

Information and Resources for Rural Community and Voluntary Groups

compiled by

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“I once told my daughter that what keeps the Earth turning are the thousands of immigrants walking to new destinations everyday, pushing the planet around and around with their millions of footsteps”

Anonymous

“Migration is the mother of progress and invention.....Our world today is shaped by the industry of immigrants”

Peter Sutherland, Special Representative for Migration to the UN Secretary General

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About Irish Rural Link

IRL is a non-profit organisation, which represents rural community groups and associations at a national and international level. The group, which was formed in 1991, has grown significantly and now directly represents over 250 community groups with a combined membership of 10,000.

We have been extremely successful in influencing decisions which affect rural communities. Most recently, IRL has focused on a number of distinct areas of concern including rural services, social inclusion, rural development and transport. We represent rural communities at a number of Irish social policy fora. We also provide policy, organisational and funding advice and training to our membership organisations.

From its inception Irish Rural Link has sought to highlight the plight of the most vulnerable in rural Irish society and support our members in tackling that disadvantage in their own communities. Our members over the years have run support programmes aimed at vulnerable or disadvantaged groups in their own communities. Many of our members would have run support programmes aimed at, for example, unemployed people, women, children, elderly people, low-skilled youths and adults, travellers.

Irish Rural Link is the only national organisation with a rural anti-poverty focus.

About Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) is an independent, progressive organisation committed to funding radical change towards a better world. The JRCT makes grants to individuals and to projects seeking the creation of a peaceful world, political equality and social justice.

JRCT's Ireland programme aims to fund work which will support the ongoing development of a just and peaceful society in the island of Ireland:

- enhancing civil liberties and human rights;
- encouraging co-operation across religious, racial and political divides;
- strengthening civil society.

Preface: Why this Resource?

Large numbers of non-Irish nationals have moved to rural Ireland over the past decade¹ and despite the deterioration of the national and global economy many non-Irish nationals intend to remain in Ireland, illustrating the multi-faceted nature of migration today. Irish research, policy and media comment has paid very little attention to the experiences of newcomers in rural areas and to the experiences of rural communities who have received them. Similarly, discussions on rural development and rural social exclusion have to date paid little attention to the presence of new minority communities who are now living in rural Ireland. Therefore, while there are lots of Irish policy documents and much academic literature on the relationship between social exclusion and rurality, peripherality, distance from services, etc² and there is a burgeoning literature on Ireland's recent immigration experience³, there has, to date, been very little attention paid to how these issues intersect.

This lack of engagement with the links between the experience of new minority communities in rural areas and the literature on social exclusion in rural areas is surprising given that a number of local or sector specific reports have drawn attention to the potential vulnerability of members of new minority communities in rural contexts⁴ and because international literature suggests that rural communities, and in particular less affluent rural communities, often struggle to make a success of integration⁵.

¹ According to the Census 06 figures the percentage of 'non-Irish' people in the state is 10.1%, in aggregate town areas it is 12.8% and in aggregate rural (settlements below 1500) it is 6.1%. However, many small rural towns the figure is well above the national average. The percentage of 'non-Irish' in Ballinrobe is 29.5%, in Gort it is 43.8% in Ballina (North Tipperary) it is 23.8% in Clones it is 32.1% and in Virginia it is 23.1%

² See for example, The National Economic and Council, (1994) *New Approaches to Rural Development*, Commins, P (2004) 'Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas: Characteristics, Processes and Research Issues' *Sociologia Ruralis*, Volume 44 No. 1 or Walsh, K and Haase, T. (2007) *Measuring Rural Deprivation Literature Review and Issues Arising: A Report to the Rural Development Advisory Committee*

³ Gertrude Cotter of Integration Ireland does at least acknowledge this gap in the literature on Ireland's immigration experience. See, Integration Ireland (Cotter, G) (2004) 'A Guide to Published Research on Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Immigrants in Ireland'.

⁴ The absence of research on the intersection of rural studies and ethnic and minority studies is evident in many countries according to Hoggart et al. See, Hoggart, K. et al (1995) *Rural Europe: Identity and Change* Arnold pp.223- 225

⁵ *Our Shared Future*, 2007, Commission on Integration and Cohesion
http://www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/~media/assets/www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/our_shared_future%20pdf.ashx

Earlier research conducted by Irish Rural Link highlighted the reasons why a focus on rural migration and integration issues was necessary:

- Ireland has a highly dispersed settlement pattern of immigrants when compared with that of other European countries. Immigrants are not concentrated solely in Dublin but are living and working in towns and villages all over Ireland. The 2006 census indicates that 14.4% of Latvians here are living in rural areas, 12.4% of Polish migrants and 9.7% of people of African origin are also in rural areas.⁶
- The focus of national media and often government policy in relation to migration tends to be on the impact of this change on our capital and the growing commuter belt around the city.
- There are particular challenges to integration in rural areas facing both immigrants and the 'host' community. This may be connected to a struggle to maintain services locally, public transport issues, centralisation of public services and difficulties getting accurate information on rights and entitlements.
- Many of the non-governmental organisations established to work with new minority communities are focused on our main cities. There is an evident gap in support to smaller community and volunteer-led groups around Ireland.
- Research in the UK and elsewhere indicates that integration has been a struggle in geographic areas which have a limited history of immigration and cultural diversity.

While the design of integration strategies by Government Departments provides an important framework for national policy development in key areas such as health, education, employment and justice, integration also needs to be resourced and supported at the local level.

This means that the role of community organisations at the frontline of Integration and Intercultural type activities on a daily basis is recognised and valued and that groups are given the appropriate resources and support necessary to continue what they are doing.

⁶ Central Statistics Office defines a "rural area" as that with a population of less than 1500. However IRL has member groups from larger towns and this study will be available to all members.

Irish Rural Link wants to make a contribution to this process by supporting all rural community and voluntary groups to look at ways of reaching out to newcomers from all nationalities in their community.

With some of the practical suggestions in this study, community groups and individual volunteers can inform themselves of how this may best be done in their area, in consultation with all those who are stakeholders in a vibrant, evolving and diverse Ireland.

Research conducted by Irish Rural Link found that the vast majority of rural community groups were involved in providing support for new minority communities and / or promoting integration in their local area. It also found that very few rural community groups had been provided with relevant training, support material or an opportunity to learn from other rural communities who had developed successful programmes to support new minority communities or promote integration.

Despite the economic downturn and the resulting departure of both Irish and non-Irish nationals, the experiences, difficulties and opportunities outlined here remain valid and we are confident that this study will provide rural communities with the information and basic tools to plan local strategies to support new minority communities or promote integration in the future. A training programme, aimed at staff and volunteers of rural community and voluntary groups, will be developed by Irish Rural Link. Individuals of groups interested in this training should contact Irish Rural Link to find out when training will be provided in their area.

This study is divided into three sections:

Section One gives an overview of the context and evolution of immigration to Ireland over the past decade.

Section Two looks at how diversity can be managed at a societal and community level and discusses some of the challenges to managing diversity in rural areas

Section Three outlines some case studies & looks at opportunities for rural community groups who may be wondering how they can be effective in their own locality.

Section One: Context and evolution of immigration to Ireland over the past decade.

This section gives a brief overview of the changing patterns of migration in Ireland over the past decade. It summaries the policy and institutional changes which have taken place in response to the arrival of large numbers of non-Irish nationals during those years and explains key terminology.

Changing Patterns of Migration

Migration is a global phenomenon and has been happening since the beginning of time. Sometimes the choice to leave a home country is voluntary and it is intended to be a temporary event by people with a sense of adventure who wish to travel.

Often it is coercive - an economic imperative to find work that is not available in the home country. As a result of political turmoil and natural disasters people become displaced and may have to seek refuge elsewhere.

Where populations are falling and labour markets contracting, governments can proactively seek migrants from overseas to fill employment vacancies and improve an older population demographic. This has been the case in Canada and Australia since the 1950's where governments have designed resettlement packages to increase populations. The trend globally is for movement from poorer countries with high birth rates to wealthier countries with much lower birth rates.

Prior to the 1990's few immigrants came to Ireland who were not of either Irish or English descent. Although there had been some very modest inward migration of refugees, substantial immigration from outside the English speaking world is very recent.

The strong improvement in national prosperity in the early 1990's led to a return of people who had left Ireland during tougher economic times, while the possible increase in emigration as Ireland deals with the impacts of a global economic downturn only confirms the Integration statement 'Migration Nation' in March 2008 from the Office of the Minister for Integration which states;

“Irish life as we know it from our history and as a people has been very much defined by migration....in purely historical terms, it is not an exaggeration to state that the Irish identity is as much a product of those who left our shores as those who stayed at home” .

