

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of Ireland

CAPITAL: Dublin

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Unitary Multiparty Republic

AREA: 70,282 Sq Km (27,136 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION 3,640,600



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Ireland is located on an island in the eastern part of the North Atlantic Ocean and on the western fringe of Europe. It is bound by Northern Ireland to the northeast, the Irish Sea to the east, the St. Georges Channel to the southeast and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The country consists of an undulating central limestone plateau which is almost completely surrounded by coastal highlands. The central lowland plain is characterized by many lakes and scattered low ridges. The Mourne and Wicklow Mountains in the east and Macgillycuddy's Reek in the southwest are the principal mountain ranges. The rivers of Ireland cross the central lowlands and the principal ones include the Shannon, Boyne, Barrow, Slaney, Bann, Lagan, Foyle, Erne, Moy and Corib. Major Cities (pop. est.); Dublin 477,700, Cork 127,000, Limerick 52,000, Galway 50,800, Waterford 40,300 (1991). Land Use; forested 5%, pastures 68%, agricultural-cultivated 13%, other 14% (1992).

CLIMATE: Ireland has a temperate climate which is influenced by the North Atlantic Drift and characterized by mild, moist and changeable conditions. Rainfall is heaviest in the west where it can exceed 3,000 mm (120 inches) per annum while 60% of the country has an average annual precipitation between 762 mm and 1,270 mm (30 and 50 inches). Extremes in temperatures are uncommon, although the weather can be changeable as a result of temperate depressions. Average temperature ranges are from 4 to 7 degrees Celsius (39 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit) in January or February to 14 to 16 degrees Celsius (57 to 61 degrees Fahrenheit) in July or August.

PEOPLE: The Irish are of Celtic origin with an admixture of Norse, French, Norman and English. More than 94% of the population are of Irish nationality.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 50 persons per sq km (129 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 57.1% urban, 42.9% rural (1990). Sex Distribution; 49.7% male, 50.3% female (1991). Life Expectancy at Birth; 71.0 years male, 76.7 years female (1987). Age Breakdown; 29% under 15, 25% 15 to 29, 19% 30 to 44, 13% 45 to 59, 10% 60 to 74, 4% 75 and over (1986). Birth Rate; 14.5 per 1,000 (1992). Death Rate; 8.7 per 1,000 (1992). Increase Rate; 5.8 per 1,000 (1992). Infant Mortality Rate; 9.1 per 1,000 live births (1991).

RELIGIONS: Mostly Christians with 93% of the population Roman Catholic while 3% are from the Church of Ireland and less than 1% are Presbyterian.

LANGUAGES: The official languages are English and Irish or Gaelic. English is understood by 100% of the population while up to 80% of the population can speak Gaelic, depending on the region.

EDUCATION: Aged 25 or over and having attained: primary 52.3%, secondary 23.3%, higher 24.4% (1981). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over virtually 100% (1987).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: In 1949 Ireland declared itself a republic and left the Commonwealth. In 1957 Eamonn de Valera, after serving as Prime Minister between 1951 to 1954 and 1957 to 1959, became President until his death in 1973. During the 1960's widespread violence broke out between Protestant and Catholics in Northern Ireland, in which IRA members played a leading role in the fighting. In 1972 a referendum approved the deletion of a "special position" the Catholic Church held from the 1937 constitution. In 1973 Ireland became a member of the European Community (EC) and in July 1976 a State of Emergency was declared when the British ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart-Biggs was murdered. As a result anti-terrorist laws were passed so that IRA members could be severely punished. In 1979 Admiral Earl Mountbatten was assassinated and 18 British soldiers were also killed on the same day by the IRA. During 1980 to 1982 attempts were made to establish a joint governmental power sharing system in Northern Ireland, although they were rebuffed by both religious divides. In 1985 Ireland's Premier Garret Fitzgerald and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, signed an agreement known as the Hillsborough Accord that established an advisory council for Northern Ireland. The IRA has continued to stage bombings and other terrorist acts mainly in Northern Ireland but also in England. In 1990 Mary Robinson, a constitutional lawyer, was elected as Ireland's first woman President. In May 1991 an ITV program alleged malpractice and fraud in the labeling and marketing of Irish beef. In response the government setup a full judicial tribunal on Sept. 30, 1991 to investigate the claims. In June 1991 negotiations between all parties were undertaken in the attempt to assimilate the Irish government into Northern Ireland's politics and to transfer power to Belfast after 17 years of direct rule from London. In Dec. 1991 Prime Minister Charles Haughey and his British counterpart John Major agreed to hold regular twice-yearly summits. In 1991 the chairman and senior executives of the Irish Sugar Company and the chairman of Telecom Eireann were implicated in financial scandals through conflict of interest deals and forced to resign. Also during the year the Brooke Initiative in Northern Ireland, a response to Northern Unionists and an alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, failed despite government support. In Feb. 1992 the leader of the ruling Fianna Fail party, Charles Haughey, was forced to resign following allegations that he was involved in the tapping of two political journalists phone lines in 1982 combined with a series of business scandals also link to him. Albert Reynolds, a former finance minister, was elected to succeed

