

***Reaching Out: A Community Profile  
on the experience of migrants from  
outside the EEA living in Co. Meath***







Cultúr is a community organisation that works with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees promoting equal rights and opportunities to develop an intercultural County Meath.

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*An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail,  
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We would like to thank the staff and board of Cultúr for their ongoing work on this project over the past year.

Finally and most importantly, we would like to sincerely thank and acknowledge all nineteen interviewees for sharing their experiences with us; this profile we hope will highlight not only their needs but will also hold up a mirror to the needs of other migrants from outside the EU living in Co. Meath.

**Sinead Smith**

**Editor**

## **Chairperson's Foreword**

Over the past year Cultúr has been striving to review, evaluate and assess its potential role in supporting migrants from outside the EEA. In order to do this, we sought to carry out a baseline study which would have a threefold impact, namely providing information on the needs of those profiled as a representative sample, secondly the information collated would feed into and inform our pre development work with this target group and thirdly to inform other agencies about the needs of migrants.

While many of the issues experienced by this group are similar and resonate with migrants in general, including those who are European citizens, the immigration status of migrants from outside the EU and the aligned rights and entitlements linked to this status mean that the day to day life of this group is shaped by their immigration status. This status has implications for integration, anti racism and equality strategies.

The findings in the profile which are common to other migrants that Cultúr already engages and works with migrants on include information on rights and entitlements, issues of work place exploitation, issues relating to training and employment and experiences of discrimination and racism.

Cultúr is currently in the process of developing a new strategic plan and we are striving to deepen our knowledge of and response to the needs of migrants in Co. Meath. It is our hope that this profile will directly impact on that strategic plan and its implementation.

Finally, we would like to thank all the individuals, organisations, staff and volunteers and most importantly all of the interviewees who contributed to the completion of this report.

**Ned Rispin**  
**Chairperson**  
**Cultúr**  
**October 2010**

## **Section 1 Rationale for carrying out a Community Profile**

This report is best described as an initial needs assessment or profile of migrants from outside the EEA living in Co. Meath. As an organisation Cultúr is embarking on developing a strategy in relation to its work with this target group and in doing so we set out to create a base line from which we could develop that strategy through carrying out the Community Profile.

In December 2009 we began work on the development of a community profile, which we undertook to bridge the gap in knowledge and experience the organisation had in working with this target group. On average our current statistics convey that 20% of our drop in centre work and 15-20% of those accessing our English language classes in 2010 are migrants from outside the EU.

On reviewing the low level of participation are: the numbers of those currently living in Co. Meath are low a number of key issues were identified:

- Cultur was not actively engaging migrants from outside the EU, this situation has since reversed with links now established with ethnic led groups and a number of initiatives undertaken in 2009 and 2010 to establish links with migrants from outside the EU
- In 2009 our staff, volunteer and board representation did not represent this target group, in 2010 this situation is reversed with both our board and our volunteer representation including migrants from outside the EU
- The level of information we had about the needs of migrants from outside the EU was extremely limited and as a result, pre development work and a community profile were identified as the immediate strategic response to those issues

## **Introduction and Background to the Report**

This report is a qualitative study which supplements earlier research carried out in the Meath Migrants Report *Engaging Difference* which was published in 2008 building on the information already gleaned from this report.

The overall aims of this profile were to explore:

1. the needs of migrants in terms of information provision and access to general services e.g. health, education and will identify gaps in services and policies
2. their experience of working and living in Co. Meath
3. the links between migrants immigration status and their rights and entitlements

Defining what we mean by non EEA migrants is a challenge as we are conceptualising a diverse community of interest, within which there are huge contrasts in terms of culture, language, identity, immigration status, needs etc

When we use the term ‘outside the EEA’ migrants we use it in an inclusive manner to describe migrants who are nationals of countries outside of the European Union i.e. are not EU citizens. In some cases, the migrants profiled in this report are in the process of applying for or are awaiting the outcome of applications for naturalisation and may in the near future no longer fit into this category; however their experience of the system to date is relevant for this profile.

The profile does not examine the experience of those currently being accommodated within the direct provision system for asylum seekers process. This is namely due to the fact that the asylum process is distinctive in terms of the legal and immigration status which is enshrined in Irish law and the rights and entitlements attached to those awaiting their application for status are distinctive to those migrants from outside the EEA. The profile does include an interview with a person with refugee status and two people with leave to remain i.e. those already with status. A separate profile is warranted to assess the needs of asylum seekers living in Co. Meath.

