



**HDI Rank** 5<sup>th</sup>/182. **Public debt** 44.2% of GDP. **Income/person** \$60,510 (128% of USA).

## Politics

Ireland was under British rule for over 700 years. In 1921, Ireland was partitioned between the 26 counties that were Catholic and Celtic, and the 6 counties in Northern Ireland that were predominantly Protestant Scots Anglo-Saxon. The south became independent in 1922 and then a parliamentary republic in 1949. The violence and strife of the past continues to fade as Ireland's political scene has moved from being a parochial backwater on the edge of Europe to a dynamic force in the EU. The last generation has borne witness to remarkable progress and change in the political sphere.

## Religion

There is freedom of religion. The Catholic Church has no official link with the state. Though it had a massive influence over everyday life in the past, this influence is waning rapidly.

# Ireland

## Republic of Ireland

### Europe

## Geography

**Area** 70,285 sq km. Comprises 80% of the island of Ireland. Northern Ireland is a constituent part of the United Kingdom.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	4,589,002	1.85%
2020	5,145,254	1.04%
2030	5,573,182	0.75%

Millions of Irish have emigrated throughout the English-speaking world, especially to the USA and the UK.

**Capital** Dublin 1,098,636. **Urbanites** 62%. **Pop under 15 yrs** 21%. **Life expectancy** 79.7 yrs.

## Peoples

**Anglo-Celtic** 91.2%. Irish 88.2%; British 3.0%.

**Other** 9.8%. Polish 2.3%; African 0.9%; Asian 1.5%; North American 0.5%; increasing numbers of other immigrant groups, including Eastern European, Latino, Asian, African. Many of these groups are very difficult to enumerate due to their unofficial status and transient nature.

**Literacy** 99%. **Official languages** Irish, English. Irish spoken as a first language by less than 4% of the population; 40% of the Irish population can speak Irish. There are no monolingual Irish speakers. **All languages** 5. **Languages with Scripture** 2Bi 1NT 1por.

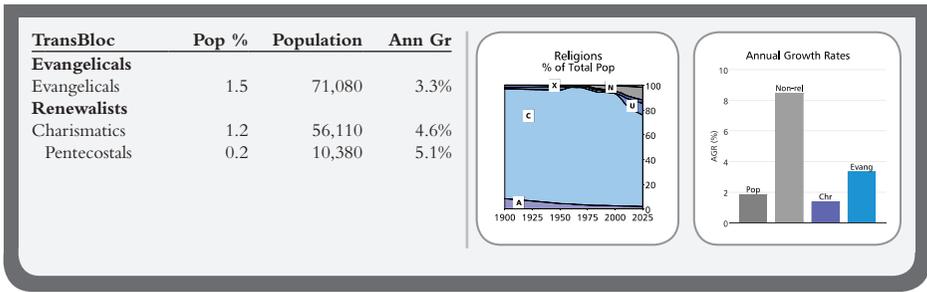
## Economy

High-tech industry and services replaced dairy farming and tourism as most important. EU membership in 1973; an economic boom since the 1990s has transformed the country, with one of Europe's most successful growth rates. The juxtaposition of the growth boom ending, of house prices dropping and of the financial crisis of 2008-09 caused the economy to significantly contract. But for some, a very uneven spread of the new affluence makes life more difficult.

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Christian	91.72	4,209,033	1.4%
Non-religious	7.26	333,162	8.5%
Muslim	0.87	39,924	6.4%
Hindu	0.09	4,130	10.5%
Jewish	0.04	1,836	1.9%
Chinese	0.01	459	1.9%
Buddhist	0.01	459	1.9%

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	36	0.91	42,000	2.2%
Independent	17	0.34	16,000	5.1%
Anglican	1	2.20	101,000	1.2%
Catholic	1	81.72	3,750,000	0.6%
Orthodox	3	0.60	28,000	6.7%
Marginal	7	0.30	14,000	1.5%
Unaffiliated		5.58	256,000	17.2%