Conor Lenihan, Minister for Integration, 2008

The statement goes on to suggest that this historical experience has given Ireland a unique moral, intellectual and practical capability to adapt to the experience of inward migration. There are four priority areas identified for future funding;

- ❑ Faith Based Organisations
- ❑ Local Authorities
- ❑ Sporting Organisations
- ❑ Membership Organisations (including political parties)

Between 1995 and 2004 approximately 218,000 Irish-born nationals plus their families returned to live in Ireland. Since the accession of countries from Eastern Europe to the European Union in May 2004 there has been continued inward migration. It is estimated that between May 2004 and 2006, 206,145 people from accession countries applied for personal public service numbers (PPSN) here⁷. There has also been an increase in non-EU immigration (sometimes known as third country nationals) with applications from people for work permits, asylum seekers and international students.

Table 1: Applications for Asylum in Ireland, 1992-2007			
Year	Number	Year	Number
1992	39	2000	10,938
1993	91	2001	10,325
1994	362	2002	11,634
1995	424	2003	7,900
1996	1,179	2004	4,766
1997	3,883	2005	4,323
1998	4,626	2006	4,314
1999	7,724	2007	3,985
Source: Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner Monthly Statistics (May, 2008).			

⁷ Foreign National PPSN Allocations & Employment 2002-2006, CSO December, 2007

The table indicates the changing pattern in applications between 1992 and 2007. The applications for asylum in Ireland peaked at 11,634 in 2002. There has been a sustained fall in the number of applications since then.

In 2007, the Refugee Applications Commissioner received 3,985 applications, the lowest number since 1997. The top six applicant countries in 2007 were Iraq, Nigeria, China, Pakistan, Georgia and Sudan. In 2006, of all applications for asylum in EU countries only 2% were made in Ireland.

Hence despite the perception that Ireland has been 'swamped' the number of actual approvals of asylum applications is quite small. Since 2000 from a total of 48,632 applications, only 6,814 have been granted full refugee status.

In addition, a total of 16,727 were granted leave to remain under the arrangements mentioned above for the parents of Irish-born children. Therefore, there are at least 23,000 people who are legally resident in Ireland who had originally arrived as individuals seeking asylum.

Changing Institutions & Policies

A number of policy and legislative changes have contributed to the fall in asylum applications since a peak in 2002. Following the citizenship referendum in 2004, the constitutional definition of citizenship was changed meaning that a child born in Ireland is no longer entitled to automatic citizenship unless one of his parents is already an Irish citizen. The government argued that this change was necessary to close a loophole in Irish law. Those in dissent argued that it added an unnecessary 'ethnic' dimension to citizenship and was contrary to human rights.⁸

The Immigrant Council of Ireland suggests that Irish policy to date has treated migrants as temporary economic units and that any State-lead policy based on an understanding of migration as temporary or purely economic creates difficulties-

“our research shows the complex nature of the interaction between economic, political, social and cultural aspects of migration and integration, while research in other contexts, points out that the notion of temporary migration is often an illusion or myth, what Syad calls ‘the temporary that lasts’ (ICI, 2008)

Listed below are the different paths of entry that exist for different groups of migrants. Their access to employment and social services will depend on whether a person's status is one of the following;

- ❑ From the Common Travel Area (essentially British Isles)
- ❑ From the European Economic Area (EEA)
- ❑ Non-EEA Work Permits
- ❑ Non-EEA Work Visas or Green Cards
- ❑ Students from outside the European Union
- ❑ Asylum-seekers and those who achieve refugee status
- ❑ Arrivals as a spouse or family dependant

There are more detailed definitions for these different categories in Section Two below.

⁸ Labour Migrants, Asylum-seekers and Refugees, Piaras Mac Einrí in 'Understanding Contemporary Ireland', Eds., Bartley & Kitchen, Pluto Press, 2007

There are also migrants who do not possess any legal status, i.e. undocumented migrants, who may have entered Ireland illegally or who may have overstayed the time specified on their visas or people whose work permits have not been renewed by their employers.

The 2006 Census indicates that 9.4% of the population is non-Irish nationals, comprising 400,000 people. Nearly 85% of these are migrant workers from the UK and from the other 26 states within the European Union.

There is however, an acknowledgement that there are challenges in securing an accurate statistical picture on the number of non-Irish nationals here. The Central Statistics Office suggests that this may have been underestimated by up to 100,000 in the 2006 census. Some suggestions indicate that non-Irish nationals could comprise up to 14% of the national population rather than 10% as reported in the Census.

Ireland is not alone in this dilemma. It is recognised internationally that it is becoming increasingly difficult to measure and quantify migration flows and statistical data that gives a snapshot in time cannot capture a full and accurate picture of migration trends and patterns.

Some of the state institutions that have been established or adapted to work with non-Irish nationals within the past ten years include:

Office of the Minister for Integration

Established in 2007, it has a reporting line to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC)

Is an independent body established to process applications for refugee status.

Reception and Integration Agency (RIA)

RIA is responsible for co-ordinating the provision of services to both asylum seekers and refugees and responding to crisis situations when programme or convention refugees arrive in Ireland. www.ria.gov.ie

Irish Naturalisation & Immigration Service (INIS)

Established in 2005 to provide a one-stop-shop to migrants. The aim is to promote and co-ordinate social and organisational measures across the spectrum of government for the acceptance of lawful immigrants into Irish life. www.inis.ie

National Consultative Committee on Racism & Interculturalism (NCCRI)

An independent expert body comprising, non-governmental organisations, state agencies and social partners set up in 1998 to inform policy on racism and interculturalism. At the time of publication the functions of this body were to be subsumed into the Office of Integration in the Department of Justice.

National Employment Rights Agency (NERA)

The National Employment Rights Agency was established as an independent labour inspectorate in 2007 to monitor and prosecute, where necessary, employers who breach employment legislation. www.nera.ie

Garda Ethnic Liaison Officers and Garda Immigration Officers

A unit has been set up in Harcourt Street to co-ordinate and advise ethnic liaison officers that are appointed to Garda Stations around the country.

In the National Social Partnership Agreement 'Towards 2016' the government has committed to developing a National Strategy for Integration. This is the responsibility of the Office of the Minister for Integration.

There is also a commitment to support a National Anti-Racist Workplace Week and a stated recognition of the need to tackle the exploitation of migrant and vulnerable workers through the establishment of the employment rights agency (NERA).

The Department of Health has published an Intercultural Strategy and the Department of Education is working on an Intercultural Education Strategy for 2009. RTE has produced an Intercultural Strategy and the GAA and FAI are both actively promoting integration through sport.

In 2005 the Government launched the National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) which aims to give strategic direction to developing a more inclusive, intercultural Ireland. Under this Plan local authorities at city and county level have been publishing plans for example, Dublin, Longford, and Wexford. Galway city has developed an anti-racism strategy that is considered a strong example of good practice by a partnership of agencies and groups coming together and this strategy is lead by Galway City Council.

As noted by the NESC report on Managing Migration (2006), produced during the "Celtic Tiger" period, immigration reflected Irish prosperity and despite the challenges of dealing with migration flows

'few are likely to want to go back to the 'old days' in which emigration rather than immigration was the dominant theme'.

A Question of Definition? Who is Who?

There are many different terms used to describe people who may be said to fall within the category of “new minority communities” in Ireland. The question of language and how we describe people can be a sensitive one.

Gaining a basic understanding of the differences in status is important because it gives people an opportunity to challenge some of the myths that may be created by local or national media or misinformed opinion in their locality.

EU National

All citizens of the European Union, 27 countries, are entitled to travel freely within the EU. All citizens are entitled to work here. However, restrictions that did not apply to other EU countries were imposed on people from Romanian and Bulgaria accessing work in Ireland when they joined the European Union on 1st January 2007.

European Economic Area (EEA)

This term refers to the 27 member states of the European Union and also Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

Migrant worker

A migrant worker is a person who is working in a state of which he/she is not a national. This includes people from within the EU and those from outside the European Union and European Economic Area (EEA). Migrant workers from outside the EU require an employment permit in order to work in Ireland

Student Visa Holders

A student visa holder is an individual who has immigrated to Ireland to undertake a course of study in the country. Student visa holders are permitted to work up to 20 hours a week during term time and 40 hours during holidays.

Work Permits

An employer or an employee can apply for a work permit for a specific job when the applicant is from outside the EU once they have proven that they cannot find an Irish or other EU citizen to fill the position. Permits are normally issued for two years & can be renewed for three additional years. Since 2006, an employee can apply for their

own work permit. Currently non-EU citizens can only register with FAS if made redundant from their employment or if they have long term residency (stamp four).⁹

Asylum Seekers

An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for protection under the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This was incorporated into Irish law in the 1996 Refugee Act. A person is an asylum-seeker for as long as the government is investigating their application. During this time he/she must reside in a direct provision centre/hostel, where they receive an allowance of €19.10 per week from the state.

Refugees

A refugee is someone whose application for asylum has been successful.

A refugee is defined under the 1996 Refugee Act as a person who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself, of the protection of that country”.