Haughey as Prime Minister and formed a coalition government with the Progressive Democrats, then upon his appointment quickly sacked 8 of the 12 serving Fianna Fail ministers. Later the Progressive Democrats withdrew their support of the coalition after Reynolds wouldn't apologize to the Progressive Democrat leader, Des O'Malley, following accusations that he acted in a "reckless, irresponsible and dishonest" manner in his testimony on Ireland's beef industry. On June 18, 1992 a referendum on the Maastricht Treaty on closer European political and economic union resulted in a 68% yes vote. On Nov. 5, 1992 Prime Minister Reynolds failed to survive a vote of no confidence, following which elections were set for Nov. 25, 1992 that resulted in Reynolds attempting to form a Fianna Fail-Labor coalition government. On the same day as the elections three referenda were to be held on abortion following the case of a 14 year old pregnant rape victim was refused permission by the High Court to travel to England for an abortion. The case was later overturned by the Supreme Court. On Jan. 12, 1993 following a seven-week delay the Fianna Fail party reconciled differences and formed a coalition government with the Labor Party with Reynolds re-elected as Prime Minister. By the end of Jan. 1993 the newly formed government devaluated the Irish Pound by 10% to protect from further speculative devaluation in the already worsening economic conditions. In May 1993 the Pres. Robinson made the first-ever courtesy call by the Irish head of state on a British monarch by meeting with Queen Elizabeth II. In June 1993 former EU commissioner, Peter Sutherland was appointed as director general of the GATT while in August 1993 with the collapse of the European exchange rate mechanism the government was forced to revise its financial targets. Also in 1993 the leader of the Social Democratic and Labor Party, John Hume, in the face of stalled inter party discussions on Northern Ireland met with Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, and held talks on an agreement that would entail the cessation of violence from the IRA in return for Sinn Fein's involvement in all-party talks.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Euro divided into 100 cents.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$44,906,000,000 (1992). Public Debt; USD \$41,603,000,000 (1993). Imports; Ir Pounds 14,795,700,000 (1993). Exports; Ir Pounds 19,671,000,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; USD \$1,639,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; Ir Pounds 5,563,000,000 (1993). Economically Active Population; 1,376,000 or 39.1% of total population (1993). Unemployed; 15.5% (1991).

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are other EU countries including France, the UK and Germany.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Barytes, Cereals, Copper, Dolomite, Fish, Gypsum, Lead, Limestone, Livestock, Natural Gas, Peat, Potatoes, Silver, Sugar Beets, Vegetables, Zinc.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Beverages, Chemicals and Fertilizers, Clothing,

Construction, Electronics and Data Processing, Food Processing, Machinery, Pharmaceuticals, Textiles, Tourism.

MAIN EXPORTS: Chemicals, Computer Equipment, Dairy Produce, Instruments, Livestock, Machinery, Meat, Textile Yarns and Fabrics.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; route length 2,814 km (1,749 mi) (1989), passenger-km 1,140,000,000 (708,000,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 516,000,000 (353,408,000 short ton-mi) (1989). Roads; length 92,303 km (57,354 mi) (1989). Vehicles; cars 773,396 (1989), trucks and buses 133,854 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 177 (1990), deadweight tonnage 188,348 (1990). Air Transport; passenger-km 4,296,000,000 (2,669,000,000 passenger-mi) (1989), cargo ton-km 120,516,000 (82,541,000 short ton-mi) (1989).

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 8 with a total circulation of 652,350 (1992). Radio; receivers 2,150,000 (1994). Television; receivers 1,000,000 (1993). Telephones; units 1,170,000 (1993).

MILITARY: 13,000 (1994) total active duty personnel with 86.1% army, 7.7% navy and 6.2% air force while military expenditure accounts for 1.3% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).