



Engaging Difference

the opportunity of diversity
in a changing county meath

Meath Migrant Research Publication

Engaging Difference:

the opportunity for diversity in a changing Meath

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Report Abstract

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On behalf of

Meath Citizens Information Service

And

Meath County Development Board

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Joint Foreword

Meath Citizens Information Service

Meath Citizens Information Service is delighted to have taken an active part in this excellent initiative. The population of Meath has increased dramatically over the last few years. Presently there are 15,000 foreign nationals living in County Meath and to date there has been no measure of their experiences of living in this county. This research is a snap shot of what migrants are experiencing in County Meath.

I would like to thank Meath County Council and Meath County Development Board for their full support for this valuable research project. I would also like to thank Ned Rispin for his hard work on the project.

I believe that the recommendations in this report can be used as a stepping stone for the development of a county that is inclusive where every person is valued and encouraged to be the best they can be.

Mairead Byrne

Chairperson, Meath Citizens Information Service

Joint Foreword

Meath County Development Board

On behalf of Meath County Development Board (CDB), I would like to welcome this publication *'Engaging Difference: the opportunity for diversity in a changing Meath'*, which provides an insight into the opportunities and challenges which present to migrants living and working in County Meath. This is the first time that this type of research has been conducted within the county and I would like to commend all agencies and individuals involved.

I would especially like to thank the Citizens Information Service who took the lead role in overseeing the project and also the CDB who provided funding through their representative organisations. I would also like to congratulate the Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Group (a sub group of the CDB) who endorsed the project at an early stage and provided the opportunity for agencies and individuals to become involved in the Project Steering Committee. Without the commitment and dedication of the Project Steering Committee, this research would not have been as comprehensive and reflects the positive nature and benefit of interagency work. It is also important to recognize the enthusiasm and commitment of Dr. Alan Bruce, Universal Learning Systems who undertook the research in association with the Project Steering Committee.

This publication is of benefit to all agencies and members on Meath County Development Board and I welcome the future opportunity for diversity in a changing Meath as outlined within the research.

James Mangan

Chairperson, Meath County Development Board

Background

The population of Meath has changed in many ways over the last 10 years. With a population of over 164,000 people (2006 CSO), the requirements for social services and social/recreational activities have also changed. Over the last 5 – 7 years Meath Citizens Information Service (CIS) has seen a substantial increase in the number of foreign nationals visiting CICs, enquiring about all aspects of life from health, employment, training, education, social, culture and information. To date there has been no research into this area in Meath, which is necessary for future planning within the county.

Meath CIS approached Meath County Development Board who immediately recognized the value of the research for all agencies operating a service in Co. Meath and endorsed their full support. The following organizations formed the Project Steering Committee which aimed to develop, manage and fund the project:

- Meath VEC
- Meath Partnership
- Cultúr
- Meath CIS
- HSE
- RAPID
- Meath County Development Board
- Department Of Social & Family Affairs
- FAS
- Meath County Council
- SIPTU

The following report looks at regional, national and international research while highlighting local experiences of foreign nationals coming to and living in Meath. The recommendations should be used as a cornerstone for change in County Meath and has the potential to be modeled around the country.

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1. Introduction

This research was commissioned by the Meath Migrant Research project, representing a number of statutory and community organizations in Co. Meath. The primary aim of the research was to investigate the circumstances of the migrant community in Co. Meath through a combination of consultation with migrants themselves and through an analysis of existing data regarding service provision with the primary purpose of identifying gaps in services provided to migrants by the state, community and voluntary sectors.

The research was designed to focus on:

- Migrant experiences
- Identification of service provision issues and gaps
- Issues around education, training and employment
- Issues around health and welfare
- Issues around information and access
- Social activity and integration
- Analytical profile of demographic issues
- Analysis of national and local policies with reference to best practice and identified concerns.

The key focus was on migrants who were presenting to services for support. The research terms of reference did not include reference to the circumstances of the Mosney reception centre in Co. Meath – housing primarily asylum seekers and refugees. While the Mosney experiences and conditions are absent from this review, it should be borne in mind that the circumstances and experiences of those who have resided for any length of time there (and some families are now in their sixth year of residence) have had a bearing on those who subsequently left and took up residence in the county.

The *methodology* aimed to develop a collaborative analytical process where findings, results and recommendations would be clear, realistic and objective. The process was designed to have a strong emphasis on consultation, literature review, data analysis and strategic assessment to identify and review challenges, issues and needs of the migrant community, service providers and stakeholders in addressing strategies and methods to promote best practice and inclusion.

The key *aims* of the research project were agreed as:

- To evaluate the degree to which identified needs have been met (or otherwise) based on evaluative analysis of migrants' own experiences.

- To outline the key demographic characteristics of the migrant communities in Co. Meath.
- To identify current needs and issues based on analysis, evaluation and background research with reference to policy at local, national and European levels.
- To provide such an overview with reference to the role of relevant stakeholder agencies and services.
- To provide an analysis of current trends, issues and networks which could contribute to needs identification and response.
- To develop evidence based findings that are realistic, structured and relevant to the enhanced integration and service provision for migrant communities in Co. Meath.

The objectives of the review were agreed as being:

- To identify the key challenges and issues.
- To identify to what extent needs have been met (or otherwise).
- To identify issues around social participation and engagement.
- To undertake interviews, surveys and focus group meetings to establish issues, themes and suggested priorities.
- To develop a comprehensive consultation process.
- To consult with and interview all relevant agencies and stakeholders.
- To determine from findings what are the current identified issues, needs and concerns.
- To identify key elements for forward strategic planning.
- To make recommendations from the findings on how targets and actions can best be defined and addressed within the context of best practice and national policy.
- To provide an associated comprehensive literature review and targeted recommendations for future developments.

1.1 Themes

The feedback and analysis reflected in this research indicate common trends - reflected locally. These refer to the human dimensions of migration. The free movement of labour is a cornerstone of EU policy. The sheer implications in terms of family structures, cultural differences, variations in qualifications (and common recognition of same), health, language, loneliness and social dislocation are enormous however. While labour market conditions are the primary driver, the social and cultural impacts directly affect the quality of life of migrants – as well as the expectations and attitudes of host communities.

The research to date has analyzed data and responses from national, international and local perspectives. The literature review has looked at trends at European level

and has cross-referenced these to policy concerns and directions articulated by both the European Union and national governments. This data has been further cross-referenced with information supplied by Irish national bodies centrally involved with immigration and interculturalism – as well as a range of specific sources of academic and research expertise.

The broad trends at national and European levels suggest:

- Immigration will remain a permanent feature of most European societies.
- Inward migration is necessary to maintain economic activity and function because of altered indigenous European demographics
- Issues around accommodation and integration are highly contentious in some countries.
- Associated issues of xenophobia and racism have the potential to cause significant issues of destabilization and conflict
- Debates around national approaches are often confused and strongly demarcated between themes around assimilation, multiculturalism, interculturalism, etc.

The specificity of Irish circumstances is noted. Uniquely, Ireland has transformed itself from a country of significant emigration to one of net inward migration in a remarkably short period of time. There has been no tradition of debate or analysis regarding immigration, although a long tradition of support for those Irish 'exiles' who were compelled to emigrate. On the surface this is seen by some commentators as a factor in pre-disposing Irish indigenous populations to be more empathetic towards the needs of immigrants and to having enhanced degrees of tolerance.

As the work of MacGreill and others indicates, however, issues around prejudice, discrimination and intolerance are present. Pre-existing attitudes in Ireland towards travellers indicate that hostility towards out-groups can be felt and expressed. While this has not emerged consistently regarding immigrants, there is the potential to do so. In addition, while the economic usefulness of immigrants has been acknowledged, issues arise around the capacity of Irish society to welcome national and ethnic difference in the longer term in all its cultural, religious and linguistic dimensions.

Issues around equality and labour market participation for members of ethnic minority groups in Ireland have been analyzed by a number of researchers particularly after the results of the first census to record data on nationality – the 2002 Census which showed a non-Irish national population of 224,261 which was 5.8% of the total population at the time.

Research commissioned by the Equality Authority in 2003 identified six major concerns of members of ethnic minorities in relation to their participation in the labour market (Conlon, C. et al. 2003).

These were:

- English language skills
- Experience of discrimination
- Lack of familiarity and knowledge about processes and procedures associated with job search in Ireland
- Recognition of educational qualifications and work experience
- Information
- Childcare access

All available literature indicates that while economic issues may be the primary and key driver for the decision to emigrate, it does not take long for a range of other issues to come to the fore in the emigrant's social, cultural and communications development. Interaction with the host community (or with other different migrant communities) can produce unexpected challenges and experiences (not all of which are negative). The increasing engagement with social structures and services may contrast sharply with earlier experiences in the home country. Issues around familiarity and navigation through often alien bureaucracies and systems can seem daunting.

A host of new issues may be encountered as emigrants begin to experience needs and issues in areas as diverse as health, medical treatment, socializing, food, entitlements, welfare and housing. John Berger memorably once summed this up in quoting from the German experience of mass inward migration of *gästarbeiders* – 'we asked for workers, but people came'.

In a parallel manner, the host community may experience issues around unfamiliar behaviour patterns or a sense of social transformation over which it feels it has no control. While prior Irish experience of massive outward emigration would at first sight seem to predispose the local population to more understanding, there was some evidence throughout the responses to this research of some expressed concerns either in relation to cheap labour or new communities that had 'other agendas' or were not prepared to integrate. This raises a host of separate questions about identity and self-perception for the host community. Migration affects all sides. It is an encounter of difference and diversity and no one is left untouched by the process.

It also raises significant questions of identity for the host community. Before defining the other, it too embarks on a process of discovery about what it itself may be.

Mutwarasibo has documented this in the case of Ireland:

There are sentiments that "non-nationals" will dilute the "mono-cultural Irish society;" however there is no compelling evidence of this. It is also questionable that there is "one" unified Irish culture to dilute... ethnically, the Irish nation is a pluralist hybrid of Firbolgs, Celts, Vikings, Normans, English, Scottish,

Huguenots, etc. (Johnson) argues that racial purity in the case of the Irish is blatant nonsense... It is very clear since that Ireland has had "others" in the past and prior to the recent immigration waves. The "indigenous others" in Ireland (Republic) include - Protestants, Jews, Travellers, black Irish, the Irish-Chinese, lone parents, gays and lesbians, etc.

It is advisable, from all the literature reviewed, that an international perspective be adopted from the outset when addressing concerns around migration and the linkage to potential social inclusion. No problem or issue existing in Ireland is unique to Ireland. No problem found in Ireland is without learning and value for understanding for those from other countries. However wide the surface disparities, issues around unsupported migration, exclusion, discrimination, difference and prejudice have common threads. Largely, that is because they have a common origin.

Delineating exact and accurate statistics for the number of immigrants is problematic. By its nature, this population is constantly changing in response to issues such as altered socio-economic circumstances and seasonal labour demands. This has had a particular impact with the downturn in the private housing construction sector that has been notable since January 2008. While there is some initial indication of some migrants returning to their countries of origin (or a slow down in inward migration to Ireland) most commentators agree that migrant communities are and will remain a permanent part of the Irish population structure.

In addition, migrant groups differ significantly in levels of expressed need, linguistic competence in the English language, employment sectors, national origins, legal status or even levels of socialization. Some groups have been associated with specific employment sectors (e.g. Filipinos in the medical and nursing fields). Others are widely dispersed and fragmented or clustered in specific geographic areas (e.g. the high number of Poles and Lithuanians in Oldcastle). Some communities have expectations of limited and temporary residence in Ireland while others (e.g. African nationalities) have expectations of long-term residence.

1.2 Methodology

The Meath Migrant Research project has endeavoured to develop a research methodology that addresses the identified needs, aims and objectives. The methodology aimed to develop an analytical process where findings, results and recommendations would be clear, realistic and objective. The process was divided in a number of stages.

These included agency consultation, literature review, data analysis, identification and review, interviews with individual and focus groups of immigrants. A series of structured interviews and consultations was carried out with a range of agencies – statutory and voluntary – and with individuals working in the five specified focus areas.

Additional interviews and consultations were held with agencies and experts in migration and ethnic and intercultural integration policy at national level. Extensive consultations were held with migrant representative bodies engaged in policy, training, education and advocacy. A set of interviews was undertaken with ethnic chaplaincies and church bodies, service providers and employers with experience of diversity management.

Eight Focus groups were conducted in three locations: Ashbourne, Navan and Dunshaughlin. A total of 48 individuals participated.

1.3 The situation in Co. Meath

The analysis of migrant issues and concerns in Co. Meath is as much about change in the county itself. In something less than a generation the population of the county has doubled. There has been a corresponding transformation of the economic environment from one that was primarily agricultural and rural to one that is increasingly urbanized and based on a vigorously expanding services sector.

Housing patterns have been profoundly affected by the explosive growth of metropolitan Dublin with increasing numbers of Meath residents commuting to work there each day. This extraordinary rate of growth reflects the fact that Meath is today very much part of the commuter belt of the greater Dublin area. This has a number of knock-on effects in terms of community composition. As housing is cheaper, new house growth has tended to come before the development of community facilities and resources.

Evidence from respondents to this research suggests a link between growth in social isolation and differential growth rates (areas closer to Dublin are more urbanized and have strong population growth rates. Some areas, especially in the northwest of the county, are more rural and remote). Some areas have significantly underdeveloped levels of public transport provision.

Into this matrix of widespread social change and economic transformation there is now the experience of recent immigration. This aspect of rapid change has had a particular impact on the nature, distribution and scale of immigrant communities in the county. Immigration thus can be viewed in the context of a profound social and demographic transformation that has witnessed significant changes in overall labour market participation, economic activity, housing patterns and service provision. This has produced many pressures to develop effective responses to change and the management of the processes involved to meet the needs and expectations of citizens.

According to the preliminary results of the 2006 Census, Meath is now the second fastest growing county in Leinster with an increase of 21.4% in population compared to the 2002 census. The population has grown in numerical terms from 134,005 in 2002 to 162,621 in 2006. As a comparison, the national average population growth

was 8.1%.

As the evidence will show, Ireland in general and local county structures in particular were quite unprepared for these significantly increased levels of immigration and simply had not developed the systems, policies and procedures necessary to address the challenges involved.