Programme Refugees

Persons who have been invited to Ireland on foot of a government decision in response to humanitarian requests from bodies such as the UNHCR. Vietnam, Hungary, Bosnia and recently Kurdish refugees from Iraq have been resettled here. They do not have to go through an asylum process and after three years residency they may apply for Irish citizenship.

Convention Refugees

Persons who fulfil the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Convention and are granted refugee status.

Leave-to-Remain

Permission can be granted to a person to remain in the state at the discretion of the Minister for Justice. For example, to a person who does not fully meet the requirements of the definition of a refugee under the 1951 convention but is allowed to remain for humanitarian reasons.

⁹ Work permits are covered by the Employment Permits Act 2006 which also establishes regulations for spouses of work permits holder, student visa holders, and Green card holders. For further information – www.entemp.ie

Habitual Residence Condition

This condition was introduced on 1st May 2004 and requires that a person is habitually resident in the state for two years and that their 'centre of interest' lies in Ireland in order to access social welfare benefits such as child allowance or rent allowance.

Green Cards

A green card is a type of work permit given for selected professional areas where Ireland has a skills shortage. It applies to jobs with a salary over €60,000 and is valid for two years. It does not allow permanent residence (unlike its US equivalent) but is renewable indefinitely and allows immediate family reunification.

Section 2: How do we Manage Diversity?

This section looks at how diversity can be managed at societal and community level. It discusses some of the particular challenges which arise when one considers strategies for managing diversity in rural areas. Finally, the chapter presents a brief outline of what a community development approach to managing diversity in rural areas might involve.

“We recognise that integration is much more than anti-racism measures and targeted initiatives. Essentially, integration is everyone’s business”

Bertie Ahern at the launch of the report ‘Migration Matters’ by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in 2006.

What kind of approaches can be adopted by a society in managing a diverse culture?¹⁰

Assimilation

This approach is based on the assumption that any minority group should adjust to the culture and views of the majority group in a country. Assimilation is very much a one-way process, putting demands on ethnic minorities to adapt and shed their own identity in order to conform to the majority culture.

Multiculturalism

A multicultural society simply refers to the fact that there are a variety of ethnic minorities living here. A multiculturalism policy tolerates the culture of minority groups without any acknowledgement of the need to change negative attitudes and practices of the majority population. Multiculturalism says little about the status of different cultures in a society, it only implies their presence.

¹⁰ Adapted from material of MRCI Realising Integration & NCCRI website,

Interculturalism

The concept of interculturalism is one that sees cultural diversity as a strength that can enrich society. An intercultural approach is the proactive development of strategies, policies, and practices that encourage interaction, understanding and respect between different cultures and ethnic groups. This concept is widely advocated by the European Commission and is being applied in Northern Ireland, especially in relation to education.

Racism

Anthropologists suggest that the concept of 'race' is a social construct i.e. human beings often define themselves in terms of difference rather than similarities. There may be many ethnic groups in the world but there is only one race – that is the human race. The United Nations definition of racism based on an International Convention (UNCER) to which Ireland is a signatory is “Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life”.

Anti-Racism

Proactive actions and policies to counteract racism at institutional and community level are considered an important plank of an intercultural approach. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) has been monitoring the incidents and patterns of racism in Ireland. This function will be subsumed into the Office of Integration in the Department of Justice. Reporting incidents is treated with the strictest confidence. A Racist Incident Report Form is available on their website, www.nccri.ie

Integration

In 2005 the European Union published the Common Basic Principles for immigrant integration policy within the EU. This defines integration as a “dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States”. These principles consider a basic knowledge of the host society’s language, history and institutions as essential to successful integration.

What are the Myths about New Minority Communities?

Offensive labels have been applied to asylum seekers by those who suggest they are work-shy and out to exploit Irish public services. Aside from the humanitarian grounds of providing adequate shelter and support to those who need it the following points are relevant;

- ❑ Asylum seekers are not treated more favourably than those with Irish citizenship and are not given help towards mobile phones, cars or socialising as has been reported in some media.
- ❑ Asylum seekers are not entitled to do paid work or access third level education until they are granted refugee status. Many do voluntary work while their application is being assessed.
- ❑ There is no evidence that asylum-seekers are responsible for a crime wave according to Gardai. To label a whole community for the transgressions of a few is offensive and inaccurate and ignores the fact that some asylum seekers and refugees have been victims of crime, harassment and sometimes violent assault.
- ❑ Migrant workers should not be blamed for employers who do not pay the minimum wage and who choose to ignore employment legislation.
- ❑ The media and politicians have talked of 'welfare tourism' but it is also important to remember that migrant workers pay taxes and contribute as consumers of goods and services.
- ❑ It is also crucial to note that the Habitual Residency criteria prevents any worker from outside the EU from qualifying for any social welfare assistance unless they are resident here at least two years.
- ❑ Most available research indicates that migrant workers replace rather than displace workers in Ireland –doing jobs that are dangerous, difficult and dirty, known as the 3D's.

- In the year 1900, Europe had 20% of the world's population, today it is 12% and estimates are that Europe's percentage population will be approximately 4% in 100 years time.

- People born in Ireland are still emigrating at the rate of approximately 17,000 annually. There are an estimated 50,000 undocumented Irish migrant workers in the US.¹¹

¹¹ Taken from material provided by Migrant Rights Centre & NUI Handbook for GP's Working with Asylum-Seekers, 2007

Why are people from new minority groups at risk of marginalisation?

NASC, the Immigrant Support Centre based in Cork is campaigning for changes in the processing of asylum applications. Research conducted by NASC and NUI Galway, has indicated some of the significant physical, psychological and financial challenges facing those in the direct provision system. The Intercultural Health strategy published by the HSE stated that

“it appears that prolonged length of stay of people within the direct provision system may have a direct negative effect on overall well-being” (HSE, 2008). Research by the Irish Medical Organisation indicates that up to 90% of asylum-seekers get depressed within six months of coming here”.¹²

Research into the direct provision system by NASC in Ireland indicates there is a;

- ❑ Lack of consistency amongst centres around the country in terms of facilities and support available to residents
- ❑ Lack of training amongst staff on how to deal with conflict amongst residents
- ❑ The minimal welfare payment of €19.10 which has not changed since 2000, restricts residents from engaging in any training or education or other any activity that will cost money
- ❑ There is a lack of input into decision-making/representation within direct provision hostels which often compounds the sense of powerlessness that people fleeing situations of conflict have experienced.

Hence it is apparent that the term ‘new minority communities’ or ‘ethnic minorities’ is not a homogenous one where people can be treated all the same with the same difficulties. Many migrants here are highly-qualified and struggle to get work that reflects their qualifications and experience. Some groups of people will be far more at risk of marginalisation than others and the challenge is to find creative community development responses that may reach them. Some of the more vulnerable groups are

- ❑ Spouses of migrant workers with work permits can be very socially isolated because of their inability to work outside the home and poor language skills.
- ❑ Workers who become undocumented are extremely vulnerable whether as a result of redundancy, their work permit not being renewed or workplace exploitation.

¹² Irish Times, March 29, 2008

- ❑ The sense of isolation for those individuals and families placed in a direct provision centre in small towns or rural areas can be exacerbated by virtue of their location.
- ❑ Women and children who experience domestic violence are at high risk because of the lack of family support systems and language difficulties.
- ❑ There is anecdotal evidence that migrants with poor English, who are unaware of their rights, are being exploited by landlords in the private rental sector.
- ❑ Discrimination on the basis of Race or Ethnic origin is the second most common ground for complaints made to the Equality Authority under the Equal Status Act 2000.
- ❑ Unemployment rates are much higher for ethnic minorities of African origin who are eligible to work than others. For example, in the table, below 24.6% are unemployed compared to the national average of 5%.¹³

Table 2: Employment Status by Ethnicity, 2006

Ethnicity	Employed	Unemployed	Not in labour force	Total
White Irish	56.3	4.6	39.1	100
White Irish Traveller	13.8	41.2	45.0	100
Other White Background	71.8	7.6	20.6	100
African or other black background	40.7	26.6	32.6	100
Chinese	47.8	6.3	45.8	100
Other Asian	62.9	7.8	29.3	100
Total aged 16 & over	57.2	5.2	37.6	100

¹³ Employment Status by Ethnicity in Equality in Ireland, CSO, 2007

Research by Community Development Projects¹⁴, of which there are 180 around Ireland, has indicated that some were reluctant to engage with new minority communities because;

- ❑ They don't know what to do
- ❑ A perception that asylum-seekers & refugees are transient groups of people
- ❑ The Projects felt that the work is specialised and therefore needs to be left to specialist Non Governmental Organisations.
- ❑ They don't have the staff or resources to get involved.