The underlying principles which inform the profile are integration, equality and social inclusion and through this document we examined some of the key components that should form part of any response to migrant issues. We modelled the report structure

in our interviews with migrants on the framework outlined in the Migrants Rights Centre Ireland publication-Realising Integration, which cites economic, social, political and cultural inclusion as the tools for ‘creating the conditions for meaningful integration.’<sup>1</sup> The report examines the issues that impact on the realisation of integration across these thematic areas.

In view of the global and permanent reality of migration,<sup>2</sup> the fact that civic participation is key to successful integration,<sup>3</sup> and the need to drive integration policy through research,<sup>4</sup> we believe through this profile and our ongoing efforts to collate data, statistics and essentially creating an evidence base we envisage this profile will inform the future work of Cultúr and indeed other agencies in the county. We hope will generate an awareness of and response to the issues facing migrants through illustrating the experiencing of migrants living in Co. Meath.

Given the current discussion on the recently published revised Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, due to be debated in both Houses of the Oireachtas the issues highlighted in this report should reflect some of the key challenges and opportunities for consideration within government policy on planning for integration, equality and social inclusion not just at a national level but at local level. Immigration legislation and policy is decided upon nationally but as has been acknowledged by the government, integration happens locally and local issues in turn should impact and shape national policy and ultimately migrant voices should inform integration policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Realising Integration: Creating the conditions for economic, social, political and cultural inclusion of migrant workers and their families in Ireland, MRCI, p. 19

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Migration Nation, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

## **Section 2 Report Structure**

This report is broken down into seven sections:

Section 1 is the rationale for undertaking the profile and introduction which includes an outline of the background to the report, the aims of the profile and finally the framework used to review the thematic areas covered in the body of the report.

Section 2 outlines the report structure in detail.

Section 3 presents the report methodology in summary and outlines the role of the working group which oversaw the process and presents the ethical considerations considered in advance of undertaking the profile.

Section 4 is a literature review of the available relevant literature at a national and county level pertaining to migrants from outside the EEA, including literature on integration policy.

Section 5 is an examination of the experiences of migrants from outside the EEA living in the county collated through in depth one to one semi structured interviews and broken down into thematic areas using the framework of social, economic, cultural and political inclusion.

Section 6 presents a collation of experiences of agencies working on the ground with migrants and the experiences of ethnic led groups who are supporting migrants within their communities.

Finally, Section 7 of the report will make a number of recommendations in relation to policy and service development and delivery for migrants from outside the EEA living in Co. Meath, many of which will have national policy relevance.

### **Section 3 Report Methodology**

In undertaking the community profile it was decided that a qualitative study would provide an in depth analysis on the real situation of migrants living in the county. This approach in turn impacted on the particular research methodology adopted and included:

A literature review was carried out of current government policy documents, research on migration and Integration issues in Ireland; statistical information was gleaned from a number of sources.

Undertaking semi structured interviews with nineteen migrants from a range of backgrounds: including nationality, gender, education, employment etc to convey the diversity of experience for migrants living in the county.

Four focus groups were carried out; two with community, voluntary and statutory organisations in the county and two with ethnic led groups working with migrants.

An appendix at the end of this document includes a bibliography, the questionnaires and focus group questions and a list of the organisations attending the focus groups.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As with any form of research, ethical considerations were reviewed by the working group in advance of carrying out field work with potential interviewees. A review of current data protection legislation pertinent to Cultur as the data controller and the interviewees was undertaken.

An explanatory document on the profile itself for potential interviewees was developed and provided to interviewees in advance of the interview process itself.

A summary document on the rights of participants providing their data as outlined in the legislation, along with information on the role of Cultur as the data controller including the primary and potential secondary use of information was provided to all interviewees in advance of undertaking interviewees.

Consent forms were also designed and signed by interviewees and interviewers in advance. All interviews were recorded on Dictaphone and transcribed and all interviewees have access to copies of these transcripts if and when requested.

### **Working Group**

A working group was set up in December 2009 and included Cultur staff members, two volunteer field workers and a student on placement who later became a board member and represented the board on the working group. In total the working group met on three occasions at different junctures and carried out tasks such as discussion of ethical issues, planning the timetable for the fieldwork, review of questionnaires and focus group questions, review and feedback on draft documents e.g. literature review. Two members of the working group were migrants from outside the EEA themselves.

## Section 4 Literature Review

According to the Census 2006, out of a total of 4,172,013 persons usually resident and present in the State classified by nationality, 419,733 were categorised as non-Irish (10%). This represented an increase from 2002, the first year that data on nationality was recorded. In 2002, the number of non-Irish nationals recorded was 273,520, (7.1%) of the population at the time.<sup>5</sup> The 2006 non-Irish figure was subdivided into EU (275,775), rest of Europe (24,425), Africa (35,326), Asia (46,952), America (21,124), Australia (4,033), New Zealand (1,756), other nationalities (7,984) and multi nationality (2,358).<sup>6</sup> It can thus be seen that 300,200 (71.52%) were of European nationality and the remaining 119,533 (28.5) were non-European. As the CSO report on Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland confirms, Ireland's population is by no means a homogenous group.