Table 1

Persons resident in Co Meath classified by usual residence one year earlier (2006 Census)

Meath (total population):	161,910
Under one year old:	2,849
Total over one year old:	159,061
Elsewhere ROI:	7,741
N. Ireland:	87
GB:	530
Austria	6
Belgium	8
Cyprus	11
Denmark	8
Estonia	13
Finland	5
France	56
Czech Rep.	39
Germany	52
Greece	3
Hungary	19
Italy	37
Latvia	207
Lithuania	690
Malta	0
Poland	1044
Portugal	9
Slovakia	91
Slovenia	0
Luxembourg	2
Spain	71
USA	205
Netherlands	71
Others	835

Table 1 indicates that some 3% of the population of Meath in 2006 were non-Irish nationals who had not been living in the county only one year earlier.

Table 2

Persons usually resident in Meath who had lived outside the State for one year or more classified by year of taking up residence in State (2006 Census)

Total:	27,831
Pre 1951	117
1951-60	351
1961-70	1,493
1971-80	2,803
1981-90	2,491
1991-2000	9,204
2001-06	9,041
Not stated	2,331

Table 2 figures indicate that of those who had lived outside the State for one year or more (27,831 - this can be assumed to include both migrants and Irish nationals who had returned to the county), some 65.5% had taken up residence since 1991.

Table 3

Persons usually resident in Meath classified by country of birth (2006 Census)

Total:	161,910
N. Ireland:	1,883
UK	8,071
Poland	1,882
Lithuania	2,241
Other EU	2,234
Other European	844
USA	870
Africa	1,902
Asia	1,181
Other	820

From Table 3 alone we can see that some 20,044 (12.4%) people resident in Co Meath were born outside the island of Ireland. While many of these may have had Irish nationality the fact is impressive. Of this number, 7,201 (35.9%) were born in Poland, Lithuania or other European countries (excluding the UK).

Table 4

Persons resident in Meath classified by nationality (2006 Census)

Total:	161,910
Irish:	146,100
UK	3,826
EU 15	1,008
EU accession	5,217
African	1,590
Asian	911
US	366
Other	710
Not stated	1,296

This indicates that some 14,924 (9.2%) of the population of Co. Meath in 2006 were non-Irish nationals.

2. Contexts

From the outset of human history we have evidence of migration. Individuals and groups have migrated for a number of reasons in all cultures. These reasons have included the need to flee from violence, persecution or famine as well as more positive aspects such as adventure, seeking improved opportunities or following pre-established migratory patterns. In one of his last books, the travel writer Bruce Chatwin advanced the theory that, at its core, the human species was fundamentally nomadic - with the concept of settled and rooted communities a much later development.

Movements of population on a mass scale are increasingly facilitated by new forms of transport and also access to significant sources of information about potential destinations and images of success that are imagined or wished for in the new destination.

Growing up in rural Africa, my dream was to one day go to Europe. I and my friends would constantly discuss this. It was our dream. Europe was the place where we could find and discover every opportunity and live the kind of lives we could not do at home.

(Respondent – African student)

In the post Second World War environment these population movements have been of a nature and scale of unimagined range and scope. Following the partition of India in 1947, almost 15 million people migrated to the two new states in the space of a few weeks. Huge population movements have also resulted from post-war developments in Europe, famine in Africa and massive urbanization processes in China. Writers such as Mike Davis (*Planet of Slums*) predict that future population movements will continue to be dominated by processes of globalized stratification which have resulted in a permanent underclass in the global South – a class that is aware of but frequently denied access to the benefits of the developed world. Davis estimates that there are today approximately one billion people living and working in unregulated, informal economies.

2.1 European trends

Population movements and migration in post-war Europe have been conditioned by the need of reconstructing economies to have access to significant labour resources. The key metropolitan economies (Germany, France, UK) adopted policies that encouraged inward migration to meet the needs of rapid post-war expansion. Frequently these policies focused on 'source' countries which themselves had been former colonies or which had had particularly close economic links.

Immigration has had therefore a very different character in the individual countries of the European Union. Some countries have had a long-term experience of immigration and some, especially the recent members, have no experience of it at all. Reliability, comparability and even existence of immigration data pose an obvious problem. It is an established fact that such data may be inaccurate, dated, superficial or of a nature that hampers effective comparisons.

The difficulty lies in the definition of a migrant itself, in which time factors may play a key role. Although the UN recommends one year as the borderline criterion for acquisition of official immigrant status, many countries do not operate this framework. In Germany the time spent within the country plays no role – the key factor here being the ownership or leasing of property. The statistics from the Scandinavian countries, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland are generally considered as more reliable. Southern European countries are considered less reliable.

The situation is complicated due to the great variety of migration types and characteristics. In addition to legal economic migrants, there are also “illegal” immigrants, transit immigrants, students, family reunifications, adoptions, repatriated ethnic groups, migration of post-retirement seniors, etc. These categories often overlap with migrants crossing from one category to another. The fact is often critically mentioned that the important category of refugee status is usually not included in migration statistics of European States.

If an international migrant is defined as a person who has lived outside their country of origin for longer than one year, there are approximately 56 million migrants in Europe - the largest number of all the continents. The highest percentage of foreign migrants lives in Luxembourg (34.9%) and Switzerland (19.0%). Austria, Belgium and Germany have a migrant population of about 9% each. Another group of countries – Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom – oscillate between 3.0% and 7.0%. In other countries the percentage is smaller.

According to the available data, about 66% of immigrants are of European origin, 16.2% African and 10.6% Asian. A detailed look at the numbers in individual countries reveals considerable differences. In Switzerland, for example, more than two thirds of immigrants are from European Union countries. In Luxembourg, Ireland and Belgium more than half the foreigners come from other EU countries. In Spain, the United Kingdom, France and Sweden it is approximately one third to one half.

Colonial and migration politics, history and geography are the key elements influencing which group of immigrants a country is likely to host. For instance, Africa is an important source of migrants for France and Portugal, less so for Italy and Belgium. South America is important for Portugal and Spain. Asia is the main source of immigrants to the United Kingdom (India), Greece (the Middle East) and Italy (southeast Asia). Germany receives immigrants from both western democracies (about

one fourth) and other sources – two thirds of all immigrants from Eastern Europe to the EU end up in Germany. The proportion of African immigrants in Germany is, on the other hand, minimal.

The development of migration flows over time is interesting but multilayered. From the above it should be obvious that generalization about the profile of immigration into Europe is exceptionally complicated. There is a wide range of exogenous factors that influence the numbers and countries of origin of immigrants to individual target host countries.

The factors in play may include:

- Economic attractiveness of the target country
- Relative restriction in immigration policy
- Existence of language barriers
- Unemployment rates
- Historically determined relations.

Immigration does not occur in a vacuum. Wider social and economic trends are identifiable and play powerful roles both in determining the decision to emigrate on the one hand or the contours of need whereby immigration becomes a critical component of policy to maintain economic activity and labour market maintenance on the other. The migration experience becomes a complex process for the host community, community of origin and the individual him/herself.

At European level various national governments have reacted to immigration in often contradictory ways. The need for labour to sustain altered demographics due to aging populations and declining birth rates for example underlines a critical point – for most European societies continued demographic growth and the maintenance of living standards is only possible with continuing immigration. According to research done by the population growth department of the United Nations, Germany would have to accept 487,000 people every year just to maintain its current numbers of productive-age population. France would need 109,000 people and the European Union as a whole 1.6 million.

Europe needs immigrants in both the short and the long term. The question remains how to ensure and control the movement of sufficient numbers of qualified and legal workers. Illegal migration and the worries that accompany it are important political issues for the European Union. According to the OECD, about 500,000 migrants arrive in Europe illegally – with the total estimate of illegal immigrants in the EU member countries now placed between 3 to 6 million people. They are drawn by economic possibilities, they come to reunite with their families and relations who already live in the EU or they are fleeing places where their lives are endangered by military conflicts.

Issues connected with this have fuelled considerable debate in all EU Member States.

This debate has been accompanied by often ugly manifestations of xenophobia and racism. The rise of overtly racist and anti-immigrant parties has been a fact of life in countries as different as Denmark, Germany, France and the Netherlands. The growth of anti-immigrant perspectives has been given added impetus by the election to government of immigrant-hostile parties in both France and Italy in 2008. A critical issue that has emerged is the official attitude of some member States to the potential admission of Turkey to the European Union.

The development of labour market policy for the integration of immigrants in Europe is based on the standpoint that employment is the most effective precursor for social integration – it ensures regular income, economic independence, security, social status, a chance to create bonds to the majority population and social interaction. Employment, or job market development, is a critical factor in fostering effective immigration policy in Europe.

Unemployment rates may significantly affect the views of the local population on work migration, despite the fact that it can be empirically proven that immigrant workers usually occupy lower tier jobs which require lower qualification levels and in which the local workforce is not interested.

In December 2005 the European Commission adopted a legal migration strategic plan. The aim of this plan is to meet the demand of the Hague programme for long-term development of the EU work programme in the field of justice, freedom and security. The programme included the express requirement for the Commission to hand in a legal migration policy strategic plan which would include, among other things, rules for allowing entry to the European Union to migrant workers that would enable a timely reaction to changing demands of the international workforce jobs market.

This strategic plan focuses mainly on economic migration. Its goal is to give a clear and unified view of a whole range of initiatives in the field of lawmaking and other fields which the Commission is going to propose in the coming years in accordance with the preliminary migration plan for years 2006-2009 (i.e. the remaining time span of the Hague programme).

The plan focuses on four respective domains in which the necessary measures are to be taken which are equally important to the interconnected development of the common EU legal migration policy.

They are:

- *Legislative* - preparing new rules for entry and residence of workers who are nationals of third countries
- *Actions and policies* - aimed at the improvement of needed knowledge and skills and the exchange of information in the area of immigration
- *Policies and financial support* - for better integration of economic migrants and their family members both within the jobs market and within the social life of

- *Regulatory measures* - aimed at more controlled international migration flows that require cooperation from immigrants' countries of origin.

Projects aimed at immigrants and issues around their inclusion and integration differ from country to country. Education and training are officially recognized as effective ways to promote inclusion but this is frequently conditioned and constrained by widely varying national approaches.

However, when considered in a European context, it is apparent that this growth in migrant numbers is part of an overall trend throughout Western Europe that has been discernible since the 1980s. One new trend in Europe, the asylum phenomenon, is due to a range of interdependent variables. Before the early 1980s the number of asylum-seekers arriving in Western Europe remained fairly stable at fewer than 100,000 annually. In the late 1970s and the 1980s the demand for labour was diminishing and European countries that had been involved in the importation of cheap labour from outside Europe no longer required any new workers. Moreover, the Communist bloc collapsed prompting many to believe that massive numbers of people would 'flood' into Europe - this simply did not happen.

Both factors contributed to a period of intergovernmental co-operation and the curtailment of immigration. Economic migrants now had to use other routes to enter Europe - the asylum process being one of them - and they were able to make use of existing social networks to do so. Indeed in the case of Ireland, in the absence of an American-style based transparent immigration policy, it has meant in practice that a proportion of asylum seekers would more correctly be described as economic migrants.

In conclusion, it can be stated that if immigration is to be an asset for Europe, the migration phenomenon needs to be handled logically and effectively. Immigration must be, as a process, beneficial to the European economies, the immigrants' countries of origin and the migrants themselves. Precisely for this reason, continuous concerted effort aimed at immigrant integration is as important as the creation of transparent and flexible rules for the immigrants' entry, residence and re-entry to the European Union.

On the basis of this, issues of workforce migration are a very important reality in the EU at the moment to which individual Member States must react in a number of fields.

One is the creation of conditions for as seamless an integration as possible of immigrants into the economic sphere - bringing along elevated demands for immigrants' adaptability to the new environment in terms of skills, language and social integration.

One of the critical ways of making this easier is to ensure appropriate professional training.

The basis for this will be staff and services that should be resourced and competent to be able to cope with a number of specific issues mainly in the areas of:

- Intercultural communication
- Conflict resolution
- Adaptability of immigrants within the host country
- Cultural diversity
- Racism and stereotyping
- Topics related to professional skills

These areas need to become the starting points for the setting of targets and development of supplementary educational or training interventions that support capacity for relevant host agencies and integration for migrants. The importance of this perspective gains more significance when we realize the following:

- Work migration to the EU is very strong and is going to grow in size
- Immigrants come from different cultural and social backgrounds
- Immigrants have pressing employment needs
- Immigrants usually take up the menial jobs requiring no specific qualification

2.2 Immigration in Ireland: an Overview

From being a country historically characterized by emigration, Ireland's recent economic success and resultant job creation have seen it emerge as a country of immigration. This has produced unprecedented demographic changes in a short period of time. It has in addition produced challenges and opportunities in addressing and accommodating the new diversity of Irish life. Immigration is now a feature of Irish life with people from within and outside the European Union (EU) entering the country in search of improved employment prospects.

Since 2000, over 100,000 persons from outside the EU have been admitted to Ireland largely for reasons of employment – although in a number of cases to escape poor conditions and circumstances in their home countries. In addition, a substantial number has come from within the EU itself (*Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005*) thus reflecting the free and open labour market that the EU was designed to create.

Recent census data reveal that 58% (186,000) of the State's increased population since 2002 is attributable to immigration. Extrapolating these numbers in light of previous data suggests that there are at present approximately 400,000 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland. This is almost 10% of the State's population of 4.23 million (CSO, 2006).

This represents a remarkable change in the country's experience of migration. Historically, and particularly for the past two centuries, Ireland has been a country of

strong outward emigration. The vicissitudes of Irish history and the sustained economic underdevelopment and weakness of the country meant that strong patterns of emigration were established and maintained for decades.

Traditionally Ireland has not received significant inward migration. Even the plantations of the 17th century turned within three generations to a net emigration of the Ulster Scots population. Ireland was a poor and peripheral European country with socio-economic characteristics more in common with the colonial economies to which it was linked through the common experience of British imperialism. Ireland was scarred by economic deprivation and a long history of emigration that was dramatically accelerated by the 1847 Famine and subsequent demographic near collapse.

Earlier histories of inward migration are limited. A small number of Jewish refugees fled to Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fleeing from Tsarist persecution but their entry and presence was restricted. Until recently the only immigration experienced by modern Ireland consisted of small controlled refugee movements, and the settlement of now established minorities such as the Italian and Chinese communities.