“While many existing community development projects have identified the need to engage with new communities in their areas and many want to work on inter-culturalism and anti-racism, not many have actually done so”

Alice Binchy, Tallaght Intercultural Action, 2008

Some of the projects in Section Three include activity by Community Development Projects's 180, Family Resource Centres of which there are 100 groups in Ireland and projects lead by some of the 70 local Partnerships around Ireland.

The reluctance to engage is gradually beginning to change as more groups see the value and the need for a community development approach to working on the ground with new minority groups and the assumption that all minorities are transient is questioned. According to the Prospectus report 'New Communities in Ireland' (One Foundation 2008), in 2007 there were 8,000 people living in direct provision centres and 45% of them had been there for over two years.

There is no data available on the movement of migrant workers who have PPSN's and who may have returned to their country of origin or left Ireland to work elsewhere but MacEnri suggests that based on the rate at which Irish-born nationals returned over the past 10 years, it is possible that up to half of all migrant workers will stay in Ireland in the long-term.

It is evident that many asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants are trying to make a life in Ireland and by treating them as transient groups of people we are simply adding to the many barriers they face gaining acceptance in Irish life.

¹⁴ Changing Ireland, National Magazine of the Community Development Programme, Summer 2008

What are the Challenges of Integration in Rural areas?

Research indicates that people from new minority communities are at high risk of experiencing social exclusion in their adopted home. A major review of integration of non-nationals in the UK concluded that rural areas, experiencing migration for the first time, often struggled to deal successfully with the challenges of integration.

In a study of the Small Area Profile Statistics (SAPS) based on the 2006 census, Mac Einri indicates the extent of the migrant population in small town and rural Ireland.

“It is possible to identify a whole series of mid-sized towns where the migrant population ranges from 15 to 25 per cent of the total. Towns such as Longford, Roscommon, Ennis, Bandon, Fermoy and many others are experiencing quiet revolutions”¹⁵

Although some media focused on the decline in the applications for social security numbers in Ireland during 2008 due to the economic downturn, the reality is that Ireland is becoming an increasingly diverse society and this will not change. Ireland’s relative prosperity offers opportunities not available in most parts of the globe and will continue to attract people from diverse backgrounds. According to MacEinri;

“In the medium term, Poles and Latvians may give way to Bulgarians and Romanians and in the longer term, to Turks, Russians, Moldovans and Ukrainians”

There are unique challenges for those in the receiving community and people from new minority communities who find themselves in very different environments to that where they have come from; limited public transport in many areas can exacerbate isolation, low incomes can restrict peoples’ ability and confidence to participate in activities outside their work environment, the language barrier and the lack of support services can contribute to the invisibility of people in rural areas and small towns.

Experience in counties Devon and Cornwall in the UK highlight similar changes where there has been significant in-migration from Accession countries to those rural counties which offer casual labour in agriculture and food processing.

¹⁵ MacEnri, P. Irish Geography, Vol.41, July 2008

“The capacity for provision of services in rural areas will be less than in urban areas and may be more difficult to access. The particular vulnerability of temporary workers with language difficulties, lack of access to information on their rights and under-regulated workplaces is accentuated by their social isolation in rural areas with only a recent experience of in-migration from other countries.¹⁶

Research in Ireland by the Equality Authority and Migrants Rights Centre in Ireland indicates that some employers take advantage of the poor English and lack of awareness of entitlements of non-Irish nationals. Those most vulnerable are working in agriculture, construction, catering, domestic service and other service industries.

In the mushroom-growing industry in Ireland, research by the Migrant Rights Centre in 2006 indicated the problems of mainly non-Irish born workers employed in the sector;

- ❑ Some employees paid €2.50 per hour and working up to 16 hour days with no overtime
- ❑ Illness due to exposure to chemical sprays at work
- ❑ Workers expected to be on call around the clock, seven days per week.

As a direct result of their research on workplace exploitation of migrants an association was established, AGWA Agricultural Workers Association, based in Cavan and Monaghan. There are now over 50 workers from countries such as Latvia, Ukraine, Moldova, China and Thailand in this association supported by the Migrant Rights Centre in Dublin.

Other counties in Ireland are looking at similar models to combat exploitation in the work environment. Those workers who have been recruited by Irish employers through employment agencies can also face specific challenges because of inadequate information on Ireland prior to arrival, inadequate information about the nature of employment and carrying substantial debt arising from fees charged by an agency. Charging migrant workers a recruitment fee is illegal in Ireland.

¹⁶ Singleton Ann, Recent Migration in to the Rural South West; UK the Context, 2006

Why the Need for a Community Development Response to Integration?

For all the reasons stated above it is evident that a community development response can play an important role in reaching out to vulnerable individuals and families who experience real difficulties in accessing services.

Why does a community development approach need to be recognised and resourced?

- ❑ Community and voluntary groups are ideally placed to make the connections at a human level that will support integration
- ❑ Equality and participation are core values in community development and in practice they mean trying to ensure equitable access to services for everyone
- ❑ Community groups are ideally placed to identify needs at a local level and to build positive responses to cultural diversity where it matters most.
- ❑ Community development responses focus on those most at risk of exclusion and disadvantage
- ❑ Non-Irish nationals are geographically settled throughout Ireland -thus resourcing local groups at the coalface and not just national organisations with headquarters in Dublin is critical.
- ❑ Community groups that are engaging with migrants and asylum-seekers and refugees to date have proven themselves to be highly flexible and adaptable in response to the issues that people from many different cultures bring.
- ❑ A proactive response by local structures already in place such as Family Resource Centres and Community Projects will reduce the risk of racially motivated attacks and potential community tension on ethnic grounds.
- ❑ Community groups are ideally placed to develop local networks based on collective action and promote good practice based on local experiences. These innovative projects can over time become part of mainstream policy.

An example of a project that is being rolled out nationwide is the 'Fáilte Isteach' project. This was begun by Summerhill Active Retirement group who have been teaching English to migrants in Co. Meath on a voluntary basis since 2006. This project will be funded by a charitable foundation for a three year period.

Community groups in rural areas and small towns are trying to develop relationships between those living in direct provision hostels and the community in which they are based, for example Forum in Connemara are networking with residents in the direct provision centre in Clifden, Co. Galway and the Clare Immigrant Support Service are supporting residents in a centre in Meelick in Co. Clare. A list of all the direct provision centres in Ireland is included in Appendix 1.

Some of the potential gaps mentioned below can militate against community driven responses and people need to consider why the barriers to community involvement will be greater for individuals than for others. Consider these possible reasons why people may find it difficult to engage with community groups or service providers at any level.

Information Gap¹⁷ – people are unaware that a service is available or what it does.

Physical Gap – people do not have the transport to travel to access services.

Emotional Gap – for some nationalities, especially those from former communist bloc countries dealing with any agency or local group may be based on suspicion and mistrust because they are assumed to be an arm of the state.

Structural Gap - there may be a lack of openness amongst frontline service providers. People who have had a poor experience in trying to find information/support may be reluctant to try again.

Value or Culture Gap – whose values predominate within a community group or local service provider? Some of the value gaps that can arise can be overcome by a basic understanding of the culture that someone has grown up with. For example, for Brazilians the kind of state-funded social supports that Irish people take for granted will be alien to them because there is no such support at home.

¹⁷ Adapted from 'Supported Volunteering -Refugee and Asylum-seekers', Volunteer Centres of Ireland

Another value where tensions can arise is around the issue of parenting and childcare. For some parents who are accustomed to more authoritarian ways of parenting, Irish attitudes to childcare can seem permissive. Using formal paid childcare is also a very alien concept for many women of African origin so considering activities that include both mother and baby may be a good place to start.

Another value alien to many is the concept of volunteering as we understand it in Ireland. For example in Iran, Iraq and many former communist-led countries the concept of a vibrant non-governmental sector will not be familiar-

“In Afghanistan, volunteering is forced. They say tomorrow is volunteering work; it encouraged people to hate this kind of activity. We will give our life if someone asks but not if we are forced.”

*Mina, Afghan Volunteer*¹⁸

¹⁸ Quote taken from 'Supported Volunteering-Refugee and Asylum-seekers', Volunteer Centres of Ireland

Section Three: Making Connections

This section contains case studies of community and voluntary sector groups working in a rural or small town context who have undertaken significant projects to support non-Irish nationals or promote integration in their local area. It also seeks to draw lessons from these case studies and give practical advice for rural community and voluntary groups establishing or expanding their activities in this area.

Be realistic. As a member of a voluntary community organisation you are unlikely to be overwhelmed with time and resources in which to achieve all the things that you would like to see happen in your community. However, a journey of 1,000 miles started with the first steps.

We hope by reading and sharing this study you may feel more confident about getting to know new arrivals and to extend a Cead Mile Fáilte via school, the workplace, the church, the sports field or other community events.