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Catholic Church	C	1,616	2,586,207	3,750,000
Ch of Ireland	A	563	53,492	101,100
Orthodox Church	O	23	13,800	27,600
Presbyterian Ch in I	P	91	7,712	12,030
Methodist Church	P	65	6,908	10,500
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	113	5,700	10,374
Independent churches	I	85	4,945	9,000
Redeemed Chr Ch	I	72	2,160	4,320
Lutheran Church	P	7	2,406	3,200
Latter-day Saints(Mormon)	M	15	2,021	2,850
Assemblies of God	P	18	1,265	2,150
Christian Brethren	P	19	1,330	1,902
Ch of God (Cleveland)	P	8	1,520	1,900
New Churches	I	28	1,100	1,837
Other denominations[39]		153	7,495	13,298
<b>Total Christians[65]</b>		<b>2,868</b>	<b>2,696,5413</b>	<b>950,161</b>



## Answers to Prayer

- 1 The move of the Holy Spirit** in the last decades changed Ireland from rigid Catholicism to a spiritually dynamic land where new fellowships are rapidly forming. Many of these are Pentecostal or charismatic in orientation, and a large number are either formed of immigrants or are multi-ethnic in composition. These immigrant groups bring new life and passion to the traditional denominations, which were previously in decline.
- 2 Effective inter-governmental cooperation**, beginning in the late 1990s, strengthened hope for lasting peace and for democratic solutions to Northern Ireland's problems. Although not all issues are definitively resolved, the change on the island is quite remarkable and a true answer to prayer.

## Challenges for Prayer

- 1 Transformation has rapidly overtaken Ireland**, led by the economic boost of EU membership, heavy foreign investment in a well-educated, English-speaking workforce, and increased contact with Europe and the world. But this new affluence has benefitted only some, and many were left downcast from the effects of the recession. This shift has also radically affected immigration/demographics, spirituality and culture. Pray that amid the change, the nation's leadership might also focus on protecting the vulnerable, providing for the needy and building a lasting infrastructure and legacy that will be a blessing to all.
- 2 Ireland's ancient Celtic Church** strongly shaped society 1,500 years ago through its dynamic and holistic spirituality. Then followed centuries of suffering, oppression, violence and bloodshed at the hands of the Vikings and the British. Sadly, the long conflict has, in the eyes of the world, been portrayed as religious in origin. Pray that:
  - a) Irish society might be made whole.** Progress is made on this front with violence reduced and formerly opposing parties now cooperating on certain issues. The political future of Northern Ireland remains a sensitive issue, but healing, reconciliation and forgiveness can occur nevertheless.
  - b) All Christians might work toward shared Kingdom-goals.** Encouraging signs are apparent; the bipolar nature of Irish Christianity (Catholic versus Protestant) is an increasingly outdated understanding of Irish spirituality, as outside groups arrive and post-denominational churches arise.
- 3 The Catholic Church** was, for centuries, the preserver and defender of the Irish. Catalyzed by secularism, the rapid onset of modernity and a series of high-profile scandals and cover-ups in the priesthood, the nation is rapidly losing the deep Catholic sensibilities that once tied it together. Once an exporter of trained priests, the Catholic Church today ordains few. Weekly church attendance, once 85% nationally, is now less than 50%, and as low as 5% in parts of Dublin – and there are more non-religious Irish than ever before. Despite this, there is a vibrant charismatic renewal movement within the Catholic Church and unprecedented collaboration with other expressions of the Christian faith. Pray for the Irish nation to rediscover its ancient heritage of deep and profound faith in Christ.
- 4 The sex abuse scandals that rocked the Catholic Church** devastated the nation's confidence in what was once a deeply trusted institution. Possibly the only things more

damaging than this tragic and sinful abuse are the cover-ups and collusion that occurred after these incidents came to the knowledge of Church leaders. Ireland's Catholic faith was already on a downward trajectory; these scandals may have thrust it into a death spiral. Pray that true repentance, forgiveness and, where possible, restoration might occur on the part of those involved, and that this may lead to purification and redemption of Catholicism in Ireland.