The first two refugee groups to arrive in Ireland were Hungarians and Chileans under agreements with the UN. In 1956, 530 Hungarians were accommodated in a disused army camp outside Limerick. Life in the camp was grim and resulted in the residents going on hunger strike and leaving for Canada once the opportunity arose. The Chilean exodus following the coup and repression of the junta of 1973 saw the admission of 120 refugees to Ireland, many of whom returned home as soon as they got the chance. A total of 212 Vietnamese boat people came to Ireland in 1979.

In 1985, 26 Iranian Baha'is were permitted to settle. In 1992, 770 Bosnians were admitted. Many were medical evacuees and were housed in hostels and health board facilities. Certainly the treatment the Bosnians received was considerably better than previous groups.

According to Ward, the principal reason for this is that responsibility for programme refugees moved from the Department of Defence to the Department of Foreign Affairs. This Department established the Refugee Agency in 1991 which was mandated to settle and support programme refugees. The Bosnian population has now expanded through natural increase and family reunification to roughly 1,200 people.

These historical experiences underline the dramatically different nature of the migration experience in Ireland since the mid 1990s. For the first time in its history Ireland has now become the object of massive inward migration. As we will see throughout this research, both national and Co. Meath statistics on the nature and scale of inward migration are not in themselves remarkable in comparative European terms. What is remarkable is the short time frame in which this has happened.

In the period 1995-2000, approximately a quarter of a million persons migrated to

Ireland. Many of these were returning Irish (estimated at 50%) – thus reversing the strong outward migration of Irish in the late 1980s. The rest were mainly other Europeans or Americans. The booming economy created a strong demand for new labour. There were however other factors that brought about this dramatic change. Ireland, while still a deeply class-divided society, enjoyed one of the highest GDP growth rates and lowest unemployment ratios in Europe. The creation of more jobs and a higher international profile has meant that this growth did not go unnoticed.

Other factors in this accelerated rate of inward migration relate to the features of globalization and their impact on communities worldwide. The declining cost of international air travel together with increased accessibility to industrialized nations and their promotion abroad and the dissemination of information technology have created environments where migration becomes feasible for many.

In addition, the gradual tightening of immigration controls in Europe has given rise to an extremely lucrative business in professional human trafficking. Trafficking involves the transit of people through illegal channels with the intention of entering a state and evading its immigration laws. Left with no alternative, refugees and would-be economic migrants alike have used these channels to enter the industrialized nations of the north. Additionally it should be borne in mind that these rising immigration figures are also a reflection of social and political instability in many countries of origin and the polarization and poverty that many are forced to endure through processes of globalized inequality and unequal development.

Clearly we can see that the growth in immigration is just one symptom of the rapid and massive change Irish society is undergoing. It is also further evidence of Ireland's increasing connectedness with the global economy. The decline of agriculture, the growth of the knowledge economy, increased diversity as old social certainties mutate and the massive urbanization of Ireland all point to wider and deeper change processes. In this new paradigm, immigration is a symptom and not a cause.

These realities are acknowledged in the most recent annual report of FÁS on the Irish labour market (FÁS *Labor Market Review 2007*):

While trade had been the primary channel for the worldwide globalization of labour, in Ireland's case immigration has been the most important factor. In recent years, immigration flows into Ireland have been faster than anywhere else in Western Europe since the post-WWII era. And while the growth in off shoring poses a threat to Irish jobs in exposed sectors, the immigration channel of labour globalization has thus far had a very positive impact on both the economy and the labour market. In particular, immigration has been critical in keeping skills and (especially) labour shortages to a minimum. The large supply of labour has also led to greater capital investment which has been a further boost to the economy.

The FÁS Review also investigates the likely impact of immigration from the EU new Member States on Irish economic performance and notes that while immigration can

lead to a higher unemployment rate in the short-term, it will be less if the inflow of migrants helps to reduce infrastructural bottlenecks and, in such a scenario, could actually result in a fall in the long-term unemployment rate (Fitzgerald et al, 2007).

Indeed, the Review underlines that immigration has been and will continue to be crucial in realizing Ireland's infrastructural projects arising from the National Development Plan (NDP).

Essentially, as long as migrant labour acts as a complement to the skills set that already exists in the country, then the main impact will be on alleviating shortages and increasing output rather than increasing unemployment.

Such a favourable and positive evaluation seems to accord well with recent experience where many of the new entrants into the Irish labour market have taken up predominantly low-skilled jobs that Irish workers have tended to avoid. Indeed, FAS confirms that this was broadly in line with the Government's intention to meet shortages in the low skill sectors by opening up the Irish labour market at the time of the accession of the 10 new Member States in 2004. However, migration from these new Member States is deemed unlikely to meet all high-skills needs and it is felt that there will continue to be a significant high-skill inward migration requirement in coming years.

FAS emphasizes that Ireland will need to take a proactive approach in attracting high-skill workers if it is to avoid having its comparative advantage as a welcoming labour market overtaken by competing countries.

While immigration has brought undoubted benefits and will continue to do so, it is important to recognize that we are probably entering a new era where the labour market will not be as tight as it has been. Therefore, the risks of displacement increase, as do the risks of segmentation. This could have negative social cohesion implications.

With regards to segmentation, Barrett and his colleagues have found that there has been little or no integration of EU migrants since EU enlargement (Barrett et al, 2007). It should be pointed out, however, that large-scale immigration is a relatively new phenomenon in Ireland and a reasonable length of time will be needed for integration to take place.

Nevertheless, it is of some concern that while the environment for integration has been favourable, given the strong employment and economic growth of recent years, occupational mobility seems to have been very limited for migrants (especially from the new Member States).

With regards to displacement, the slowdown in the construction sector could pose a major challenge, given the large number of non-Irish nationals in this sector. The issue of displacement was one of the most prominent topics in the Irish labour market policy

discourse in 2006 and was analyzed in last year's *Labour Market Review*. It was concluded at the time that the displacement of Irish workers by foreign nationals was not significant given the low rate of unemployment. Indeed, concern about the issue seemed to fade in the first half of this year. However, the less favourable employment outlook currently being envisaged could place it back on the policy agenda in the medium-term.

2.3 Addressing Integration

A critical view of the implications of increased inward migration has been outlined by Piaras Mac Einrí, Director of the Irish Centre for Migration Studies in NUI Cork. In his presentation to the NCCRI sponsored International Roundtable Discussion on Integration (*Integration: From Theory to Practice*, November 2007) he outlined the challenges for the State and society in addressing integration for these new immigrant communities.

His overview confirmed the ICMS statistics that indicate the vast majority of immigrants to Ireland are other Europeans. He also outlined a range of pre-conditions for successful integration.

These included:

- Anti-racism and social inclusion measures
- Partnership with civil society
- Mutual and reciprocal commitments for host and migrant communities
- Fair and transparent admission policies
- Family reintegration measures
- Removal of the damaging effects of direct provision for asylum seekers – dependence and institutionalization
- Clarification of policy approaches to integration e.g. assimilation or interculturalism

Mac Einrí continued on to highlight a number of practical issues to assist both host and migrant communities in Ireland to address these new realities.

These practical measures included:

- Reception
- Language support programmes
- Induction programmes
- Employment

- Pathways to work.

A critical component was identified as measures to advance research, political participation and citizenship.

In Ireland, there is little available research material on civic participation - as well as a lack of dynamic civic participation programmes. Ugba (2005) confirms this in his report on the civic engagement of immigrants in Irish society. He notes that Irish authorities until very recently were never keen to address the "legal and institutional" matters affecting the participation of immigrants in civic life largely because Ireland did not want to "promote itself as a migration destination". But he observes that, despite this poor civic situation, immigrants "have been active in many facets of civic engagements, even in the days of low in-migration". He also challenges current ascriptions of rising civic activism among immigrants to the dramatic increases in immigrant populations. Other factors are identified such as increased mobilization, education and specific immigration experiences of particular groups.

Gilmore (2004) acknowledges inadequate and poor attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities in Ireland when he describes the country's official approach towards immigrants as primarily market-based (admittedly this is an attitude that mirrors the situation in the rest of the European Union). In his work on the role of NGOs and development projects in the integration of new communities in Dublin's North East Inner City, Eijorh (2004) confirms Gilmore's views. His findings reveal an absence of dynamic integration and participation policies for immigrants throughout Irish society.

The study shows that many immigrants in the area are not keen to participate in the affairs of the local community for a variety of reasons. These may include racism, xenophobia, misrepresentations and perceived intolerance. This study also shows that some ethnic minorities feel excluded from the activities of civil society organizations, in addition to their experiences of physical and social alienation in the area. These and other issues - family reunification, residency and citizenship - are identified as posing potential obstacles to the integration of immigrants and their fuller participation in civic society.

While it is agreed that migrant workers represent a significant component of the workforce and offer substantial contributions to Ireland's economic and social profile, data on their activities is sparse and oftentimes focused on specific negative experiences and issues rather than on labour market related investigation.

Data on work permits reveals that before the expansion of the European Union the number of permits issued to employers (work permits are employer based in Ireland) increased from 6,000 in 1999 to 48,000 in 2003 (ESRI, 2004).

Data from 2002 reveal that:

- 15% of work permits went to the agricultural sector

- 8% went to industry
- 77% went to services (catering, nursing and medical).

Analysis of occupation and earnings suggests that non-EU immigrants are over represented at the lower levels with these permit holders earning 14% less than Irish workers (ESRI, 2005). A significant statistic indicates that between 1998 and 2002, the number of low skilled and unskilled immigrant workers increased from 900 to 9,800 (ESRI, 2005).

While immigrants arrive in Ireland with varying levels of qualifications and skills, *validation of credentials* is also problematic. The extent to which qualifications, work experience or language competence difficulties contribute to this differential is not clearly known and requires extensive further study and research. In looking to the future, an Enterprise Strategy Group Report estimates that by 2010 Ireland's economy will generate 420,000 new occupations and expects that a large proportion of these positions will be filled through immigration (*Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2005*).

Unfortunately, greater cultural and ethnic diversity has also been accompanied by some evidence of increased racism and discrimination. For instance, 30% of discrimination cases under the Employment Equality Act in 2003 were race/ethnic origin related, while 12% of 2004 cases under the Equal Status Act were race/ethnic origin related (*Equality Authority, 2004*). Many initiatives - including government led programmes and locally organized measures - have attempted to tackle and combat such behaviour.

MacEinrí (2001) states that asylum seekers constitute 10% of all foreign immigrants to Ireland since 1995. An asylum seeker is a person who arrives independently in the State and asks to be recognized as a refugee under the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. According to Article 1(2) the Convention and the Protocol, a refugee is 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 nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

The term asylum seeker is a legal category recognized under international law. Ireland signed and ratified the Geneva Convention in 1956 and the Protocol in 1968. However, neither was enacted into Irish domestic law in full until November 2000. The numbers seeking protection in the early 1990s in Ireland have been negligible.

From these figures, we can see that in 1992 Ireland only received 39 applications for asylum. This figure steadily rose to 424 in 1995 and then to 1,179 in 1996. However, applications have been either doubling or tripling since then. In the last four years

these numbers have decreased. This new occurrence has given rise to much debate in Irish society and has challenged service providers and policy planners from the outset.

Nationally and locally, community and voluntary groups have established organizations and social networks that bring immigrants together, represent their interests and promote cultural understanding throughout the community. Television and radio programmes that report on cultural issues raise awareness of diversity and regional newsletters and magazines highlight issues of local interest.

Irish welfare legislation does not distinguish between Irish and legally resident non-Irish claimants once habitual resident requirements have been met. In this framework, provisions are available for housing, rent allowance, medical care and education. The *Immigration Act 2004* has addressed many weaknesses of previous legislation (such as the efficiency of the asylum application process). However, more needs to be done to render the immigration process less onerous and to facilitate integration of immigrants.

On behalf of immigrants, many groups continue to lobby for improved conditions such as:

- Recognition of qualifications
- Awareness of cultural diversity among immigrants
- Integration of immigrants into society
- Worker based work permits
- Planned family reunification policies
- Strategic immigration policies.

The fact remains that the rapid growth experienced by the Irish economy since the mid 1990s has come to depend on high rates of immigration, at least in part. Immigrants are now present in every sector of economic activity. Immigrants are here to stay and are now an integral element of Irish life. Their presence and that of their children will have a permanent effect on the nature, fabric and identity of Irish society.

Ireland is only one of five EU countries where most non-Irish residents are EU citizens. Indeed, only a third of non-Irish residents are from outside the EU, mostly from other English speaking countries. Since the 2006 Census there has been some effort to put in place a comprehensive policy on migration and integration. The legislation produced so far has targeted high-skilled labour migration, work permits and access to employment for family members and university students (the proposed *Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill* in 2006 and the *Employment Permit Act* of 2007 are examples).

Policy responses to the imperatives outlined by the National Action Plan Against Racism 2005-2008 (Planning for Diversity) are also beginning to emerge. The HSE Intercultural Strategy was launched in February 2008 and the Diversity and Equality Strategy of An Garda Síochána is scheduled for publication soon after June 2008

3. Meath Migrant Experiences

Issues around knowledge of rights, entitlements, services and community engagement are emerging strongly in all the available literature as critical ones for the new communities in Ireland. There is evidence of gaps in services, variable responses to specific needs and lack of awareness at a number of official and unofficial levels. Significant learning is required in developing sensitivity to difference and the specific needs of immigrants.

Prior experiences of public authorities in countries of origin (e.g. in relation to policing, legal rights, employment, education) may often strongly colour the attitudes of immigrants towards analogous Irish services. Comparison and unfamiliarity can often be disorienting for migrants. Behavioural and cultural norms may be unfamiliar or alien. Varying levels of competence in the host language can lead to misunderstandings and false perceptions.

Ireland has developed a strong profile in equality legislation and assorted mechanisms to combat discrimination. It is another question, however, to promote awareness and capacity in responding to and managing the new levels of diversity in Irish society. In this context, the emergence of a human rights discourse has been noted.

All these national themes and issues have been reflected in the responses to the migrant research undertaken in Co. Meath. In addition, the specificities of Irish conditions find an echo in the attitudes and experiences reflected by respondents. The potential for mutual socio-cultural enrichment for all communities (host and migrant) remains to be achieved. The emphasis to date has been largely economic - for both sides.

Responses and issues emerging in the interviews, literature and case studies analyzed in this research are reviewed under five key headings.