People will come to Ireland for very different reasons. A review in Monaghan of the needs of migrant workers in the county indicated some of the dangers of labelling all non-Irish nationals as a homogenous group,

“A migrant worker from Egypt or India has as much in common with an Irish person as does someone from Eastern Europe’

(Monaghan Partnership, 2007, Unpublished)

There may also be a danger that all people from Eastern Europe are treated as the same. Or that differences in culture of people of African origin are ignored. For example, there are over 250 ethnic minority groups in Nigeria.

The Benefits of Reaching Out

The Volunteer Centres of Ireland reported in 2008 that over a quarter of all volunteers registered with them since they were established in 2007 are non-Irish nationals. They have been spearheading a campaign to recruit volunteers from new minority communities through their 17 regional volunteer centres around Ireland. For community and voluntary organisations there are many benefits to reaching out by:

- Creating an opportunity to identify new volunteers
- Focusing on the positive aspect of the skills and experiences that people from new minority communities have to offer you are supporting community integration

Reaching out

- Enhances peoples visibility within the community & reduces the risk of exploitation
- Promotes diversity and opportunities to learn from each other
- Reduces the potential for social segregation & community tension

Case Studies: Making the Links

Sligo Volunteer Centre

A befriending programme in Sligo town was organised by the Volunteer centre to mentor/befriend Iranian Kurdish refugees who had been moved to Sligo during the summer of 2006.

After carrying out research on mentoring and befriending programmes in other countries, the co-ordinator put together a programme and obtained funding from both the Reception & Integration Agency and the Community Foundation of Ireland.

A campaign to recruit families was organised using local media, parish bulletins and posters. Eleven local families were signed up and a Sligo family was matched with a Kurdish family, based on the ages of the children. Events between October and December 2006 included a facilitated arts and crafts day, an indoor picnic to which every family brought some food, a sports day at which local sports groups showcased their clubs and a Christmas Party. Families were encouraged to meet individually and in most cases they met at each other's houses and often cooked for each other. Because of the many Kurdish dialects it was not possible to organise a local interpreter so one was provided by RIA when required.

An internal evaluation stated the outcomes of the project;

- ❑ Families have made a local link. Most relationships are ongoing.
- ❑ Events were held in a number of different community centres thereby raising awareness of local facilities.
- ❑ The community centres where events were held were delighted to host groups.
- ❑ Some of the large group events were a bit daunting; smaller events that focused on an activity where there was less pressure to speak would have been good i.e. a football game or an art activity.

As part of an EU research project reviewing the reception and orientation of resettled refugees in both Ireland and Sweden, refugees in Carrick-on-Shannon, Mullingar and Sligo were interviewed ¹⁹(Most project, 2008).

¹⁹ MOST The Reception, Orientation and Integration of Resettled Refugees in the Irish Context, 2008

The responses indicated that families who had been resettled in Sligo had an air of greater confidence about meeting with and initiating contact with Irish people. This was partly attributed to the befriending project.

Some of the recommendations that were made in this review of resettlement projects in Ireland include-

- ❑ Adequate screening of mentors is essential so that they fully understand their role and the boundaries of that role.
- ❑ A stress on confidentiality for all volunteers is extremely important
- ❑ There was sometimes a sense of Irish volunteers trying to impose their own ideas and culture - a need for cross-cultural training was identified
- ❑ Befriending programmes will not work of their own accord but need careful planning and sustained effort and energy
- ❑ Both Sligo and Kurdish families expressed a desire to have more information on the history, background and culture of the families they were matched with.

Community Interpreter Training

A network of local development companies in the Midlands came together to address the strong need they had identified to improve access to services for non-English speakers in the area. Their research had indicated a lack of uniformity across state and semi-state bodies in relation to translation and interpretation provision.

The aim of the project was to encourage up-skilling of those who were already providing a local translation & interpretation service but in an ad-hoc and informal way. The training provided through the project would give them a recognised qualification and meet a gap in existing services locally.

This training project was adopted from a South Tyrone Empowerment programme, (STEPS) organised by a non-for-profit, rights-based organisation in Dungannon since 1997. The community interpreting and translation service is now part of the social economy programme in Co. Tyrone

A pilot programme lead by Longford Community Resources in partnership with Tullamore Wider Options, Westmeath Community Development, and Westmeath Employment Pact has been very successful during 2007. A Certificate in Community Interpreting, at FETAC Level 5 has been achieved by 19 volunteers in Longford, Westmeath and Offaly.

In return for the training, which is provided free to participants, they are committed to providing four hours per month as volunteer interpreters for six months after the training.

“Our main reason for offering this training was the fact that people were interpreting on a voluntary basis for people from the Russian-speaking community and in some cases, they were being questioned by service providers, what are you doing here? It can be difficult for some health practitioners to work with an interpreter when they are not used to it. We wanted people to get a professional qualification so that the value of the work they were doing would be recognised. It is a difficult job interpreting accurately for both sides”

Svetlana Razlivanava, Longford Women's Link

“The training has been fantastic benefit to us in the school. We’re probably a typical rural school, we have 9 non-Irish national children out of a total of 81 pupils and we have been able to get parent authorisation forms relating to nurse visits to the school and an insurance form translated. Apart from the educational needs of child we have to look at the health and safety and social aspects to their lives. We have also invited some of the parents to sit in on a English class to help them understand what is needed with their child’s homework and this helps to improve their own English”

Amelia Keena, Principle, Ardnagrath Primary School, Co. Westmeath

‘Different Together’ Creative English Language Mentoring

Oughterard town, 17 miles west of Galway is a popular tourism destination. Many of the businesses in retail, guesthouses, hotels and pubs were finding it increasingly difficult to fill vacancies, especially in high season in the late 1990’s. Many of these vacancies were filled by non-Irish nationals who came to Ireland in search of work.

Clann Family Resource Centre was established in 2002 and is managed by a local group of volunteers who employ a full-time co-ordinator. The resource centre, on the main street, operates a drop-in-centre with information on rights and entitlements. They also provide a Citizens Information Centre clinic. They became aware through the process of a community audit and approaches from local employers that English language learning support was a need amongst new immigrants in the town.

A local writers group was based in the resource centre, many of whose members were retired. In 2004, the Clann Resource Centre received a grant under the Action Against Racism programme and devised the ‘Different Together’ project. The project brought together members of the writers group and people from Poland, Lithuania and Peru who wanted to learn English.

People worked in pairs, an English speaker sharing a story of their life experience and culture with a non-English speaker who then translated this story into their own language and vice versa. In this way stories which were written allowed people to get to know each other and gain a deeper understanding of the place where they lived.

In addition to language mentoring, an art project was organised to paint a mural based on symbols of various cultures of people in the town outside the resource centre. The ‘Different Together’ project was launched in March 2006 where people from Poland, Peru and Lithuania read the life stories in English of the people they had gotten to know through the project. Friendships were formed that have continued long after the official term of the project.

“With the project we have raised the profile of the richness of different cultures and the contribution that migrant workers make to the local economy of Oughterard and the surrounding area”

Anne O’Shaughnessy, project co-ordinator

Leitrim Partnership-A County Strategy

The County Leitrim Partnership has been working with migrants and programme refugees for the past six years. There are approximately 104 people from 11 Kurdish families living in Carrick-on-Shannon who have arrived as programme refugees. Many had been displaced from their homes during the war in Iraq. The majority of the migrant workers in Leitrim are from Poland, with smaller groups from Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ukraine, Africa and Brazil.

A support worker for the refugees, funded by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) was employed by the partnership on a twelve month contract in 2006. In 2007 the partnership was successful in securing funding from the Office of the Minister for Integration to employ a migrant support worker for a 15 month Integration Project to work with legally-resident migrants in County Leitrim.

“As a support worker for both migrant workers and the refugee community it can be very challenging, the level of support needed is different. The majority of the migrant community are educated and very capable and focused on working. They need practical support with information and improving their English language skills. But many of the Kurdish adults would not have any formal education or a basic level of English and so they need much more support. They also need help to settle into our culture while being respectful of their cultural differences. They are continuing to receive support with English language classes, and many are now involved in training courses and social events.”

Linda McGloin, Leitrim Partnership

The work in Leitrim includes developing a local information guide to ‘Living in Leitrim’ and a leaflet for local employers on Best Practice Guidelines when employing migrant workers. They hope to work towards building a migrants workers forum in the county.

One of the more successful events organised in early 2008 was an Intercultural Football Day organised by the migrant support worker and the FAI Development Officer. Football is a passion for many of the men and nine teams of adults aged 16 to 35 years got involved, four Irish teams, four Kurdish teams and one Polish team.

“The feedback was really positive and we’re hoping to start a league in September. This will mean capacity-building with some of the participants to help them take on more of the organisation of the event themselves”

Linda McGloin, Leitrim Partnership

The Partnership also links with the Garda Ethnic Liaison Officers and the Garda Immigration Officers who work with migrant workers from all over the world. The Immigration Officer works closely with workers from outside the EU/EEA Countries to ensure that their work permits are up-to-date and that they do not become undocumented through difficulties with their employers or with late applications for work permits which can leave them in a vulnerable position.