**5 Immigration sees a “new Ireland” emerge**, complete with radical change in ethnic, cultural and spiritual spheres. The pastoral Celtic image of days past has given way to a context where 90% of population growth is from immigration, and where foreign religions and denominations thrive. Ireland willingly adopts these new arrivals, who in turn bring cultural diversity and spiritual passion. Pray for those who do not know Christ or who come from other religious backgrounds, that Ireland may be the land where they meet the Saviour.

**6 Evangelicals are experiencing sustained growth**, especially among charismatic and Pentecostal groups. The immigration surge contributes to this, with around one-third of evangelicals coming from non-Irish ethnicities. Pray for:

**a) Unity amid the new diversity.** The recently formed Evangelical Alliance in Ireland will be a major help in this area, drawing believers together from across denominational (and racial) lines. Anglicans (Church of Ireland), traditional Protestants and newer immigrant or multi-ethnic Independent and/or charismatic fellowships can all benefit from shared vision and cooperation.

**b) Continued growth.** Ireland still has the lowest percentage of evangelicals of any English-speaking nation, but they have shifted from a huddled and marginalized minority to a confident and dynamic movement. Some Christian leaders speak of a 20/20 vision, wherein 20% of Ireland's population has a personal relationship with Christ by the year 2020.

**c) Good Bible-trained leadership** to be raised up. The Irish Bible Institute launched in 2000 as a merger of two Bible colleges and subsequently merged with the Global University-based ministry of the **AoG**.

**d) The further development of holistic ministry** by evangelicals. This already includes helping the unemployed find work, assisting those suffering with AIDS and reaching out to the urban poor, especially children. Urban Soul and Serve the City focus on blessing neighbours through community service and acts of kindness. Pray that evangelicals might be salt and light in their communities and demonstrate the whole gospel by word and by deed.

**7 Pray for young people.** Ireland has a young population by European standards, with 21% under age 15. Their spiritual need is underlined by the rapid increase of serious social issues: alcoholism, suicide, broken families, alternative lifestyles and post-Christian attitudes. Many are open to the gospel when it is presented and expressed in a new way. Ministry in schools and Christian camps is run by Scripture Union, **CEF** (67 full-time workers), the Faith Mission, **IFES** and others. Ireland also hosts increasing numbers of international students. Pray for many young people to have life-changing encounters with Christ.

**8 Significant ministry challenges:**

**a) The older generation**, many of whom are entrenched in rigid traditional mentalities about religion, faith and culture. Many are rural and Irish-speaking. Relational, patient interaction is required to have an impact on them. The Irish Evangelistic Band was formed in 1936 to reach such people.

**b) Muslim numbers** are increasing faster than evangelicals. They are an ethnically diverse immigrant population, poised to continue rapid growth. Pray for Irish believers to reach out to them in friendship and Christian love.

**c) Travellers (Gypsies)**, numbering 25,000 and growing, have been in Ireland for centuries, and they spread from here to elsewhere. They tend to be poor, illiterate and with the lowest life expectancy of any group in Ireland. Little has been done specifically to reach them.

**9 Missionaries now work** in all 26 counties, but they are mostly focused on the Dublin area. **GEM** is instrumental in leadership training and church planting, with 16 full-time workers. Other significant missions include **AoG**, **OM**, **TEAM**, **IMB**, **UFM** and Christian Associates. Pray for their ability to minister ably, for new congregations to be planted and for long-term investment in indigenous churches and leaders.

**10** Ireland has a long tradition of sending missionaries, from the *peregrini* of the early Celtic Church onward. But now the number of Catholic missionaries is rapidly declining as is the number of traditional Protestant missionaries, though to a lesser degree. The new churches recognize the need for reaching the unevangelized in their midst and in the wider world. Pray for the release, training and funding of more Irish missionaries and leaders by evangelical churches and fellowships.