These are:

- *Employment*
- *Education and training*
- *Health*
- *Information*
- *Social and cultural*

3.1 Meath background

Much of the specific nature of the Meath response to these challenges is based on earlier work undertaken by the MITE project (*Meath Investment in Training and Education*) that operated from 2005-2007. This project aimed to develop a dedicated Meath based model of partnership between State, community and voluntary groups to address labour market inequality and to increase labour market entry, retention, participation and adaptability for a number of groups – specifically including job seekers who were foreign nationals.

In October 2005 MITE held a number of workshops following a discussion of its Partnership Link report. One of these concerned the needs of foreign nationals. At this workshop a number of barriers in regard to employment for foreign nationals was identified.

These included:

- Language difficulties and the resultant need for interpreters
- The need for more educational opportunities at all levels
- Translated rules and guidelines on health and safety at work
- Religious barriers
- Difficulty in recognition of qualifications
- Issues around exploitation and discrimination
- Problems with work permits and documentation regarding status
- Fear factors in contact and integration – on both sides

A number of potential solutions were also identified. These included:

- Transnational qualification recognition systems
- Employer involvement
- Additional resources for community and voluntary response to language training
- Interagency cooperation and collaboration
- Direct involvement of non-Irish nationals themselves

By 2006, the MITE partnership had identified five key areas where it was felt that foreign national jobseekers needed particular assistance.

These included:

- Increased provision of and wider access to English language classes across Meath
- Access to migrant rights information in Meath
- Assistance with job seeking activity and career guidance

- Provision of support groups and networks
- Assistance with business start-up and self-employment opportunities.

This resulted in three key initiatives that commenced in 2006 and operated throughout 2007.

1. Training for Employment programme for foreign national job seekers – this provided a range of supports and services to enable participants to progress to employment.
2. English Language Class initiative – MITE (in association with County Meath VEC, Meath Partnership, Meath Citizens Information Service and RAPID Navan) developed and piloted an English language learning initiative.
3. Migrant Rights Initiative – MITE (in association with County Meath VEC, Meath Partnership, Meath Citizens Information Service and RAPID Navan) established an inter-agency initiative to provide a wider and more coordinated approach to migrant rights information and advice.

These initiatives were located in the offices of Cultúr, a key voluntary service provider active in Co Meath in the area of immigration and cultural integration. Cultúr has undertaken a significant role in promoting the interests of migrants and in providing mechanisms of contact and capacity building which address the needs of the new emerging migrant communities in Meath.

A survey undertaken by the MITE project in 2007 looked at HRM (Human Resources Management) practice and attitudes under a number of headings among employers, employees and jobseekers in Co Meath (*MITE Survey Report*). Among these headings was the issue of workplace equality and diversity. In the employer survey undertaken, 90% of the MITE Small to Medium Enterprises surveyed employed foreign nationals. While 70% of respondents reported having an equality and diversity policy, the research findings indicated that this may not in all cases be translated into procedures and practice. Some 60% of employer respondents indicated they required additional training in diversity and some 80% reported that they needed supports in meeting employer-specific legislation compliance needs.

Of the employee respondents to this MITE research, some 33% were non-Irish nationals. A significant proportion of these confirmed they were uncomfortable in their use of the English language. Respondents identified a number of barriers to future employment and career development opportunities. Most of these were generic (transport, childcare, training and childcare). In-company supports and training were also identified, but few of these – apart from English language training – were issues confined to migrants.

Among job seekers, a number of concerns around barriers to employment and training were identified by the survey.

These included:

- Lack of flexibility in existing training, education and work practices
- Childcare
- Poor transport or physical access
- Attitudes of others
- Poor access to information
- Poor linkage between agencies and services
- Lack of clarity regarding entitlements and an associated fear of losing existing benefits
- Lack of funding for support agencies
- Language barriers
- Low expectations and low self-esteem.

Since 42% of respondents to this section of the survey were migrant non-Irish nationals, this is strong evidence of a number of specific concerns for those hoping to progress to employment or skill-specific training. Of the foreign national respondents, some 44% were from Eastern European countries. In terms of identified supports that could assist, respondents ranked highest the following:

- Training
- Job seeking supports
- Childcare
- Information, guidance and advice.

Additional research addressing migrant training and employment issues was conducted by RAPID in Navan and published in April 2007. While this referenced the needs of the overall community in the housing estates under review, its findings on migrant groups are of interest. While the two most significant barriers identified by respondents were lack of childcare and lack of qualifications, a number of respondents claimed they could not get work because migrant workers were undercutting wages. For non-Irish national respondents the two key identified barriers were lack of childcare and lack of recognition for existing qualifications. The distinguishing identified issue was the barrier caused by English language competence. Therefore, while both communities identify common concerns, the potential for conflict based on lack of understanding or poor communications is underlined as a critical issue.

The issue of fair and effective policing responses to diversity has been an increasingly important one throughout Europe. Policing structures (themselves often strongly

hierarchical) and policies do not respond in a uniform way to the challenges presented by strong inward migration and cultural difference. This in turn mirrors many significant policy variations at national level. Attitudes to immigration in Europe run from strongly limited and restrictive (Denmark), to assimilationist (France) to multicultural (UK) to intercultural (Ireland).

An Garda Síochána has a critical role to play in addressing the vastly changed demographics of modern Ireland. As an organization it has recognized this fact and has initiated a set of measures over the recent past to reflect and engage with this new Ireland. Internally the service has commenced a process of recruitment from ethnic minorities and immigrants. In so doing it has overhauled its own internal training and produced a number of training initiatives around equality and diversity. In so doing it has become the first police force in Europe to accept non-citizens as full officers.

Externally it has begun a planned engagement with non-Irish national communities. This includes dedicated resources such as the *Garda Racial and Intercultural Office* (GRIO) and a national network of Ethnic Liaison Officers (ELOs). A critical and welcome development has been the development of a national *Diversity Strategy and Implementation Plan* by the force which is due to be launched after June 2008.

In Co Meath a number of ELOs are deployed. Their primary aim is to promote a forum for ethnic communities, develop linkages and awareness and to monitor racist incidents. It is clear from responses to this research that the ELO resource has developed good local knowledge and excellent connections. Reported concerns focus on the issues around status and legal residence (it should be noted that Garda ELOs have no access to the files of the Garda National Immigration Bureau). Other noted concerns also settle on employment related matters and concerns around potential exploitation of vulnerable immigrants.

Generally the proactive attitude of the Garda has facilitated much positive interaction. It is accepted however that ELOs have other duties and can be significantly overstretched in meeting all the expectations communities may have. Again this comes down to a question of resources. Responses also indicate concerns about the need to establish strong levels of trust and interaction with migrant communities. An aspect that was emphasized was that within migrant communities there could and did exist levels of internal oppression, extortion or exploitation that would be difficult to address directly. Additionally it is recognized that issues around trafficking and human exploitation could develop in the future if not addressed effectively. On the whole it was felt that all in the community had the potential to benefit from the experience of interculturalism.

3.2 Employment

Evidence at national level confirms that migrant workers form an increasing part of the Irish workforce. By 2004, a study by the Chambers of Commerce in Ireland could

show that more than 20% of Irish businesses employed non-Irish nationals. Interestingly, 64% of these firms reported that they had no experience of problems with these workers. In the same study, however, issues around retention were identified. Despite these issues, 66% of the firms surveyed had not initiated any specific policies to address integration and retention of these workers.

The decision to emigrate to Ireland is one that has been taken by several hundred thousand people, primarily from Eastern Europe, over the past ten years. All studies confirm that the single greatest motivation is the improved employment prospects available in Ireland and the fact that EU membership allows free movement of labour. The resilient conditions in the Irish economy have maintained this pattern.

The first specific study of the largest group of foreign employees is that undertaken by Kropiwiec on the situation of Polish workers for the NCCRI in 2006. This identified the issue of 'chain migration' – most migrants having been encouraged to migrate by family or friends who were already resident in Ireland. The majority of Polish migrants had purely economic motives and intended to earn and save for a better future, most probably back in Poland. There were additional incentives to stay connected with acquisition of a new language and gaining professional experience. The longer migrants stayed however the less likely they were to return to Poland.

Information from respondents to this research process in Meath confirmed that many jobs in Meath had been secured through extensive use of informal job finding networks. Frequently these would be based on information supplied by relatives or friends from the same ethnic group. The use of familiar contacts to secure jobs or initial employment contacts was reported by all respondents. Informal work patterns were also widely reported, with the associated risks recognized and reported regarding failure by some employers to pay the minimum wage. Many migrant respondents felt this was a risk worth taking to secure work. Stated reasons included unfamiliarity with regulations or fear regarding formal registration and enforcement systems.

In many cases respondents reported that significant specific concerns centred on some ethnic groups and communities (especially in the catering trade) where intra-group exploitation (for example of extended-family members) was possible. Many migrants exist in a shadow world where escape from poor conditions at home and the desire for a quiet life and work at any cost may often outweigh investigation and identification of substandard employment conditions and enforcement of basic rights. It is in this context that access not simply to information but also to advocacy and support structures becomes critical.

Advocacy has become a central feature of the services provided by the Citizens Information Service in Navan. This aspect of provision has expanded significantly in recent years. According to respondents, advocacy in relation to a wide range of issues began around 2005.

The main issues identified were:

- Employment
- Residency status
- Tenancy agreements
- Taxation issues and understanding of these.

At present, language translation support services are available and this has facilitated the advocacy role greatly. Individuals contact the CIS largely on the basis of word of mouth. Numbers have increased significantly and lack of personnel resources mean that there is recognition that the work can be very time consuming. The largest percentage of cases is presented by migrants from the Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian communities.

Identified issues within the employment sector were identified as wage levels, terms and conditions of employment, perceived victimization and insecurity around rights and entitlements (particularly in relations to terms and conditions of employment). Respondents indicated that a significant issue for complainants was fear of reprisal. In the absence of labour inspectors these issues can become time consuming and demanding with the limited resources available.

In spite of this, respondents reported that issues got sorted out in about 75% of cases. The ideal was to deliver fair and equitable services. It was critical to verify stories and to see both sides of an argument. In many cases there could be misunderstanding, poor communications or cultural gaps.

This being acknowledged, there remained issues around potential and actual exploitation of migrant groups. Respondents from the trade union sector also confirmed that in certain sectors there had been particularly worrying stories of marginalization in terms of employment, up to and including significant levels of blatant exploitation.

One way to measure the number of migrant workers in Ireland is by counting the number of Social Welfare and PPS numbers. These, however, are issued nationally and as yet there is no local geographic breakdown. Up to May 2006 some 300,000 new PPS numbers had been issued.

The Department of Enterprise, Training and Employment does issue details of work permits on a county by county basis. Work permits are issued in respect of citizens of non European Economic Area countries who wish to work in Ireland.

Table 5

Work permits issued in Co. Meath for non-EEA nationals

	Total	New	Reissued	Refused
2005	1063	249	813	101
2006	814	206	605	34
2007	844	197	647	68
2008 (part)	169	76	93	19

Trade union respondents to this research noted that increasing migrant labour presence began to be noted after 1998. This was particularly apparent in the mushroom growing sector and in meat processing. Particular concerns in these sectors centred on the often casual nature of employment and the questionable practices used in recruiting workers. Recruitment was often undertaken via agencies or contracting processes. Wage levels would be noticeably low and a series of ongoing issues caused difficulties - particularly in the mushroom growing sector.

This sector did not require English language proficiency and workers were frequently very socially isolated, unaware of their entitlements, and living in often sub-standard accommodation. The employee profile was largely female (98%) and almost exclusively from Eastern Europe. Terms of employment were poor and there were many documented cases of bad practice. Respondents acknowledged that there were many good employers and, in recent times, significant new agreements have been signed which are designed to regulate the sector and improve standards.

A current issue of concern is the catering and hospitality sectors. Levels of staff recruitment are reportedly very high and, once again, recruitment mechanisms are casual and informal. There are indications that labour in this sector is transient and the cookery sector in particular is highly complex and variable in terms of circumstances and conditions. Financial records are often inadequate and it is a sector where many respondents have identified twilight economy patterns.

A final sector mentioned is domestic work. Significant information has been documented here by the Migrant Rights Centre.

In August the Dublin Information Centre received 470 queries. 153 new cases were opened for people accessing our services for the first time. Migrant workers accessing our service in August mainly came from the Hotel and Catering, Construction, Agri-food and Domestic Work employment sectors.

Our data shows the continuing trend that people of non-EEA nationalities are most likely to access our service, with the majority of migrant workers coming from Asia. In August, migrant workers who contacted MRCI were for the most part either undocumented, on a work permit (stamp 1), EU citizens, or on a study visa.

The most common presenting issue in this period related to residency status. People becoming undocumented remains a dominant theme. The second most common presenting issue was workplace exploitation, and following that queries relating to the operation of the work permits system, reflecting the difficulties that migrant workers are experiencing in trying to understand and engage with the new system.

(MRCI Bulletin, September 2007)

Issues around tied housing, poverty, exploitation and undocumented domestic work are highly problematic ones and no reliable statistics in relation to this are available simply for Co. Meath. This is complicated by the fact that the circumstances as well as the nationalities involved are often invisible to the general community. Separate concerns have been raised about the role and operation of employment recruitment agencies that are subject to few regulations in Ireland.

3.3 Employment – Meath migrant responses

Both in focus groups and in individual interviews migrants themselves had extensive comments to make about their employment experiences in Ireland in general and in Meath in particular. Many described their original motivation to emigrate as largely driven by economic circumstances or employment related considerations. Many identified employment as a critical issue in driving and sustaining the emigration decision.

In addition to individual and group responses, one focus group was conducted at a place of employment. The employees were all operating in a professional capacity and represented a number of nationalities – German, Latvian and (predominantly) Polish. As professionals there had been no issue about recognition of credentials or qualifications (even if all had not qualified in the specific discipline for which they had now been hired). All reported high levels of satisfaction with their employer, their terms of employment and the opportunities for professional growth and development.

Respondents in this group described various factors in the decision to emigrate. The primary one was poor socio-economic conditions at home and, specifically, the recession in the Polish labour market. In a number of cases, spouses had migrated first and the respondents had subsequently followed. The group members agreed that the initial decision to migrate was economic and for reasons of finding a new job. Most agreed that they had achieved good levels of social integration. Circumstances in Ireland were generally positive. As time had gone on most had developed extensive

social networks and linkages and, combined with superior employment prospects, this led to a stated agreement that they would most probably not be leaving Ireland in the near future.

