107) | (0.106) | (0.1) | (0.098) | (0.099) |
| Live rent-free/Other/Refused | 0.12 | 0.119 | 0.118 | 0.125 | 0.132 | 0.115 | 0.128 | 0.131 |
| | (0.101) | (0.101) | (0.101) | (0.101) | (0.102) | (0.103) | (0.104) | (0.103) |
| baseline – no children | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Only children 18+ | −0.106 | −0.105 | −0.104 | −0.099 | −0.105 | −0.122 | −0.132 | −0.125 |
| | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.088) | (0.089) | (0.09) | (0.089) |
| Has children under 18 | 0.012 | 0.013 | 0.015 | 0.018 | 0.017 | 0.009 | 0.001 | 0.009 |
| | (0.08) | (0.08) | (0.08) | (0.079) | (0.08) | (0.074) | (0.073) | (0.073) |
| Irish Traveller | −0.94 | −0.95 | −0.966 | −0.969 | −0.956 | −0.831 | −0.827 | −0.822 |
| | (0.707) | (0.706) | (0.709) | (0.707) | (0.673) | (0.632) | (0.618) | (0.641) |
| Any other white background | 0.499* | 0.496* | 0.499* | 0.430* | 0.438* | 0.596** | 0.593** | 0.611*** |
| | (0.21) | (0.209) | (0.21) | (0.207) | (0.205) | (0.184) | (0.187) | (0.185) |
| Other background | 0.596*** | 0.593*** | 0.588*** | 0.596*** | 0.586*** | 0.518** | 0.538** | 0.529** |
| | (0.149) | (0.145) | (0.148) | (0.149) | (0.167) | (0.177) | (0.18) | (0.186) |
| Subjective wellbeing (index) | 0.080* | 0.080* | 0.080* | 0.082* | 0.080* | 0.080* | 0.080* | 0.079* |
| | (0.035) | (0.035) | (0.035) | (0.035) | (0.035) | (0.033) | (0.033) | (0.033) |
| Lives in Dublin (cf. other regions) | 0.168* | 0.176* | 0.177* | 0.062 | 0.034 | 0.077 | 0.135 | 0.138 |
| | (0.068) | (0.069) | (0.069) | (0.077) | (0.075) | (0.094) | (0.113) | (0.116) |
| *Community-level variables* | | | | | | | | |
| Migrant share (2022) (SA) | 0.272 | 0.321 | | 0.03 | −0.376 | −0.408 | −0.425 | −0.499 |
| | (0.29) | (0.306) | | (0.319) | (0.345) | (0.356) | (0.353) | (0.357) |
| Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) | | −0.322 | 0.549 | −0.248 | −0.374 | −0.446 | −0.342 | −0.007 |
| | | (0.533) | (1.145) | (0.542) | (0.475) | (0.402) | (0.421) | (0.453) |
| Migrant share (2011) (SA) | | | 0.307 | | | | | |
| | | | (0.316) | | | | | |
| Migrant share (2011) (SA) * Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) | | | −2.219 | | | | | |
| | | | (4.719) | | | | | |
| Community disadvantage (SA) | | | | −0.131*** | −0.098** | −0.071+ | −0.090* | −0.101** |
| | | | | (0.034) | (0.036) | (0.038) | (0.04) | (0.038) |

(*Continued*)

**Table A2.** Continued.

| | Model 1 Immigration positivity | Model 2 Immigration positivity | Model 3 Immigration positivity | Model 4 Immigration positivity | Model 5 Immigration positivity | Model 6 (1) Immigration positivity | Model 7 (2) Immigration positivity | Model 8 (3) Immigration positivity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| baseline – lives in urban area (SA) | | | | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. | ref. |
| Lives in rural area | | | | −0.171* | −0.399** | −0.447** | −0.449** | −0.427** |
| | | | | (0.071) | (0.138) | (0.149) | (0.146) | (0.149) |
| Migrant share (2022) * Rural area (SA) | | | | | 1.492* | 1.575* | 1.494* | 1.259+ |
| | | | | | (0.728) | (0.696) | (0.655) | (0.657) |
| Change in migrant share (2011-2022) (SA) * Community disadvantage (SA) | | | | | −1.585** | −1.447** | −1.265** | −0.991* |
| | | | | | (0.518) | (0.502) | (0.477) | (0.417) |
| Segregation (LEA) | | | | | | −1.333* | −1.524* | −1.555* |
| | | | | | | (0.678) | (0.642) | (0.641) |
| Ratio of demand and supply for primary schools (ED) | | | | | | | 0.210* | 0.215** |
| | | | | | | | (0.082) | (0.082) |
| Number of people per GP (ED) | | | | | | | 0.000+ | 0.000+ |
| | | | | | | | (0) | (0) |
| Percentage of Tenants who Pay 40% or More of Their Disposable Income on Rent (LEA) | | | | | | | −0.01 | −0.01 |
| | | | | | | | (0.01) | (0.01) |
| Ratio: 2021 Median (buyers) income to median purchase price (LEA) | | | | | | | 0.191 | 0.088 |
| | | | | | | | (0.873) | (0.971) |
| Arrivals from Ukraine as percentage of the population (LEA) | | | | | | | | 0.007 |
| | | | | | | | | (0.027) |
| Asylum seekers in IP accommodation as a percentage of population in a small area (SA) | | | | | | | | 0.893** |
| | | | | | | | | (0.297) |
| Constant | −1.040*** | −1.050*** | −1.053*** | −0.855*** | −0.769** | −0.433+ | −0.65 | −0.621 |
| | (0.238) | (0.239) | (0.241) | (0.248) | (0.245) | (0.241) | (0.409) | (0.424) |
| Observations | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 | 1210 |
| AIC | 3137.86 | 3139.442 | 3141.07 | 3129.388 | 3121.927 | 3104.056 | 3102.934 | 3102.921 |
| BIC | 3290.811 | 3297.492 | 3304.218 | 3297.634 | 3300.37 | 3292.696 | 3311.967 | 3322.151 |

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; $p$ values = $+ p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Sample restricted to Irish-born CAPI respondents. Models are weighted. SA = Small Area level; ED = Electoral Division level; LEA = Local Electoral Area level.