

The Electoral Commission

Education and Public Engagement Strategy

MARCH 2025

Nasc, the Irish word for 'link',
empowers migrants to realise
and fulfil their rights.



Nasc

Migrant & Refugee Rights

Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre

Registered Address: 34 Paul Street, Cork City, Ireland T12W14H

Phone: 021 427 3594

Email: info@nascireland.org

www.nascireland.org

CRO Number: 335227

CHY Number: CHY13752

CRA Number: 20043612

This report represents the views of the publishing organisation and does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funder. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the authors.

We'd like to acknowledge the support of the Funder, the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Scheme to Support National Organisations 2022-2025



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



The Scheme to Support National Organisations is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development

Submission to the Electoral Commission - Education and Public Engagement Strategy Consultation

03rd March 2025

Nasc, the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Electoral Commission's consultation on its Education and Public Engagement Strategy. As an organisation dedicated to supporting migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities in Ireland, we recognise the importance of inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive voter engagement strategies.

Our submission highlights key challenges that impact political participation for migrant and refugee communities and provides recommendations for improving awareness, access, and engagement in the electoral process.

1. Increasing Awareness of Voting Rights Among Migrant Communities

A significant barrier to political participation among migrants and refugees in Ireland is a lack of awareness regarding voting rights. Many migrants, including long-term residents, do not know they are eligible to vote in local elections or understand how the voting system works.

Recommendations:

- **Multilingual and Targeted Public Information Campaigns**

Electoral awareness materials should be provided in multiple languages, reflecting Ireland's diverse communities. Partnering with migrant-led organisations to develop culturally appropriate materials can enhance reach and impact. We appreciate the Electoral Commission's current efforts in distributing posters in English and Irish ahead of elections to encourage voter registration. However, we strongly recommend expanding this initiative to include key additional languages, particularly those spoken by Ireland's largest migrant communities. This would greatly improve outreach and engagement, especially for newly arrived voters. We would also recommend that expanding outreach to include accommodation centres, libraries, places of worship and community hubs.

- **Voter Registration at Citizenship Ceremonies**

Over 50,000 people received Irish citizenship between 2023 and 2024. Citizenship ceremonies present a unique opportunity to facilitate on-site voter registration. Citizenship ceremonies are held multiple times per year with up to 6,000 individuals receiving Irish citizenship on the day of each naturalisation ceremony. Voter registration booths at these ceremonies, staffed by personnel who can explain the registration process, answer questions, and assist with on-site voter registration. As an alternative to in-person registration, voting information should be included in citizenship packs to encourage new citizens to engage in the democratic process.

- **Voter Education Sessions**

It would also be helpful for digital resources and voter education materials to reinforce the important message that voting is private and confidential. Many people, particularly those from countries with different electoral practices, may be uncertain or anxious about the secrecy of

their vote. Clear and reassuring messaging that no one, including family members, candidates or the government can see how they voted would help build trust in the electoral process. This is particularly relevant for vulnerable groups, including those with experiences of coercion or political repression in their countries of origin. A focus on voter privacy would promote free and informed participation, ensuring everyone feels safe and empowered to vote according to their own preferences.

We are aware that voter education sessions are being carried out at local level throughout the country, which is a positive step toward increasing electoral participation. However, developing centralised digital resources, such as short videos explaining the PR-STV system and the voting process, which would be shared via WhatsApp and social media channels would help avoid duplication of work and ensure a consistent and accurate message is delivered nationwide. These resources would then be available at a local level when by-elections are called.

These resources would not only benefit migrant and refugee communities but also provide valuable support to the general population, particularly young voters and those unfamiliar with the electoral process. By making these resources readily available online, the Electoral Commission could amplify its impact and enhance public understanding of Ireland's unique voting system.

2. Ensuring Accessibility in Voter Registration and Participation

Migrants, asylum seekers, and ethnic minorities often are unaware of how to register to vote. We commend the significant progress made in Ireland's voter registration system, particularly the introduction of the online registration portal at checktheregister.ie. The ability to register to vote, update personal information, and change address online represents a major step forward in accessibility and convenience.

Our experience running voter registration drives in 2023-2024 compared to previous years clearly demonstrated the positive impact of this new system. The streamlined process reduced barriers to registration, enabling more people, particularly those from migrant and refugee communities, to engage in the democratic process with greater ease and confidence.

- **Data Privacy and Protection Concerns**

In our experience of registering voters, it became clear that people living in congregated accommodation settings were concerned about their personal details being made available on the edited electoral register, which can be accessed for commercial purposes.

Recent protests outside IPAS centres for asylum seekers and UCTAT centres for beneficiaries of temporary protection have understandably raised safety concerns among residents of these centres. Some individuals we spoke with feared that the publication of their details, including names and addresses, could expose them to harassment or danger from protestors and this acted as a deterrent to them registering to vote.

We note the high degree of privacy afforded under [Section 26 of the International Protection Act 2015](#), which explicitly prohibits the public identification of asylum seekers without their consent. This legal protection is crucial in ensuring the safety and dignity of individuals seeking international protection in Ireland.

However, if an individual's name and place of residence at a centre for asylum seekers is published, it could inadvertently breach these protections, potentially exposing them to risk and raising serious questions about compatibility with Section 26.

To safeguard individuals' privacy and safety, we recommend implementing measures that allow anonymous voter registration for residents of these centres. This could include clear guidance on how to register anonymously and greater collaboration with organisations working directly with asylum seekers and beneficiaries of temporary protection to ensure that privacy concerns are fully addressed.

We recommend switching to an opt-in model for greater privacy, particularly for vulnerable groups such as survivors of domestic violence and international protection applicants.

3. Annual Voter Registration Awareness Week

To increase awareness and engagement with the voter registration process, we suggest the introduction of an annual Voter Registration Week. Often, voter registration is only widely discussed in the immediate run-up to elections, which can lead to missed opportunities for eligible voters to register or update their details.

An annual Voter Registration Week could provide a dedicated timeframe for promoting the importance of being electorally prepared year-round. This initiative could include:

- Nationwide campaigns in multiple languages to reach diverse communities, including migrants, refugees, and young voters.
- Targeted digital campaigns through social media, websites, and digital advertising to encourage people to check and update their registration status.
- Workshops and information sessions hosted by local authorities and community organisations to guide individuals through the registration process.
-

By promoting voter registration as an ongoing civic responsibility, rather than a last-minute task, this initiative could help ensure that more people are registered, their details are up to date, and they are ready to participate when elections occur, as when general elections are called with short notice.

Conclusion

Nasc supports an electoral education strategy that is inclusive, accessible, and tailored to the needs of Ireland's diverse population. We encourage the Electoral Commission to adopt a community-centred approach that actively involves migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities in shaping Ireland's democratic future.