Some reported that spouses wished to return – this was marked in the case of Polish respondents. Stated reasons concerned homesickness and missing family members. None reported specific language issues for themselves. All had secured housing or accommodation through their own efforts - either using friends or internet searches or local estate agents. In terms of general employment issues, all valued having an excellent employer, developing greater proficiency in English and having a generally superior quality of life.

On the negative side the group mentioned grave deficiencies in terms of public transport compared to their home countries. Some concerns were expressed around cultural differences and the lack of meaningful and close interaction with Irish friends. It would seem that for this group of respondents most social life and activity centred on fellow-nationals. Health insurance was deemed complex and somewhat inadequate. On the other hand, all mentioned the lack of bureaucracy and greater efficiency in dealing with Irish public services (e.g. taxation).

Working here has been a great advantage for me. I have got great new experience and an excellent employer – far better than I could have had in Poland. It is hard work but enjoyable. I would be happy to stay but my wife wants to go back some day. It always seems different if you have children. We don't, so for now things are going well.

(Respondent – Polish employee).

In other focus groups and individual interviews, issues and concerns around employment were explored. Almost all underlined the economic nature of the original decision to migrate to Ireland. Many mentioned the role of personal and family contact from those who had migrated to Ireland previously and secured employment.

For many, Ireland was seen as a land of plenty and of opportunity. A clear difference emerged between those who had secured employment through job specific recruitment and contacts on the one hand and those who arrived unprepared and willing to take their chances on the other. As in all such situations, it was acknowledged that those who did the preparatory work in advance usually fared better.

Several individuals in focus groups in all locations complained that work could often be hard to find if one did not have the right contacts. Many expressed negative comments about the role and function of FAS. Others complained that their CVs were often rejected on the basis of bias towards foreigners. Many claimed to have strong evidence of prejudice and disengagement from the host Irish community.

Many focus group respondents mentioned that they were over-qualified for the jobs they currently held. Some complained vociferously about harsh employment conditions they or friends had experienced, particularly in the hospitality and mushroom production sectors. Working conditions of an exploitive character were described - although many had secured positive outcomes through social networks or agency support (many respondents mentioned the excellent service they ad received from the Citizens Information Service).

Those who had experienced sub-standard working conditions referred to examples of excessive working hours, lack of information on entitlements, pay well blow minimum wage conditions, unlawful deductions for board and lodging and being dismissed on the spot.

General responses indicated that Polish migrants were relatively well organized and networked and often well informed of their rights and responsibilities. Other communities were somewhat more vulnerable. Respondents in focus groups referred to vulnerable populations in the catering and restaurant business sectors – some often vulnerable to exploitation from their own ethnic group.

Working here has been great. I was a student at home but there was no work. Here I have been able to get a job and develop my skills and English. The money is good (even if the cost of living is very high). Things have worked well for me.

(Respondent – Lithuanian worker)

It was hard to find work at first. But I kept trying and some Polish friends gave me the contacts that worked. I tried FAS but it was useless. There was no individual advice and I could do better by myself.

(Respondent – Polish worker)

It is really hard to work if your status is not clear. I would do anything to get a job but it is hard if you are not from the EU. I have good connections and keep busy with a mix of voluntary work and training.

(Respondent – Zimbabwean unemployed student)

I did get domestic work but it was hard and difficult. I really feel they were taking advantage of me. I found things hard to understand. Now my husband is working and things are easier. We have a child so I will concentrate on that and think about a job when she is a little older and going to school. Apart from family, it gets quite lonely.

(Respondent – Bangladeshi homemaker)

Our status as EU workers is not the same as others yet. So we have had to seek self-employment. If you do not have a work permit that is all you can do. So we did set up our own business and my husband is doing really well. We have

great extended family support and many satisfied Irish customers and friends. I am concentrating on my child now but we are not worried. The quality of life and work here is pretty good and full of opportunity.

(Respondent – Romanian homemaker)

3.4 Education and training

A commonly identified issue has been the question of recognition of foreign qualifications, access to appropriate training and education and the issue of personal career development. The evidence from the previous research undertaken by MITE shows that the majority of employers is more than satisfied with the education and skills levels of migrant employees in Meath. Research indicates that many migrants are actually over-qualified for positions they hold.

Once again, since the primary motivation for migration is economic, many migrants feel that their primary task is to gain employment (almost universally remunerated at far higher levels in Ireland than in their home countries) and to gain professional experience. Another incentive was described as the opportunity to develop greater proficiency in the English language. Interest in pre-employment training is minimal and many respondents indicated that they relied primarily on their qualifications, previous training or trades originally obtained in their countries of origin.

FÁS employment offices are available to give information on training courses as well as job information. In addition, many respondents reported that they were referred to FÁS services by other agencies such as the Citizens Information Services or voluntary agencies such as Cultúr. The profile of FAS among migrant communities is largely one of job-seeking rather than training provision as borne out by responses from migrants themselves.

Education is becoming an issue for migrants in terms of their children. This is increasingly emerging as those who reside in Meath for more than purely economic reasons begin to establish families and participate in local schools. Schools have adopted policies of active multiculturalism and sensitivity to ethnic diversity. Parents report satisfaction although at times there is uncertainty around the significant differences between the Irish curriculum and that of countries of origin. For Polish respondents in particular the Irish systems can appear less structured and academically rigorous than that which parents experienced in Poland.

The universally agreed issue around training has been language training and competence. All respondents - whether agencies or migrant individuals and groups - stressed this as a priority. Proficiency in the English language is a highly desired objective and clearly requires planning, coordination and resources. Provision is not currently standardized but significant contributions have been made through the efforts of Cultúr and the Meath Library Service.

From its foundation in 2004, Cultúr had recognized that for many migrants in Meath

there was no one place to go to address their range of needs. In terms of VEC programs for example, classes that were available were not necessarily accessible for a number of reasons including recognition of foreign qualifications and levels of accreditation. Cultúr recognized the need for accessible English language classes and began to develop these.

Presently there are some 15 voluntary tutors and 32 voluntary translators or interpreters. A noted feature of the Cultúr approach is to use migrants themselves to network with and integrate other migrants. Cultúr has used its training outreach to provide assistance and guidance with formatting CVs, assistance with role play for interviews and guidance in relation to use or recognition of foreign qualifications and experience. In its own training initiatives Cultúr makes use of a flexible curriculum that is based around learners' needs and availability. Cultúr activities are publicized through a weekly column in the Meath Post.

Of all areas under review it should be remembered that in education and training it is not productive to seek a one size fits all approach. Migrants who are in specialized sectors (e.g. Filipino nurses) have been recruited to work in Ireland precisely because of their qualifications and experience. This also applies to other specialized and professional groups.

Those qualified in their own fields (and often to postgraduate or doctoral levels) have left their home countries precisely because the career opportunities or levels of pay simply did not meet standards that could be achieved abroad. Many of these are willing to work – for a time – at entry level occupations until they are able to revert to their fields of initial qualification.

Issues around recognition of qualifications and educational levels have been a key element of policy development at European Union level. The development of the Bologna Framework specifically addresses issues of educational qualification comparability and is used for example throughout the Irish certification framework (as articulated by HETAC and FETAC). This process is now similarly under way within the vocational education and training (VET) sector and a recent initiative (ECVET) aims to develop a EU wide set of comparative levels and recognition systems for vocational skills and competences over the next three years. Even if and when this is achieved, however, it will only apply to citizens of EU Member States.

Issues around training and education were also addressed in research undertaken at local level in Co. Cavan in 2007. In a report on the living and working conditions of migrants in Cavan sponsored by the Cavan County Development Board and Cavan County Community and Voluntary Forum, it was recognized that many migrants see doing relatively unskilled work for a limited period in a new county as an entirely rational choice.

It was also noted that many non-Irish nationals were already working in their specialized fields.

Notwithstanding this, most of the participants in this study, if they are to remain in Ireland, would naturally like to work in their own field or progress within their current employment. Moving on to that second stage of their lives here in Ireland will be a challenge for employers, for wider society and for immigrants themselves. The provision of English language classes and of more specialized and/or flexible English language classes, the provision of training to non-Irish national workers, the recognition or conversion of qualifications and in some cases simply letting non-Irish national workers into the circle – all of these are key to meeting the challenge. (Cavan Study, p. 27)

An issue identified by this research centres on the limited training opportunities that are available – including those provided by employers. Migrants do face a number of challenges in relation to language fluency, time, transport and individualized training needs analysis. Imaginative approaches to training need to be developed which can meet both individual needs and employer expectations. Again, this is an issue that has been identified as relevant to all labour market entrants in Ireland.

In 2002, The Government's *National Training Advisory Committee* (NTAC) reported on these issues:

For Ireland to maintain its position as a strong knowledge-based economy, there are urgent and far-reaching implications for the training and up-skilling of workers. Investment by companies in training their employees, with the encouragement and, where appropriate, the support of the State, is critical to maintaining a strong economy. Failure to make this investment will lead to Ireland falling behind its competitors in terms of attracting foreign investment, particularly as new lower-wage economies join the single European market. With its changing demographic profile, Ireland needs to put in place a structured framework of workplace learning to provide confidence to potential inward investors of the on-going availability of skills in the labour market.

This Committee highlighted the issue of an estimated 600,000 employees currently at work who did not have a Leaving Certificate standard within the formal educational structure. The performance and contribution of these employees will become increasingly critical to company competitiveness and national economic and social progress.

This policy direction further indicates that migrant issues in relation to training and employment can more effectively be looked at in an overall analysis of employability, labour market strategy and competence development for all in employment in Ireland. The mutually beneficial outcomes from a training or employment view would act as a critical integration factor for migrant communities.

The lifespan of employments in this competitive and uncertain age - particularly

in private industry - are diminishing. Many employees are being made redundant, some on a number of occasions during their working lives. It is critical that every employee has the capacity and confidence to survive redundancy, job change, redeployment, innovative technologies, new business environments and legislative change. A key guarantee for employees, particularly the least qualified, is the development of a minimum, recognized standard of education to enable potential for higher levels capacity building. The ability to maintain current national economic performance directly depends on the capacity and the competence of the national workforce to adapt to and master change processes. Employees in the next ten years will experience even greater change than in the past decade. New education and training mechanisms are needed to assist employees update their qualifications to enable them to cope with the challenges in the workplace.
(In *Company Training Report, 2006*, p. 6)

3.5 Education and training – Meath migrant responses

Without doubt, the main identified issue from the perspective of migrants in Meath was the recognition of existing qualifications and experience in their countries of origin. Both individuals and focus groups displayed significant differences in how they evaluated the importance of education and training – thus reflecting the various national traditions and experiences represented.

For most respondents, the key training imperative was the acquisition of fluency in the English language. Many expressed appreciation for the role and efforts of Cultúr. Many had unclear expectations of what might be available in terms of language training when they came to Ireland. For these, and many others, Cultúr had played (and continued to play) a critical role.

Many expressed strong determination to secure the training and education that was necessary to acquire and maintain employment. Most respondents, however, felt that the experience and qualifications obtained in their countries of origin should be sufficient to secure employment and appropriate status in Ireland. Some respondents (particularly Polish) expressed a strong desire to maintain ongoing contact with the educational system in their country of origin – especially if they were to have children. Others described this in terms of maintaining adequate and sufficient quality standards in educational attainment should they ever decide to return home.

Many individuals expressed reticence about FÁS, either from a total lack of awareness or from a previous experience that failed to live up to expectations. Many felt that FÁS failed to provide individualized supports and offered little or no levels of support in terms of guidance and counselling. Many in focus groups expressed the opinion that some Irish training supports were pro-active and responsive to individual needs. Particular appreciation was expressed for start your own business and entrepreneurial

development training programs.

Focus group respondents stressed that their priority was to develop proficiency in the English language. Many also mentioned that they worked very long hours and it was difficult to find courses at times and in venues that suited them. Several mentioned cost factors and the associated difficulties of being able to practice English when interaction with native speakers could be socially restricted or limited. Lack of language competence was described by many focus group respondents as a factor that often led to bewilderment or confusion. This was mentioned by some as an issue that impaired levels of self-esteem and confidence.

All respondents were enthusiastic and positive about the language training that they had received via Cultúr. Many also expressed strong interest in aspects of the Irish language and local culture as areas where they might be interested in further educational development.

Specific points on school-based curricula were expressed by those migrants who were parents and whose children were now attending Irish schools. These comments were generally positive in terms of teacher sensitivity and school flexibility in encouraging multicultural and person centred approaches.

I did not really need training. I arrived and found a job pretty quickly. I intend to return to Poland as soon as I have enough money so I won't need training in Ireland.

(Respondent – Polish migrant worker)

Our education system in Poland is excellent. I wish my degrees and qualifications were recognized here. They do not seem to appreciate what a high level of education we have in Poland.

(Respondent – Polish migrant worker)

My main objective is to get excellent English language skills through education. That is my main need from the school and training system

(Respondent – Chinese migrant worker)

3.6 Health

As with any community, health issues tend to cluster under a number of headings. These include:

- Acute or emergency services
- Public health matters
- Access to primary health care
- Health related information.

As in other areas, migrants are as diverse as any community and their health issues cannot be separated off neatly from common issues and concerns in the wider community.

Respondents to this research confirmed that a key issue regarding health was familiarity with the specific nature and structures of Irish health delivery systems. It is frequently not recognized by the host community, for example, that the Irish model of primary health care, with the central role of the General Practitioner, is not the norm in the rest of Europe - and particularly in the East. For many Polish citizens accessing health services, for example, the first port of call is the specialist medical adviser – not a generic family doctor. For many Polish respondents, therefore, the Irish system seems cumbersome and duplicates available and required services. The fact that a primary consultation must be paid for – prior to referral to a specialist - was also mentioned frequently in responses as a matter of note.

A multicultural health project was developed by the Irish College of General Practitioners in 2005. It has provided valuable in-service training for GPs on an ongoing basis. Key themes identified included interpretation needs, cultural diversity training and identification of disease. An interesting aspect of health care in the last two years has been the development of Polish staffed health centres and clinics – of which there are now six in Dublin. These operate with Polish specialists, doctors and allied health staff and they evidently avoid the need for translation or adaptation to Irish norms (although fully regulated and recognized by the Irish Medical Council). In the longer term this kind of development would not necessarily assist an integrationist agenda.