Mixing Cultures Brazilian Community in Gort, Co.Galway

Gort, a town of 2,446 people in south east Galway with a large rural hinterland, has been attracting migrant workers to a meat plant which was struggling to fill vacancies. The factory closed in 2007 and many of those who had work permits moved to work in a meat processing plant in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. According to the census of 2006, 1,065 people living in Gort stated their nationality to be other than Irish, with 900 of these being Brazilian.

Those that have stayed in the town since the meat plant closed are working in a variety of roles; some as agricultural labourers, in casual construction work and in gardening and domestic cleaning. Some of the Brazilian community have opened their own businesses; a car valet service, a clothes shop and an internet café are now owned by Brazilians in the town.

A community development training course was organised by the Family Resource Centre in 2007 and delivered by NUI Galway in Gort. There were participants from Brazil, Moldova and the Czech Republic. Some of the challenges to integration identified locally include the language barrier, people being undocumented and poor employment conditions.

“Brazilian people have become part of the community in Gort. There are specific challenges for us in the family resource centre, however, in trying to support integration work. We were getting feedback from Brazilian women that they were struggling to learn English because they were mainly mixing amongst themselves”
Sandra, Administrator, Gort Family Resource Centre

A recent initiative of the Resource Centre has been a project called ‘Creative Conversations’ funded by Galway VEC which is providing pottery classes for a mix of native English and non-English speakers. In 2008 the Family Resource Centre received core funding from the Family Support Agency for a part-time development worker. This fact that this person speaks fluent Portuguese is a bonus and will add significantly to their ability to work on integration projects.

“There were 27 people in our group, four Brazilians, me and three women and lots of Irish people. It was a great opportunity for us to get to know what was going on in the area because lots of community groups were involved. We all got a Diploma. I’m here four years already and it was a big help for me to meet people”

Nilton Vieira DeFoza, participant on community development course

“The key part of the work has been building trust, it takes times and although I’m involved over four years with the Brazilian community in Gort, I’m still learning. Social supports do not exist in Brazil and because social help is not part of their own culture in Brazil, it can be very difficult for them to learn to trust that kind of help here”

Frank Murray, Migrant Support Worker, Gort Family Resource Centre

Intercultural Youth Work, Kerry Diocesan Youth Service, Tralee, Co. Kerry

In 2003 Teresa Elumelu, an asylum-seeker, with two small children, living in a direct provision centre in a former hotel in Tralee approached the local youth service, KDYS, Tralee Youth Centre about working as a volunteer.

“I was living in one room with my two young children. It’s easy to allow your problems to overwhelm you when you have nothing to do 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I told myself I had to do something for myself and the children living in the centre as they were no facilities available to them, and they were unsure how to access any recreational activities outside of the centre. When they find themselves in a centre they need to get used to the environment and learn things about Irish culture”

Teresa Elumelu, part-time youth worker

The youth service in the town responded positively and Teresa helped to convince other adult residents in the reception centre to volunteer to work with young people. The biggest challenge in starting up was the language barrier but they managed to negotiate this using storyboards introduced by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA). Twelve adult volunteers from Croatia, Somalia, the Congo, Nigeria, Kurdistan and Kazakhstan completed training on youth work skills, child protection and the summer scheme worker training in 2004. After two years, the project received a small grant from RIA that went towards covering materials and some activities of the group.

Since 2003, the group has gone from strength to strength. In 2007 they received funding from the One World Foundation, which has allowed them to employ five part-time resource workers until the end of 2008. They have a senior group, aged 12-17 years with 40 members and a junior group with 22 members aged, 5-11 years. They have organised swimming, African drumming, hiking and many arts and crafts activities. Two of the young people run a hip-hop dance club once a week with 20 of their peers attending regularly. Activities are often shared with other KDYS projects and other youth clubs in the area.

“Working with people in reception centres can be a slow process but is very rewarding. Some of the members have been involved with us for almost five years and we have seen them thrive as they mix with others. There’s a wealth of talent in the group, great dancers, sports people and artists. Some members help members of other projects with their French homework. It has really helped to break down barriers”.

Nora Butler, Youth Information Co-ordinator, KDYS

Teresa and another volunteer Alinoor Sheikh both won recognition in 2008 for their work under the youth and education category in the World Refugee Awards organised by the Irish African Centre. Teresa along with four others from Somalia, Cameroon and Poland have completed a Certificate in Youth and Community Work in Kerry and Teresa hopes to complete the Diploma in Youth Work in 2009.

Making the Links - Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath

The South Westmeath Employment and Enterprise Company (SWEETS) was established in 1998 to promote the development of south Westmeath which includes Kilbeggan and a rural hinterland from Kinnegad to Moate. They manage a community services programme in the area, with an office in Kilbeggan and employ seven people, three on a part-time basis.

In 2008, as part of their planning process they completed a community analysis based on the CSO 2006 statistics which indicated that within the electoral area of Kilbeggan there were 240 non-Irish nationals living. This represents 1 in 5 or 20% of the total population of 1,200 people.

Many of these people are Brazilians who have applied for work permits for a local meat plant. Since accession Polish, Latvians and Lithuanians are also living in the town. They are employed in shops and other services in the town. The company has organised Safe Pass training for migrant workers and estimate that between June 2007 and June 2008 over 150 non-Irish nationals sought advice in the service.

The SWEETS organisation has been working to meet the diverse needs of people from new minority communities living in the area. They have a contract with the Citizens Information Service (CIS) to provide a local information service.

This has been in demand since the company offer a one-stop-shop on information and advice based in their office on the main street which is open five days a week. The main queries concern finding private rented accommodation, securing PPSN numbers, the transfer of driving licences from abroad and help with preparing CV's.

“The main difficulty non-Irish nationals have here is travelling to get to work. There is no direct bus service to Mullingar and the first bus to Tullamore is 10am daily. Some are travelling to Athlone for jobs because there's an hourly bus service. Most of them don't have transport so there are restricted in how they can travel”.

Lily Cleary, Information worker, Sweets Ltd.

An arts and international food festival was organised last summer with Kurdish and Brazilian musicians and a traditional Irish band providing the entertainment and a similar event is planned for 2008.

Access to Information - Ballyhoura, Co.Limerick

In June 2004 there was no information service in Charleville, Co.Cork, a town with a population of 2,984 people and a large agricultural hinterland and a high rate of new migrants arriving into the area to work in Kerrygold, meat plants, supermarkets and fast food outlets. Migrants came from Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Brazil. Research by the local partnership Ballyhoura Development indicated that an information service that could respond to migrants queries was badly needed.

An information service was started in the town aimed specifically at migrant workers by Ballyhoura Development, who began negotiations with the CIB to have the information service mainstreamed and this goal was eventually achieved after two years.

The result of this negotiation process is that a professional information worker is available 8.5 hours per week for a clinic in the town. Statistics from the database maintained by the Citizens Information Service show that 95% of queries made to the office in Charleville by phone or in person are from non-Irish nationals. In the year to end of June 2008 they had 1,946 service users, many of whom had multiple queries.

They have built up a strong expertise in dealing with migrant queries and many people will travel to get to the clinic when they have extended opening hours on Wednesday evening. Most of the service users don't have private transport so they will share transport, hitch or cycle.

The clinic depends on both Irish-born volunteers and a Polish woman who volunteers with the service to translate every Wednesday and this has proved a popular and necessary part of the clinic. They have also identified a Czech national who is willing to volunteer with the service.

“Even when their spoken English is ok, their written English may be poor so it helps to talk to someone in Polish who will help them fill out a form. Technical language is often used on forms and that can be an obstacle. We've struggled to get childcare costs covered for the women who volunteer and that's an ongoing issue”

Josephine Staunton, Information & Advocacy officer, C.I.S, Charleville, Co.Cork

“It feels good to volunteer, I know they really need the help and I enjoy getting to meet lots of Polish people. I’m looking for work at the moment but even if I get a job I will continue to volunteer with the clinic”

Ula Traczyk, Volunteer, C.I.S. Charleville, Co. Cork

Environmental Works - Milford, Co. Donegal

There has been an accommodation centre for asylum seekers and refugees in Donegal town since 2001 in a building previously used as a backpacker's hostel. This is a men-only hostel with a capacity of 67 adults at any one time, some of whom have been there for over two years.

The Donegal Volunteer Centre in Letterkenny responded to an approach from some of the men who were interested in volunteering locally. Placements have been organised with the Errigal Arts Festival where the men have worked to organise parking at events, stewarding, and preparing and dismantling outdoor sites during the festival. A placement in Letterkenny Community Development Project was arranged for a volunteer with computer skills who is helping them to develop a website.

Another placement for men who preferred outdoor work was organised with a group in Milford, a village 14 miles north of Letterkenny.