For non-European migrants public health issues may vary and again may relate to levels of familiarity as well as to pre-established traditions of medical care and access to information. Negotiating the system is a challenge reported by many migrants. Such experiences would tend to suggest that valuable learning and system adaptation can occur if effective channels of communication are established and an ongoing planned consultation and planning system is developed which can produce benefits for health care professionals and system users alike. This thinking partly informs the strategy behind the HSE intercultural strategy which was officially adopted in 2008.

The engagement of the HSE with migrants in Co Meath is, like other regions, composed of two dimensions. One is the significant uptake of employment in the HSE itself by non-Irish nationals (including highly skilled medical and paramedical grades). The other is the provision of services to the non-Irish national population of the county.

In addition, the experience of the HSE in Meath has been influenced by one specific factor – the Mosney centre for refugees and asylum seekers. While outside the remit of this research, the impact of the Mosney experience has had a number of effects on thinking and service provision for a range of agencies - including the HSE. Not least

of these were those issues identified by respondents as centring initially on the almost complete lack of liaison, planning or inter-agency linkage in providing resources or services. In part, this was identified as reluctance by the relevant authorities in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to provoke possible local resistance if plans for settlement were to be known in advance.

The HSE was from 2000 left with no option but to respond to public health needs of the population in the Mosney centre (this was estimated at 760 people in December 2007). Most residents had been there for an average of two years and the largest single ethnic group was the Nigerian community. The key HSE inputs have been around medical provision, financial assistance (engaging Community Welfare Officers), nursing, speech and language therapists, maternity and child services, disability as well as other specific services.

Community Welfare Officers have had particular experience around money, welfare issues and housing. The HSE has no specific data on ethnic or national classifications since ethnic identifiers are not used. Evidence is based on reported experience from professionals in the field. This, together with a certain amount of anecdotal reportage, does suggest a number of identifiable trends. The main sources of information are Public Health Nurses, GP contact and hospitals. Five primary care networks are planned for Co Meath in the future, based on defined population areas.

While primary care services have been developing and GPs and allied health professionals (primarily Public Health Nurses) have been able to address many of the issues confronting migrant communities, a number of issues remain. These include chronic understaffing, limited resources and lack of translated materials.

Key identified health areas for migrants were defined as:

- Social isolation
- Family issues
- Support issues
- Substance abuse (alcohol and illegal substances)
- Infectious diseases (including TB)
- Time factors due to language issues
- Child protection.

Respondents identified a number of care groups where specific attention to migrant needs could be directed.

These centred on:

- *Children* – identified needs for pro-active strategies and parenting and family supports

- *Elderly populations* – some evidence is beginning to emerge around older migrants who lack social, language and employment resources and are increasingly presenting with problems
- *Disability* – this is an issue for some migrant families and some initial engagement with the voluntary sector has commenced (in particular with Enable Ireland).

This is supported by evidence from Barnardos which undertook research with ethnically and culturally diverse families and children in 2005. While focused primarily on the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, this research pointed to specific health issues and concerns for migrants and health service providers.

In particular these underlined the needs to:

- Integrate gender perspectives in all integration programs
- Utilize women's and/or parenting groups as best practice models in health promotion and social networking
- Provide information in different languages
- Focus on health education – in particular where health practices are used that may not be familiar in the country of origin
- Develop culturally appropriate treatments in consultation with migrant patients and their communities
- Provide training to service providers as well as to service users as needed.

Generally respondents from the health sector felt that the key priorities should be for a defined inter-agency strategy in Meath – ongoing fragmentation needed to be replaced by focused linkage. Initially there had been no dedicated resources or finance. This underlined the identified need to develop a coherent range of services that responded to the health needs and concerns of the entire community. The role and scope of the NGOs operating in the health sector was mentioned. These were in a position to develop a coherent interface with the HSE in regard to migrant communities once a policy direction was agreed. Meath had also been a pilot site for the national intercultural research project that had previously identified many of these issues and trends.

At the end of the day, the HSE has adopted a well-intentioned approach in Meath by acknowledging that the health needs of migrant communities are to a large degree the same as for the host community. The specific issues around barriers related to familiarity with health delivery systems, translation and language issues, the understanding of the role of hospitals and the lack of specific policies and protocols. Additional difficulties centre on the mobility of certain migrant populations. They are frequently difficult to track and consistent contact may thus be a real issue.

A critical development over the life of the present research was the development and

launch of the HSE intercultural strategy in February 2008. This sets national standards and policy for addressing the needs of migrant communities at national level for the first time. This also provides a blueprint for addressing diversity in practice as well as in facilitating integration, contact and support in the design, delivery and review of health services.

Informing this strategy was an extensive consultation process with groups, organizations and individuals representing the interests of minority ethnic communities. This consultation process by the HSE identified a number of key principles in developing best practice in health and migrant communities.

These included:

- Cultural competence and capacity in information and service provision and communication
- Equality of access
- Engagement and participation of minority ethnic communities in planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of services
- Attention to needs of geographically remote groups
- Development of gender sensitivity (Including specific support for socially isolated women and those at risk from violence or abuse).

Issues and barriers identified by the HSE included:

- Information and communications
- Awareness barriers for staff providing services particularly regarding understanding of diversity and cultural backgrounds
- Participation barriers in engaging minority ethnic service users
- Cultural barriers especially regarding faith systems, cultural understandings and expectations.

Specific good practice developments were highlighted.

These included:

- Intercultural health projects
- Information, translation and interpretation services for migrants in community based services, hospitals and health centres
- Community based initiatives funded by the HSE and provided by community organizations
- Specific local initiatives addressing migrant community engagement and information access.

From this emerged four priorities:

- Information, language and communications
- Service delivery and access
- Changing organizational culture to reflect diversity and enhance learning capacity and knowledge
- Working in partnership with ethnic minorities.

3.7 Health – Meath migrant responses

For many respondents in focus groups, and also from individual responses, health was not seen as a major pre-occupation. This reflects the fact that most respondents were young and single and saw little need to engage with health services or agencies on a regular basis. This changed significantly as longer term engagement with Irish society developed. For many, the first reported structured involvement resulted from pregnancy and childbirth experiences.

Many expressed confusion and uncertainty about the role and function of the General Practitioner. For many from Eastern Europe in particular this system appeared very unfamiliar and indeed unnecessary. Some respondents indicated that they would prefer to consult Polish specialists (either at Polish clinics in Dublin or on trips home) or to contact an Irish specialist directly.

Almost all respondents reported that they found the levels of health care that they had experienced in Ireland to be very satisfactory, professional and supportive. It seemed that most respondents simply had very different levels of expectation about hospitals and the role of consultants.

Those that had encountered hospital services in two focus groups during this research process spoke in generally positive terms. Services were found to be effective and of a good quality. Hospital care, especially in treating emergencies, was rated as positive and responsive to the issues presented. Some respondents had experienced lengthy waiting periods in emergency admissions and this had been for them both confusing and a source of anxiety. Specific levels of satisfaction were expressed with the quality of maternity care from those women who had experienced pregnancy and childbirth in Meath. The home visitations and follow-up services were mentioned and valued highly.

Most confusion and uncertainty that was expressed by respondents focused on the structure of service provision as well as with the specific roles and inter-connections between grades of service. While some respondents simply opted for private medical care, others who were using the public system found it difficult to understand the role and function of, for example, the HSE or the linkage between services and sections in the system. Issues around medical cards, entitlements and information were mentioned by many – but this was not simply confined to the health sector. Many reported high

levels of satisfaction with the role and services of the Citizens Information Centre in relation to coordination of health information.

Cultural differences in health care provision were not directly reported by migrant respondents in the current research review. There was some anecdotal mention of issues around mental health (but in regard to others not the respondents themselves). Issues around depression, isolation or social withdrawal were not likely to be directly reported in the forums employed for this present research. Deeper investigation and research may be required. In Meath there is only a very small Muslim community so no specific issues were reported in relation to potential issues around health care.

Deeper engagement with health services can be expected as length of residence and/or integration into the economic structures of Irish society deepens. Some respondents had experienced maternity care through pregnancy and childbirth. All the respondents had found the services and systems to be excellent and supportive.

I had to attend the emergency clinic in Navan hospital once. The care was excellent but I had to wait a very long time. I do not understand why.
(Respondent – Lithuanian migrant worker)

I do not like attending the GP. All they do is charge you €50 and then refer you to someone else.
(Respondent – Polish homemaker)

3.8 Information

Throughout this research, access to appropriate and relevant information has been highlighted as a critical issue. Unfamiliarity with the policies, procedures and structures of Irish life is a common characteristic of many immigrant groups. When this is combined with the fact that, for most, the initial intention was to migrate for purely economic reasons and that their expectation is that they will return to their home country in a relatively short period of time, it is not surprising that information may simply be on a need to know basis.

As the time of residence extends and as migrants become more enmeshed in the social and cultural aspects of their engagement with Irish life, a range of other information needs begin to present themselves.

A particularly informative response to this research project was received from the Co Meath Library Service. The Library Service in Meath has some 13 branches, including one in the Gaeltacht. In 2007 it had some 22,500 members. In that year 417,805 items were issued. Since 2003, some four to five new branches have opened and demand has continued to increase.

The Library service has witnessed a period of rapid expansion and growth throughout

a parallel process of wide external social transformation. In part this was recognized as an associated element of the wider demographic expansion in Meath as a whole. However, it also became clear that the presence of large numbers of foreign nationals and migrants was adding directly to the process.

Direct and explicit involvement with migrants and ethnic minorities commenced in 2003 with specific engagement with the population resident in Mosney. Significant uptake of library facilities and resources by non-Irish nationals and migrants has been noted in all branches since then. Books and materials have been acquired in a number of languages to cater for increased demand. Provision of internet access services has also been a factor in attracting customers for diverse national backgrounds. A noted element has been the use of the Library service as a resource to provide information, cultural enrichment and contact with the wider Irish society. The Library Service staff has reflected this change as well. In addition to the dedicated librarian appointed as project officer in 2007, there is one member of staff who is herself Polish.

A critical contribution was the work undertaken by the research project examining the implications for library services of multicultural developments, *Meeting the Challenges of Cultural Diversity*, carried out under the Public Library research programme and published by the Library Council in 2007. The project was an initiative of the Branching Out Steering group and included participation by three local authorities – Dublin City Council, Waterford City Council and Meath County Council. This project examined stock acquisition and service delivery practices and policies regarding culturally diverse users.

Meath County Library undertook the survey on library service needs of foreign nationals. The research findings indicated that a number of services were provided at varying levels to meet the needs of culturally diverse residents and users.

These included:

- Foreign language materials – 19% of authorities used book rental schemes
- Multilingual library information leaflets – provided by 9% of authorities
- Community outreach – provided by 37% of authorities
- Information and Communications Technologies – widespread across all authorities with 31% promoting targeted initiatives for foreign nationals
- English language learning facilities – 50% provide English language learning resources or spaces for classes
- Information services – 72% provide specific information services to foreign nationals
- Events and activities – 63% of authorities have organized cultural diversity events.

The report was also able from its work and findings to identify a number of barriers which affect the ways in which library services relate and respond to the various national communities. These included:

- A lack of policy and planning
- A lack of suitable stock
- Budgetary constraints – some 83% of authorities were not in a position to allocate specific resources for foreign nationals
- A lack of language skills among staff
- A lack of culturally sensitive awareness and understanding – no training had been provided in these areas.

The Meath Library service would seem to have been particularly pro-active in addressing the needs of a culturally diverse and changing population. A targeted lending programme has been developed with materials acquired via the *Bright Books* service in the UK. The largest single category of books currently provided is in Polish. The second largest is Lithuanian. The next largest uptake of services is described as from the African communities. As many of these are from Anglophone countries, foreign language provision is not a primary issue however. Provision in these cases centres on books but also music and film. A point of interest is that many donations to the library stock have been received from individual members of immigrant communities.

An interesting initiative was the hosting by Meath County Library of African Drumming Workshops. These explored the connections between African storytelling and music and, aimed primarily at 7-13 year old youth, were held in library branches in Trim, Navan, Dunboyne, Duleek, Ashbourne and Dunshaughlin. A Lithuanian art exhibition was held in Oldcastle in 2006 and an African art exhibition in Navan and Trim in 2007. A foreign film festival has attracted widespread interest and involvement.

These activities underline the central role libraries can and do play in providing services, information and contact for migrant communities in Meath. They also highlight the potential for future development and outreach. Respondents identified a critical issue as being the provision of adequate resources. These are ever more required as the significant population growth of the county is already eroding funding. Staff have reported some incidents of racist behaviour among the host community. While isolated these underline the need to address integration issues creatively. Future directions were described very much in terms of finding an effective balance between mainstream and specialist needs for the benefit of all.

A critical service and resource for addressing the information needs of migrants in Co Meath has been the *Citizens Information Service*. As the statutory service provider for information and advocacy in Ireland, the CIS plays a critical role as a point of first contact for many groups addressing their needs in relation to rights, entitlements,

services and information. Respondents to this research process noted that there was an incremental and steady increase in queries from non-Irish nationals over the past five years.

This became more pronounced as migrant communities began to encounter a range of issues in relation to immigrant status, employment conditions, rights and entitlements and access to services. Respondents confirm that many migrants had expressed difficulties in dealing directly with statutory agencies. Many lacked the confidence to ask questions. Over this time the CIS in Navan has developed considerable expertise in addressing the needs of migrants and identifying the trends and issues. It has also taken a particularly pro-active stance in relation to professional advocacy. This advocacy role has developed in a fair and professional manner and operates to secure outcomes that are equitable and that take into account the perceptions of all sides to a dispute or concern. It has established a set of operational procedures to ensure this.

In many ways the CIS has evolved into a one-stop-shop for many migrants. It uses the services of Polish volunteers as information givers. Information evenings in the languages of migrants are strongly supported. It acts as a central point for information, linkage, networking and onward referral. It has also developed the capacity to isolate trends and issues that impact upon migrants in Meath and their lives. These include concerns about housing and migrants, particularly in relation to unscrupulous landlords. It also covers working conditions, tax and social insurance and the existence or growth of racist and discriminatory incidents or practices.

The CIS has also served as a focus to inform migrants about rights and entitlements. It has been at the forefront of issue identification and has, within limited resources, been able to link the needs to a coherent sense of service provision requirements.

A recent report by Goodbody Consultants (2008) for the Citizens Information Board confirms these trends and issues. Among other things, it highlights the lack of uniformity and consistency in provision of advice and information and the lack of standards and guidelines to make information relevant, accessible and useful.

3.9 Information – Meath migrant responses

Access to information, guidance, advocacy and support were all mentioned as central issues by almost all migrant respondents - whether in focus groups or individuals. Dealing with service provision and agency complexity was frequently described as bewildering experiences. The complexity of roles and responsibilities, the unfamiliarity with new systems, the attitude of staff, the issue of access and the question of language difference all impacted greatly on the nature of responses.

In this context, all respondents commented favourably on the critical role played by the

Citizens Information Service. Many respondents confirmed that they had often been initially reluctant to seek advice or help. Many simply stated that they or their family members had lacked the confidence to ask questions. Many had initially relied on friends, family members or other fellow-nationals. Many reported confusion with the structure and role of statutory agencies and found it difficult to identify the relevant information services they required.

A number of individual respondents referred to their previous employment status. For these individuals, they had been working in highly exploitive environments where any attempt to seek information, let alone advocacy or redress, was seen in an extremely negative light by their the employers. These individuals reported that they were fearful and apprehensive in seeking help and were deeply concerned about possible victimization. Some of these had obtained useful support and information eventually from trade unions. Others felt they had been assisted by individuals in particular social services with whom they had dealt.

The key issue for these respondents remained the initial contact and the sense of confidence to engage accordingly within a context of confidentiality. Previous experiences of poor employment conditions or exploitation meant that many had experienced deep levels of suspicion in regard to neutrality or impartiality when approaching official agencies. Individual respondents also reported many specific instances about patterns of discrimination and unfair advantage being developed within specific ethnic or national communities. This often meant that levels of malpractice could be disguised or hidden from official Irish bodies.

Individual stories and complaints have to be approached with fairness to all parties. They also have to be examined for veracity and set against competing viewpoints. Some migrant respondents acknowledged this. A critical issue was fairness, transparency and justice. In this context the work of the advocacy services provided by the CIS requires specific mention. This system operated on a structured and fair basis and was designed to support individuals to secure resolution of issues. Those who had availed of this had reported very high levels of satisfaction with the process and outcomes.

3.10 Social and cultural

One of the more significant developments in Co Meath regarding interculturalism was the establishment of Cultúr in 2004. As a response to the rapidly growing immigrant community, Cultúr set out to promote a multicultural Meath, to facilitate integration of migrants into the host Irish society and to combat racism. Cultúr saw its mission as the promotion of intercultural awareness, community development and integration through education, training (language and intercultural), sports, arts and capacity building.

The key outputs of this organization over the last four years have been the English

language class initiative, the Migrant Rights initiative and the Sports and Cultural initiative. Across these initiatives, Cultúr has sought to promote and develop multi-agency cooperation and links. Cultúr has aspired to be a lead agency for migrants in Co. Meath. It has established a number of useful links and has developed a high profile as a migrant support organization. It has established a database of some 700 people and has been a critical contact point for a wide range of migrant groups.

Cultúr has developed a strong awareness of the various groups and nationalities that now reside in Meath. Working closely with these groups Cultúr has been in a position to identify issues around cultural sensitivities and the elements of fear and blame that may sometimes color relationships between migrant groups and between these groups and the wider community.

The Migrant Rights Initiative developed a focus on advocacy, networking and training as critical factors in developing migrant integration strategies.

The English Language Class Initiative has proved very successful in providing classes and language training supports. The interpreters and translators provided by Cultúr are also used by schools in the county. It has further provided a number of schools newsletters and a "*Letters Home*" project to develop capacity and awareness around the implications of starting a new life in a new country as seen by students.

Cultúr has played a central role in promoting cultural activities centred on sport and music. It has developed a range of activities to engage people and to inform them of rights and strategies regarding training, job-seeking, employment conditions and welfare entitlements. It has provided a useful link to established mainstream service providers such as the CIS.

It is remarkable that Cultúr has embarked on a wide range of service provision and supports without guaranteed core funding. Its focus remains refreshingly engaged and it is an organization that is determined to stay focused on looking ahead and continuing to deal with those on the ground. The focus on the target group is driven by relevance and the need to promote as wide a range of integration options as possible.

Cultúr has identified a set of issues around the need for coherence. It reports that many agencies seem to present as having too specific a remit. A critical task remains to develop more levels of communication and inter-agency coordination. Cultúr fully accepts that many agencies are simply unaware of Cultúr – as Cultúr may be unaware of them.

A central and valuable role has been played by Meath County Council. With a remit of improving quality of life for all in the county at a time of profound and sustained demographic change, it has developed a number of initiatives. It was centrally involved in the development of an Intercultural Family Festival. This was designed to

support contact, integration and cultural exchange and was supported by funding available under the National Action Plan Against Racism and included involvement of the NCCRI (*National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism*). This has been evaluated internally and it is now hoped to run a Meath Festival of Cultures in 2008.

A strong emphasis is placed on sports as an effective vehicle for promoting contact and integration between migrant and host communities.

Information from respondents indicates that these initiatives are attracting participation from migrants from East Asian and African countries. They are still not engaging to any great extent however with Eastern European migrants. The role of interculturalism and sports nationally has been recognized by many sporting bodies and is being introduced locally. Such festivals and initiatives require resources to achieve their full potential.

Another allied initiative promoted by a multi-agency group (including the Meath County Development Board and the County Council) has been the establishment of a *Social Inclusion Measure* group. This group addresses the needs and circumstances of 42 target groups. Its aim is to address needs on a local basis and to bridge gaps in service delivery. It has recently begun to focus more on identification of trends and issues and to develop internal awareness around seeing social inclusion in cross-sectoral terms. The complexity of multi-agency responsibilities and roles can often impact directly on the integration prospects of migrant communities and individuals. Moving from identification of needs to meeting the requirements of coordinated integration strategies is therefore a crucial one.

In addition, the County Council has participated in a Community Forum that has developed from the County Development Board. This provides a series of information events and linkage to some 950 voluntary groups. It was represented on the Multicultural Day.

These structures and fora have the potential to play a role in the greater social and cultural engagement and integration of migrant communities and individuals. As individuals progress from economic migrants to participating non-Irish national citizens the need for agency coordination and planning to facilitate deeper integration will become central. The role of voluntary and immigrant representative bodies is likely to be the main driver, however, if trends identified in other research findings are to be taken into account. Significant variations in national traditions in terms of engagement are also likely to be present.

Useful feedback was obtained from respondents responsible for administration of services and benefits coordinated by the department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. This feedback focused on the changing nature of work itself in Meath. This fundamental shift means that adaptability and flexibility are increasingly required of all

labour market participants. This is a fact which may be more evident to migrants than to the local host communities.

The Live Register in the area is witnessing a turnover of 27% per month. Many other issues need to be considered in terms of the operation of part-time and casual employment. In this context, DSCFA staff had developed a pro-active policy of responding within an equal opportunities framework to customers and families. No separate ethnic identifiers were maintained but the awareness of specific migrant concerns and issues and integration into practice was impressive.

A system of case conferences looked at needs and issues holistically. Claimants were considered individually and a strong emphasis was placed on guidance and facilitation so that employment and welfare interventions could be targeted to individual or family needs. A key issue of building trust with diverse communities was recognized and practiced. Department respondents also mentioned the availability of training supports for individual communities. Five facilitators are currently employed and in the next year this will increase to nine (including Navan). The DSCFA respondents also stressed the critical value of interagency linkage and coordination in ensuring that these initiatives met existing and anticipated needs.

The emphasis in these replies was on meeting individual and family needs and not segregating them by national origin. In terms therefore of specific migrant needs the responses stressed language training and the target of allowing migrants to appreciate, understand and engage with Irish culture.

A noted response from agencies and migrant individuals alike was the role of the Irish language. In almost all responses, migrants expressed an interest in Irish and a parallel astonishment at how little spoken - or valued - it seemed to be among Irish people. In communities of African origin in particular engagement with Irish has been pro-active.

The County Council has a specific remit in terms of housing and in this instance valuable responses were given regarding the specific circumstances of migrant individuals and communities. At present the waiting list for housing in Co Meath is around 2,500 people. Housing officials deal with a wide range of housing and accommodation issues ranging from emergency accommodation (ex-prisoners, mental health issues, domestic violence, etc.) across to service linkage around child protection, addiction and disability. The range of work and responsibilities entails significant collaboration with housing associations, private housing and follow-up.

It is fully recognized that many migrants never have any contact with statutory housing services. Many make their own arrangements via personal contact, the internet, existing friends or relatives or private agencies. Since around 2004 the County Council has noted an increase in numbers presenting from migrant communities. While no specific ethnic identifiers are maintained it has become clear to staff that

negotiating the system can be a significant ordeal for many non-Irish nationals. Some are better than others (and the vast diversity within ethnic minority communities is acknowledged) but it has become clear that there is a range of barriers in place and some evidence of institutionalized racism. It is noted with concern that no dedicated cultural diversity training for staff exists throughout almost all service providers. Language differences remain a barrier.

Anecdotally there is evidence of specific mental health difficulties for individuals of African origin (where cultural norms regarding diagnosis, acceptance and disclosure are significantly different from Irish ones) and growing issues around addiction and poor coping skills for older Eastern European single males. Staff respondents report that there are simply no time, resources or energy to develop immigrant specific work. In Meath there are 219 individuals on the housing list for each County Council employee – the highest ratio in Ireland.

Respondents reported that the critical issues for future engagement with migrant individuals and communities focused on the lack of service coordination and planning. It was felt that elements of inherent racism and ignorance could be identified. Migrant populations were described as being adrift among an indifferent environment where there was strong evidence of lack of empathy and engagement. Agencies working in the field were frequently impaired by overwork and lack of resources and individual staff were constantly running the risk of burnout.

A separate needs audit has been undertaken in Oldcastle under the auspices of Meath partnership. This has investigated issues around childcare and language training provision. It is estimated that some 35% of the population of Oldcastle is either Polish or Lithuanian.

Some information from diocesan chaplaincies indicates that the Churches have responded to migrant needs in varied ways. A distinguishing feature has been that the Roman Catholic structures have responded by using the facilities of national-specific chaplains brought in specifically to cater for their own groups. The Church of Ireland on the other hand has used specific structures aimed at all immigrants on a parish-by-parish basis.

A noted issue from other research suggests that in addition to sport, music (and especially Irish traditional music) and Irish cultural activities can attract migrant participation. This would on the face of it indicate the potential for contact and further engagement between communities.

Only a small amount of research has been undertaken in Ireland at local level in relation to migration and the experience of migrant workers themselves. A report published by Pobal in 2006 did provide some evidence however and also gave a number of recommendations and suggestions (targeted primarily at Local Authorities and Community partnerships).

This research emphasized the need for:

- Information on services (national and local)
- Employment rights and social protection
- Accessible classes on English as a second language.

These were viewed as the key elements to support cultural adjustment as well as social and economic inclusion. Pobal went on to suggest that integration measures could be developed by local communities.

These were described as:

- Facilitation of support groups
- Provision of opportunities for meetings between migrants and Irish people
- Community education on multicultural issues
- Designating specific contact persons for provision of information and support for migrants.

Local authorities and partnerships were advised to develop in the same direction. In addition it was suggested that they should:

- Acknowledge diversity of migrant populations
- Provide specific services – especially translation and interpretation
- Create opportunities for social interaction
- Improve migrant access to childcare
- Improve access to public transport
- Improve training and education outreach initiatives and access
- Encourage participation in decision-making processes.

The report concluded with a strong warning on the need to avoid duplication in information provision.

3.11 Social and cultural – Meath migrant responses

The development of meaningful intercultural practice and policy in Ireland has been identified nationally as a key priority in addressing the potential of integration in a diverse Ireland. The engagement of people on a cultural and social level transforms a free movement of labour into a vibrant and diverse community where expressions, development and understanding are fostered through the development of sustained relationships meaningful to all sides.

In their responses to the cultural and social aspects of their lives in Ireland, respondents identified a number of issues both within focus groups and as individuals.

Many mentioned cultural differences such as time keeping or attitudes to service. Almost all acknowledged that these were superficial. Many respondents described Ireland as a warm and friendly place. There was a wide variety of comment on just how far or how deep this friendliness went however. While almost all respondents confirmed that Irish work colleagues were warm and supportive, this was not seen as always extending to deeper levels of social contact or engagement.

Many migrant respondents on the other hand were aware that their own cultural traditions in relation to alcohol, public houses, family and wider socializing were themselves factors in defining the nature and extent of social intercourse.

Several individuals and many in the focus groups mentioned a sense of social isolation without always being able to define this more closely. Those who were parents had established effective and strong links with other parents they met via their children's schools. All remarked positively on Irish cultural events. Their uniqueness attracted but many were unsure about how to access traditional music or even Irish language classes or information. Many respondents spoke positively about the role of the Library Service in promoting some of these issues.

Many respondents commented on the fact that almost all Irish officials or people they encountered were themselves monolingual (despite the fact of having two official languages). Many felt that Irish people made little effort to understand or engage with cultural difference and instead expected migrants to make all the adjustments.

4. Conclusions

We live at a time of profound and significant change. This change encompasses all aspects of life and all countries. The nature and scale of this change has a direct impact not just on how we see and regard others, but how we see and evaluate ourselves. The scale and impact of inward migration to Ireland is unprecedented. It is a demographic shift of unprecedented and unanticipated proportions. It means, at a minimum, that Irish systems and structures will have to shift focus and resources significantly to accommodate and respond to this change. This requires a strategic vision of interculturalism and diversity that has been historically absent from Irish discourse. This strategic sense in turn must be grounded in policy – and policy is based on research.

This research has examined the impact of migration in Co. Meath in terms of impact on services and structures as well as in terms of migrants themselves. The key element concerns the move of migrants from workers who meet labour market needs to citizens who anticipate, contribute to and interact with the host Irish community in varied ways that produce sustained benefit for all.

This is not merely to state that there are new challenges and issues. But old challenges and issues have re-asserted themselves in new and sometimes menacing ways. These may include elements of racism or sectarianism, social exclusion, segregation, exploitation, harassment or simple avoidance. Managing change of the scale we are witnessing in Ireland and in Meath requires a set of attitudes and skills which develop a framework for meaningful integration.