“The big challenge for us is the scattered population in Donegal and the struggle to get around by bus. It can be difficult to arrange placements for volunteers who have little money or private transport but the link with Milford has worked very well. We're hoping to get some of the participants placements in charity shops, doing stocktaking and things, which will help their conversational English”

Colleen Boyle, Volunteer Officer, Letterkenny

The Donegal Volunteer Centre accessed money through the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme administered by Pobal. Money had been specifically ringfenced for volunteer actions and this allowed the Centre to provide transport for the men who undertake volunteer placements, some of whom travel to Milford each Thursday from Donegal Town, a round trip of over 80 miles.

“On a personal level I found it very useful because it helped me to get to know the local culture and it was nice to work outdoors. I speak Arabic, English and Aramaic and I was able to interpret for the men on the project with poor English. I would like to do some more volunteering”

Rafee Al-Najjar, a doctor from Iraq and resident in Donegal direct provision centre

“My main concern in the IRD was not to be seen to take advantage of the men who were not being paid but that fear didn’t materialise as they were so enthusiastic about the clean-up and made it clear they were delighted to have something to do. We transformed a public space in the town known as the Diamond by removing all the litter and overgrowth and doing some fresh planting and painting. The work itself was fairly low-key but we also got some local residents involved. Keeping community projects going in a place with only 800 people can be a struggle”

Kenny Bradley, Manager, Milford IRD, Co. Donegal

Taking the First Steps

1 Getting to Know People

The first step is always the most important one. The barriers that have been discussed above may preclude people from getting involved in community activity. However, experience shows that while people may not respond to a general invitation on a poster or notice in the local paper that 'All are Welcome', they are more likely to respond to a personal invitation. Be proactive. Identify those with enough English to communicate with those who cannot speak any English. Give them a written invitation personally.

Get curious - knowledge and information can work both ways. If you are unsure how to address someone – ask them, it can be a good conversation starter. While there may be confusion around how to address people, people are unlikely to take offence if they feel they are being treated with respect.

2 Building on Your Contacts

Look beyond the media you would traditionally use. Approach local employers where non-Irish Nationals are working. Are they interested in supporting your activity? Will they help you to disseminate information in the workplace? Are there any English-language classes happening nearby? Useful to identify those with English speaking skills who could act as community translators, and they may help to translate posters and local notices. New Ross CDP has developed strong connections with migrants and asylum-seekers in their town by providing free internet access and coffee in their premises. Twelve second-hand computers were donated by local businesses. A large map of the world is a focal point in the internet room and a good conversation starter.

3 Choosing Your Event

Has there been a welcome event in your locality for new arrivals? Could this be organised with a variety of representatives from local groups e.g. the GAA, Community council, youth club etc. As the case studies included here indicate, an activity that builds on people's common interests is most likely to be successful. However, asylum-seekers are living on €19.10 per week so any requirement to pay for events is likely to exclude them. Many migrants work very long hours so consider having an event on Saturday or Sunday. Football competitions have been organised in many towns and have thrived. Food and music can be used to help break the ice.

People can be invited to bring a sample of their typical cuisine from home. Check religious festivals, strict Muslims will not eat during daylight hours during Ramadan. Offering pork is also considered very insulting to a strict Muslim. Some National Days can be a hook for an informal opportunity to socialise and there may be an opportunity to allow participants to take a partnership role in organising an event.

4 Choosing Your Venue

Avoid using pubs or having an event that revolves around alcohol. Make it clear that children/young people are welcome - a local community hall is ideal. Lack of transport may be an issue for some people, especially in rural areas where many may not have access to private transport - try to gauge this as a potential barrier when you visit. Do they know where the venue is? Do they know how they will get there? Can you organise car pooling or a mini-bus?

5 Developing Your Resources

While small scale events e.g. a coffee morning or welcome event can be organised fairly simply by requesting donations or local sponsorship, if you want to build on this activity it helps to identify other sources of support. Most migrant-led organisations have a national focus but let them know the work you are doing and find out what plans they have in place. A list of groups who can provide expertise and/or funding is included. It is useful to get to know people in government agencies and/or NGOs on a first name basis to ensure smooth lines of communication and help build relationships.

6 'Nothing For Us Without Us'

A basic principle in any community development activity is to get people who are supposed to benefit from a project or activity involved in its design and delivery. In this way you will ensure that what happens is relevant to those you want to connect with and if not, you will gain useful feedback which can inform any further activity. You will avoid wasting valuable time and effort. A Craft Circle was organised by Kiltimagh CDP for 12 weeks for women from Nigeria, Gambia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Iraq and Bangladesh who were living in the Railway Hostel in the town. Most of the knitting materials were donated locally and according to the facilitator

“the craft circle gave them much more than a skill, now instead of just sitting in their rooms all day they can do some needlework. And they made friends”.²⁰

²⁰ Changing Ireland, National Magazine of the Community Development Programme, Summer 2008

7 Work on Your Own Cultural Awareness

Become aware of your own cultural assumptions and how these may affect your ability to promote integration locally. Volunteering Ireland have developed some factsheets on diversity and volunteering. They recommend:

- ❑ Listening with respect and a genuine wish to learn.
- ❑ Consider the importance of factors such as age, education, religion and ethnic status.
- ❑ Realise that culture is one factor but is not the only factor in someone's life.
- ❑ Remember the person you are working with is always the expert on their own life, their needs and values.

There is evidence to suggest that it takes ten years of living in a country to fully understand its culture so a comprehensive guide that reflects all the different cultures living in Ireland today is beyond the remit of this study. However, a list of organisational contacts and reading material is included for those who want to gather more information on intercultural issues. A website source for over 100 cultural profiles is available on www.spirasi.ie/culturalprofiles .

8 Developing a Local Orientation Pack

There is no need to reinvent the wheel. You can make life easy for yourself and those you want to welcome into the community by using the materials that are readily available and translated into relevant languages. See the reference to materials available from Crosscare, the Citizens Information Board and Threshold in the section on further information. You can add to this template by providing valuable local information for example;

- ❑ Contact details for rental agencies or estate agents in your area.
- ❑ Opening hours & services provided by the nearest citizens information service
- ❑ The nearest location of public internet access
- ❑ A map of the locality including the electoral areas, which is relevant for those who want to encourage voter participation in 2009 local elections & beyond.²¹
- ❑ Information on where people of the same belief can meet and worship.

The Fusion Intercultural project in Co. Laois developed an orientation pack in four languages and information on services and agencies is divided according to the five

²¹ People are eligible to vote if they have been resident in the country for six months before February 25 2009

electoral areas in the county. A map of these areas is included. Other information that may be useful is an inclusion on voting rights in Ireland²², public holidays, the sports/community facilities in the area and some local history.

In the education section consider including contact details for local schools, playgroups and crèches. The Clare Immigrant Service developed a guide 'Attending Primary School in Ennis' for parents and guardians in 2006, which provides information on practicalities of uniforms, school holidays and also an introduction to school policies around bullying, homework and channels of communication with the school. Information is available on www.ria.gov.ie and from www.jrs.ie, the Jesuit Refugee Service.

9 Doing Some Research

By building on the above events you may get to know new arrivals and wish to do more strategic research. In order to attract resources into an area, it is valuable to have a community profile which reflects the diversity of people living in your locality. This process can help you to inform local agencies of the need to provide local services. Gort Family Resource Centre developed a comprehensive interview questionnaire to supplement information available through the last census which will inform the needs of people from the Brazilian community in the future.

In Tuam²³ town they decided to supplement national data available in the national census with local focus groups made up of representatives from Gambia, Uganda, Morocco, Nigeria, Brazil, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland. People from the Irish settled and Traveller communities were also involved. These fieldworkers were trained up by a project leader and then went door-to-door reaching 307 households in the town. The results of the survey have been published by Tuam Community Development Resource Centre who led the activity.

In Glin, Co. Limerick, participatory rural appraisal was the approach used to facilitate migrants to have input into how their needs could be met at local level.²⁴

²² See A Newcomers Guide to Cork City, Cork City Council , available in Polish, French, Russian and Romanian, 2007

²³ Tuam: A Town of Many Nations, Tuam Community Development Resource Centre, 2008

²⁴ West Limerick Resources Ltd., 2008

10 Avoid Tokenism

People from new minority communities may be invited to events or meetings where their ability to make a contribution is limited, whether as a consequence of the language barrier, lack of confidence or a lack of shared information. Do not assume people will understand what's going on 'if they sit by Nelly'. A big advantage to the fact that Irish society is small is that information channels are short. If you cannot reach the people you want to reach personally, you will probably know someone who can.

With a little thought it is possible to check that you are reaching the people you want to reach. Information provided by your group should be clear, structured and free of technical jargon. Where meetings have been organised informally based on traditions that have evolved over years, it is important that this information is made available to newcomers. Write procedures for decision-making, membership and committee rotation down and explain these to new arrivals.