Current change in migration patterns and impact encompasses:

- Global systems and demographics
- National frameworks and policies
- Socio-political structures
- Economic structures.

Managing the diversity that stems from immigration in the context of fundamental social rights is an area of profound importance for both employers and policy makers.

The Supiot Report identified key areas where progress needed to be made in the context of European employment policy.

These are:

1. Reinforcement of the right of free movement of labour and extension of that right to non-Union nationals legally resident in the European Union. Fundamental rights should not be based on nationality but on legally performed work.
2. Resolution of the issue of trade union rights at Union level.
3. The need for a European framework for information and consultation for companies operating in the single market.
4. Recognition of the role of non-governmental organizations in the formulation and implementation of Union social policy.
5. Pursuit of action at Union level to combat discrimination, especially on the grounds of race.
6. Implementation of the fundamental principle of adaptation of work to the needs of the worker, particularly in the context of working time.

All these issues have also been identified and referenced at local level in the course of this research. They set parameters for the development of policies and services that not only meet the current needs of migrants more effectively, but also provide a framework in which an agenda based on integration can be structured. This will continue to focus on information, services, education and socio-cultural dimensions.

But it will critically remain about work, employment and the labour market in Co. Meath. The nature of employment in the county was changing anyway with the end of traditional agricultural production, the growth of the knowledge and services sector and the sprawl of metropolitan Dublin. There is a symbiotic relationship between this fundamental alteration in the labour market in Meath and the arrival of a substantial migrant population. The two are inextricably linked and are likely to remain so.

Ultimately employment is about individuals being able to produce and to be assessed and valued for what they contribute - not what their national origin may be. The removal of barriers can eventually be accomplished (at least formally) by legislation and monitoring practice. But the deeper transformation that a community requires can be expedited most rapidly by the world of productive employment seizing the opportunities offered by the diversity of migration and incorporating it into the employment process itself – together with all the implications for associated educational, training, informational and personnel supports.

Valued and meaningful work offers the most concrete way to assert the equality of all as producers of wealth. Employers have the option of using the diversity before them to create not only new modes of work but new products that respond to the challenges of a changing, globalized world. Or they can continue to assume that old certainties still hold.

The research process in Meath shows that this process is still unfolding. Disturbing examples of bad practice, shortsighted methods and simple exploitation were cited by respondents. Many migrants had come to the conclusion that they had been vulnerable and taken advantage of. There was strong evidence produced of shoddy

practice in relation to rental accommodation, evasion of legal requirements and discriminatory practice and attitudes.

On the other hand it was notable that many migrant respondents were talking of situations that had happened in the past. Many had found the resources, supports, information and networks to challenge poor conditions and move on to better situations. Migrants, like all people, grow and learn and adapt. As they had become more adept at language and knowledge of systems and structures, they had developed the ability to challenge, advocate and remedy.

It should also be borne in mind that employers and migrants who responded to this research indicated many examples of good practice, innovation and integration that are profoundly encouraging. Based on this and earlier research and project interventions, we can see that in Co Meath there already exists a network of employers who know and acknowledge the significant benefits that employing migrant labour have brought for all.

The findings reinforce the sense that a number of challenges remain to foster the potential and benefits so identified. Some of these stem from the need for a comprehensive and clear immigration policy. This is currently being addressed in draft legislation being prepared. It is clear that there is a need for flexible and timely responses to immigration status and residency conditions.

A central and recurring theme of this research was the need for and lack of resourced and coordinated response to appropriate English language training. Many migrants are multilingual and English is already an international language. But Ireland seems tardy in developing English language training as a coherent, coordinated and professional skill training intervention. Its provision in Meath is largely ad hoc and unsystematic. Were it not for the valiant efforts of a voluntary body like *Cultúr*, provision would be minimal.

The research demonstrated uneven and inconsistent levels of buy in to the issues around migration and interculturalism. Significant gaps in cultural diversity training were identified – or even the complete absence of such training. Many agencies have not engaged with the issue in a sustained and planned way. Those that have require additional resources and coordination. Few agencies have specific policies, procedures or protocols. This research has identified two national bodies operating locally who have over the course of this research produced critical and comprehensive policy and strategies – the HSE and Garda Síochána.

Many respondents complained of confusion with structures, bureaucracies or unfamiliar patterns of service provision. Some complained of racist or discriminatory experiences. But on the whole the attitudes and experiences of migrants in Meath were reported as positive. Many instanced the friendliness of Irish people. But on deeper examination this friendliness was often described as superficial and skin deep. Few

had established deep friendships or enduring social and cultural links to Irish people. Many felt that the welcome might be only a cold welcome. Some described themselves as being regarded as simply workers to fill gaps.

Some professional agency respondents addressed this cogently. Based on their extensive experience and knowledge they described migrant populations as being often adrift among an at best indifferent environment. These professionals felt that there could often be a noted lack of empathy or engagement by the host community. There were often identifiable inherent levels of racism and ignorance.

This research can confirm many examples of innovative best practice – such as the efforts coordinated by the Citizens Information Service and the approaches adopted by the Meath County Library Service. It can affirm proactive employers who acknowledge the huge benefits migrant work has brought to Meath. It can also confirm expressed attitudes, however, that minimized migrants' concerns, disputed their veracity and honesty, cast doubts on their motives and intentions and simply disengaged from meaningful interest in their lives or circumstances.

The critical outcomes of this analysis are therefore based on responses, literature review, policy analysis, interviews and identified outcomes. In all these specific issues around integration, contact, training and information have been identified. In many ways it can be seen that the intentions have generally been positive and agencies have been responding to a unique and unprecedented set of social and demographic circumstances.

The issues identified by migrants themselves concerned:

- English language training
- Securing and maintaining employment
- Maintaining a quality standard of living
- Supporting their families
- Lack of public transport
- Building resources for eventual return to country of origin
- Learning more and integrating with Irish culture
- Recognition of existing qualifications.

The issues identified by Irish agencies and respondents concerned:

- The need for more English language training resources
- The need to deliver quality services that met identified needs
- The need for specialist resources and expertise
- Courses for migrants run by migrants themselves
- The need to tackle substandard or exploitive employment conditions
- The need for enhanced social and cultural participation

- Improved awareness of rights, entitlements and services
- Training for Irish staff in cultural diversity
- Policy, planning and service coordination
- Additional resources to meet identified needs and required accommodations.

The issues identified by NGO and voluntary sector respondents concerned:

- The need for coordinated institutional and agency responses
- The need for language competence in the host community
- The need for social and cultural engagement
- The need for proactive welcome strategies and support initiatives for migrants
- The need for social support and contact
- Creation of a forum for learning and exchange
- Promotion of integration where desired
- Resources as required to achieve targets
- Pro-active responses to meet needs so that problems do not emerge in the medium or longer term
- The need for advocacy and networks of NGOs.

Of all the issues raised, the common issues focused on the lack of service coordination and planning. From all respondents in Meath significant concerns were expressed about the need for a central and directed policy that embedded the values of interculturalism and integration and then set out concrete and coordinated actions to achieve aims and objectives.

Many respondents strongly identified issues around lack of resources, staff overstretching and the lack of time and/or resources to undertake migrant specific work. Respondents underlined the fact that not all migrants represented problematic issues. Rather they represent varied and complex communities with their own internal levels of diversity and complexity.

In this context some migrant specific initiatives should of their nature be short term and realizable (language training provision, translated documentation, high profile information points, accessible initial training for orientation purposes). Others were more long term and strategic (integration methods, diversity training for Irish staff, intercultural strategies, attitudinal change, community engagement).

In many of the responses in Meath there was a sense of enthusiasm about the potential for mutual enrichment and benefit from the new demographic conditions emerging in the county. Those in employment are making a valuable and recognized contribution. The social and cultural opportunities opened make it possible for both migrant and host communities to learn something new about each other, themselves and the wider world of which they are both part.

The presence of languages, cultures, skills and traditions can, if approached and managed effectively, make a real and enduring contribution to the social capital and expertise of Meath and counties like it.

The challenge will be to not squander the opportunity by letting prejudice, ignorance and apathy prevail. Linkages and networking are improving but need substantial additional improvement. Training and capacity building needs to be significantly developed. Information and advocacy needs to be extended and entrenched as a quality response. Proactive strategies of welcome and engagement need to be defined and implemented. The initial partnership approaches pioneered by MITE and other county agencies now need to be reinforced and deepened.

This research underlines that Meath is at a crossroads. The potential exists to make the county into a beacon of best practice in welcoming, engaging and sustaining migrant communities in a context of integration and mutual tolerance. As the responses show, however, this will take substantial resources in terms of personnel, knowledge, skill and imagination. That in turn must be based on coordination, agreed strategic policy and leadership.

5. Recommendations

1. General

- a. There is no single comprehensive source of information on Irish culture, institutions and services that can inform migrants. Such a resource should be developed collaboratively by, at a minimum, the range of agencies represented in the Meath Migrant Research project (and others that may wish to contribute).
- b. The main voluntary body addressing integration and the needs of migrants in Meath is Cultúr. To extend and develop its work and mission it should secure adequate core funding and resources.
- c. Central guidelines on appropriate approaches to interculturalism, information provision and outreach should be developed for all involved agencies in Meath.
- d. A joint strategic goal of making Co Meath a model of best practice in integration and interculturalism in its welcome and support for migrant communities should be adopted at County Council level and cascaded out through statutory and voluntary service providers.

2. Information

- a. The lack of service integration can often lead to complex information difficulties and problems in meeting needs. This is compounded by inadequate levels of cross-referral and coordination between agencies. There is a need to extend the scope and range of information, advice and advocacy services. This is a prime function of the Citizens Information Centre and should be resourced accordingly.
- b. The need for coherence and coordination in addressing the needs of migrants has been strongly evidenced by this research and should be addressed accordingly. This will require policy, planning and coordinated strategy so that the various parts can be articulated effectively.
- c. A critical role in information provision is advisory and advocacy supports. These should be provided and resourced accordingly.

3. Education and training

- a. A dedicated county-wide initiative on English language training for migrants should be established and provided using a defined partnership model between statutory bodies and voluntary groups (e.g. Cultúr).

- b. Structured diversity awareness and intercultural awareness training should be developed and coordinated for the host community regarding new immigrant groups. This activity could be done on a partnership basis between voluntary bodies (such as Cultúr) and statutory agencies (such as FAS, CIS and the VEC).

4. Health

- a. Development of a coordinated multi-agency approach focused on the individual health needs of migrants should be prioritized.
- b. Direct inputs and contributions from migrants to coordinated service provision and health strategy should be facilitated and developed.
- c. Institutional buy-in for integration and interculturalism should be developed through joint policy formation and support with agencies with relevant expertise.
- d. At a time of limited resources the demands on staff should be acknowledged and addressed so that effective partnership with immigrant communities can produce meaningful outcomes in health education, promotion and service provision.

5. Employment

- a. A Meath Employers' Forum should be initiated to highlight best practice in the recruitment and retention of non-Irish national labour. An Annual Best Intercultural Workplace Award (with potential sponsorship from social partnership bodies) could facilitate examples of best practice.
- b. Direct migrant involvement with agencies such as CIS and the Library Service has already been established. Methods to provide similar direct engagement of migrant talent and skills should be investigated by agencies such as FAS and the VEC.

6. Social and cultural

- a. Multicultural days should be held annually as a point of contact between host and migrant communities.
- b. Sporting organizations at local level should promote and develop intercultural approaches. A successful model at national level (*Sport Against Racism in Ireland*) should be fostered and extended locally.
- c. Irish language organizations and Gaeltacht community groups should be encouraged to engage with migrant communities and provide lessons in Irish language and culture.
- d. The extensive experience and existing resources of the Meath Library Service should be used to develop ongoing intercultural initiatives and

7. *Integration and outreach*

- a. A structured initiative around welcome and integration should be developed in Meath. Modeled on the *Welcome Wagon* program in the United States. This could marshal voluntary effort and employer sponsorship to provide welcome packages and personal contact to newly arrived immigrants.
- b. Direct involvement of local and community and voluntary groups in welcoming, interacting and engaging with new migrant communities should be strongly encouraged. Building integration and interaction should be a key strategic priority for community development at all levels.
- c. Immigrant contributions to community life should be prioritized and publicized at every level in an effort to build learning and interaction for all in the community. Direct involvement of local media should be extended and coordinated.

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Appendix 1: CIS Navan Enquiries

<i>Note for Percentage figure I have taken out the No info given figure so % are of 1660</i>		
Nationality By Group	Number	% Total
Africa	194	12
Asia & the Far East	208	13
Australia	16	1
Eastern Europe and Baltic States Inc Russia	853	51
Middle East	50	3
North America & Canada	30	2
South & Central America	76	5
Western Europe	233	14
No info given	526	
<i>Note for Percentage figure I have taken out the No info given figure so % are of 1480</i>		
Caller	Number	% Total
Personal	1385	94
Telephone	87	6
Letter/Email	8	1
No info given	706	
<i>Note for Percentage figure I have taken out the No info given figure so % are of 1465</i>		
Time spent with caller	Number	% Total
less than 10 mins	730	50
11 - 20 mins	546	37
21 - 40 mins	138	9
40 + mins	51	3
No info given	704	
<i>Note for Percentage figure I have taken out the No info given figure so % are of 1884</i>		
Action	Number	% Total
Information	875	46
Advice/Assistance	816	43
Advocacy Lr	163	9
Advocacy Hr	30	2
No info given	302	
<i>Note for Percentage figure I have taken out the No info given figure so % are of 1911</i>		
Level of English	Number	% Total
Good	849	44

Fair	609	32
Poor	453	24
No info given	266	

Note for Percentage figure I have taken out the No info given figure so % are of 2205

Query type	Number	% Total
Social Welfare	645	29
Tax	164	7
Local Information	152	7
Employment Rights	142	6
Law & Justice	180	8
Immigration Status	129	6
Employment Queries	119	5
Housing	124	6
Securing Employment	103	5
Education Queries	84	4
Consumer Issues	64	3
Health Queries	66	3
HSE	50	2
Travel Queries	40	2
Family Issues	24	1
European Union Queries	16	1
Driving Licence/Passport/Embassy Details/ Lost Docs	17	1
Insurance & Finance Queries	12	1
Self Employment	9	0
Voluntary/Youth Sector Queries	9	0
Other	56	3