An asylum-seeker Reza Mirfattahi, from Iran has joined the voluntary management committee of a Community Development Project in New Ross, Co. Wexford. The project co-ordinator emphasises the value of not making assumptions that people know what is going on "ask whether they have a department of social welfare where they come from, do they know what a local partnership is?"²⁵

11 Commit to Some Training

It can be difficult to be aware of the culture we grow up in. We experience it unconsciously and consider it 'normal'. Training will encourage people to become aware of their own culture; a shared set of knowledge, beliefs, language and habits. We can use this process to examine our own assumptions, stereotypes and generalisations about other cultures. It is important to remember that there is no such thing as a culture that is all 'good' or 'bad'- we all have elements of cultural norms that may be described as negative and other elements as positive. How we perceive 'positive' and 'negative' will depend on our own personal values.

²⁵ Interview with Conor Dervan, Project Co-ordinator, New Ross CDP, September 2008

12 Develop a Diversity Policy for Your Group

A diversity policy will encourage community groups to see involving people from new minority communities as an opportunity rather than a set of problems. Some of the barriers to diversity include a fear of the unknown and a desire to maintain the status quo. The process of developing a policy as a group will enable you to consider your own values, challenge racism in the community and strengthen your group's ability promote a tolerance of difference.

13 Support Volunteers from New Minority Communities

As the case studies included here indicate many new arrivals are getting involved in community development. Your group can provide this opportunity for people by helping them to learn about Irish culture, gain new skills and meet local people.

“It has been found that refugees at some point come to realise their acceptance and integration into the host society depends in part on their own initiatives-in talking to local people and playing an active part in local community associations”.²⁶

Volunteering Ireland recommends that groups working with children/vulnerable clients build up responsibility over time which enables them to get to know the volunteer. The study, included here on Youth Work in Kerry developed a mentoring system where youth volunteers always work in pairs because of the difficulty of getting references from country of origin. You could begin by inviting someone from a direct provision centre to give a talk to your group. A resident in the centre in Meelick, Co. Clare has been visiting schools in the area talking about life in a culture different to Ireland.

²⁶ Taken from “Working with Ethnically & Culturally Diverse Families-Good Practice Guide” Barnardos, 2005

14 Tips for Cross-Cultural Communication²⁷

Slow Down

One of the most common complaints from non-native English speakers is trying to understand English at the pace at which many Irish people speak. Slow down, speak clearly and ensure your pronunciation is clear. There is however, no need to raise your voice.

Using Names

Names are the first thing we find out about people and are part of people's identity. Take the time to get to know people's names and pronounce them correctly. If you have difficulty remembering ask them to write it down.

Separate Questions

Try not to ask double questions such as "Do you want to carry on or will we stop?" One part of the question may have been understood but not the other half.

Avoid Negative Questions

Many misunderstandings can happen because of the Irish habit of framing questions in a negative way e.g. "Are you not coming?" the response may be "Yes," meaning I am not coming.

Take Turns

Communication is improved by taking turns. Be patient and listen to the response. Avoid interrupting.

Be Supportive

Intercultural communication is, at heart, about being comfortable. Giving encouragement to those with weak English gives them confidence, support and a trust in you.

Check Meanings

Do not assume the other party has understood. Summarise what has been said in order to verify it. If you're not sure you have been understood, ask or write it down.

²⁷ Adapted from Diversify-Encouraging Cultural Diversity in Volunteering Ireland, VOLT, 2006

Sources of Further Information

This list of possible topics for organising an Orientation Pack is taken from the website of the Crosscare, a Dublin diocesan immigrant support organisation. All these categories can be downloaded separately from their website, www.migrantproject.ie/immigrantinformation.

This 'Living in Ireland Guide' was updated in June 2008 and is available in English, Polish, Chinese and Russian. Hard copies can be posted to groups who request them.

- Accommodation
- Finding a Job
- Taxes and Banking
- Employment Rights & Safety at Work
- Healthcare
- Social Welfare Benefits and Entitlements
- Pensions
- Education
- Public transport
- Driving in Ireland
- Racism and Discrimination

The Citizens Information Board, FAS and the Migrant Rights Centre have also published guides to Working in Ireland available in many languages.

Housing Rights and Entitlements

Threshold, the national housing organisation has published Guides to Renting in fourteen languages including Mandarin, Slovak, Polish, Russian, Portuguese, Lithuanian Arabic and French. These are available free of charge and can be posted if you cannot access a website. See contact details in the appendix. They will also provide training on an outreach basis; contact the nearest regional office in Dublin, Cork, Limerick or Sligo.

Respond is a national Non-Governmental Organisation offering training and education on housing issues. They have delivered training on racial harassment in housing estates in a variety of locations around Ireland. See www.respond.ie.

Funding

There are Partnerships and Community Development Projects throughout Ireland funded through POBAL. They may have a fund to support your local activity. www.pobal.ie

Family Resource Centres are funded through the Department of Social and Family Affairs. They may have funding available for small scale initiatives that aim to support local integration www.familysupportagency.ie

This website of the National Action Plan against Racism provides information on funding and training supports for anti-racism actions and projects to promote involvement of ethnic minority groups in sports, recreation and the arts. www.diversityireland.ie

The Equality Authority provides diversity and anti-racism and equality training and has a range of relevant publications available on their website. www.equality.ie Tel; 01-4173333
Lo-call: 1890 2450545

There is an Anti-Sectarianism Fund available to community groups through the Department of Foreign Affairs. Grants are available to individuals or groups who are developing projects aimed at challenging intolerance & sectarianism and which will break down barriers caused by religious & cultural differences.

See www.dfa.ie/home/index/funding

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

The trust provides financial support from a few hundred euro to over €100,000 to organisations engaged in work which promotes humane migration and integration policies benefitting both migrant and settled communities. NASC in Cork, New Communities Partnership in Dublin and the Africa Centre in Dublin have received funding for staff and project costs www.jrct.org.uk.

One Foundation

The foundation is a philanthropic organisation which aims to improve the lives of people from new minority groups. This can involve support for an organisations intercultural strategy. See www.Onefoundation.ie

Atlantic Philanthropies www.atlanticphilanthropies.org

Atlantic is a charitable foundation which concentrates its work in seven regions of the world, one of which is Ireland. They focus on ageing, disadvantaged youth & children, population health and reconciliation and human rights.

Cairde

is a Dublin based organisation which aims to tackle health inequalities amongst ethnic minority communities. See www.cairde.ie

There are 17 regional volunteer centres around Ireland who work with volunteers and offer resources around volunteer management. See the list online at www.volunteer.ie.

Cultural & Sport Information

Spirasi- is a community group providing a range of services for asylum-seekers and refugees including information, medical & psychological services for survivors of torture. Available on their website are 100 cultural profiles with a specific focus on health. www.spirasi.ie/culturalprofiles
Tel; 01-8683504

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation which provides resources and support to refugees. A Guide to your Child in Ireland is available for parents from new minority communities in Arabic, Chinese, French, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian and Russian. There is also a country profile in the schools resources section online. Templates in 12 languages are available for typical letters between school authorities and parents. See www.jrs.ie

The OneWorld website offers news from over 1,600 organisations that promote human rights awareness globally. They also have guides to selected countries. See www.OneWorld.org

The BBC website includes information on all the main world religions
See. www.bbc.co.uk/faith

The United Nations Website contains information on all member states, including national holidays. See www.un.org/members/holidays

Show Racism the Red Card is a national project funded by Pobal which aims to tackle Racism through Sport. They have developed an information pack and a DVD which outline the Do's and Don'ts in responding to Racism. See www.theredcard.ie
Tel; 01-8280018

Sari is non-profit organisation set up in 1997 as a direct response to the growth of racist attacks by a small but vocal group of people. They organise an annual soccer fest in the Phoenix Park where adult teams and young people play.
See www.sari.ie Tel; 01-6688869

Useful Contacts

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
provides direct support to migrant workers and their families. www.mrci.ie Tel; 01-8897570

Immigrant Council of Ireland promotes the rights of immigrants through information and advocacy. www.immigrantcouncil.ie Tel; 01-8656525

Integrating Ireland is a network of community groups who work with asylum-seekers, refugees and immigrant support groups. They have a list of 140 members online.
www.integratingireland.ie Tel; 01-4783490

Refugee Information Service provides a regional information clinic in Mayo, Galway and parts of Dublin. www.ris.ie Tel; 01-8382740

Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform
www.justice.ie Tel; 01-6028202

Work Permit Section, Dept. of Enterprise Trade and Employment
www.entemp.ie

Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) is responsible for planning & co-ordinating provision of services to asylum-seekers, refugees & persons with leave-to-remain. They have information leaflets for parents of school-going children.
www.ria.gov.ie Tel; 01-4183200

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Notes