The Census 2006 also states that the total population of Meath was 162,831, an increase of 21.5% since 2002.<sup>7</sup> 9.2% (14,924) of the total population of Co. Meath were non-Irish nationals.<sup>8</sup> 10,051 (67.3%) of this figure were of EU origin.<sup>9</sup> **The remaining 4,873 (32.65%) of non-EU origin were classified as African, Asian, US, other and not stated.**<sup>10</sup> Westmeath recorded a total of 7,353 non-Irish national residents, Limerick 14,581, Tipperary 11,381, Wicklow 10,792, Kildare 18,586, Leitrim 2,983, Longford 3,511, Offaly 5,231, Roscommon 5,416 and Sligo 4,896.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment website, the total number of work permits issued nationally in 2008 was 13,567.<sup>12</sup> 427 (3.1%) of those were issued in Co. Meath.<sup>13</sup> Of that 427, 196 were new permits and 231 were renewals.<sup>14</sup> 269 (1.98%) work permits were issued in Westmeath in 2008, 376 (2.77%) in Limerick, 359 (2.64%) in Tipperary and 367 (2.7%) in Wicklow. Kildare

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<sup>5</sup> <http://beyond20/20.cso.ie/Census/TableViewer/tableview.aspx?ReportId=1079>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://beyond20/20.cso.ie/Census/TableViewer/tableview.aspx?ReportId=77138>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://beyond20/20.cso.ie/Census/TableViewer/tableview.aspx?ReportId=75467>

<sup>8</sup> Meath Migrant Research Report, 2008, p. 14, Table 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid; the statistics were broken down as follows; UK 3,826, EU 15 1,008 and EU accession 5,217.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid; the breakdown was as follows; African 1,590, Asian 911, US 366, Other 710 and not stated 1,296.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/AXBN-7SQDF91044205-en/\\$File/Migration%20Nation.pdf](http://www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/AXBN-7SQDF91044205-en/$File/Migration%20Nation.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.entemp.ie/publications/labour/2008/permitsbycounty.XLS>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> In 2008, 78 work permit applications were refused and 11 permits were withdrawn.

had a significantly higher figure of 1,374 (10.12%), the second highest after Dublin (6,860, 50.56%). Other counties had significantly less, for example, Leitrim 36, Longford 51, Offaly 61, Roscommon 73 and Sligo 76.<sup>15</sup> **In 2009, a national total of 7,380 have been issued to date, 223 (3.02%) in Co. Meath.**<sup>16</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that Ireland has been transformed from a country of net outward migration to one of net inward migration and that this change has occurred quite rapidly and as can be seen now in 2010 as changing again for the first time in a number of years. As has been demonstrated by the statistics above, the vast majority of Ireland's migrants come from within Europe. Although migrants face many similar issues and barriers, it is nevertheless vital to specifically address matters which may affect various population groups of migrants in different ways e.g. in relation to rights, entitlements and immigration status. This Community Profile will focus on the needs and life experiences of migrants from outside the EEA living in Co. Meath.

The recognition of the need for co-ordination of integration policy at national level was demonstrated by the creation of the Office of the Minister for Integration in July 2007. Many new initiatives have been launched and structures have been proposed under the government policy statement on integration *Migration Nation*, for example, a Standing Commission on Integration, a Ministerial Council on Integration, a Task Force to establish policy needs<sup>17</sup> and a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration.<sup>18</sup> The National Action Plan against Racism (NAPAR) 2005-2008 has also led to policy responses such as the HSE Intercultural Strategy and the Diversity and Equality Strategy of An Garda Síochána. However, along with the government closure of the NCCRI, no new NAPAR has been developed to build on the gains of the last plan.

Migration policy is also developing at EU level to meet changing migration patterns and issues. To date, the EU has focused on promoting best practice and the exchange

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.entemp.ie/publications/labour/2008/permitsbycounty.XLS>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.entemp.ie/publications/labour/2009/permitsbycounty.XLS>

<sup>17</sup> *Migration Nation*, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

of information and principles of integration common to Member States.<sup>19</sup> One example of this effort is the elaboration of the European Common Basic Principles of Integration. In addition, the European Commission has published annual reports, handbooks on integration practices, and has developed a portal on integration activities. In 2005, it adopted a legal migration strategic plan.<sup>20</sup>

The Office of the Minister for Integration in its publication, *Migration Nation*, emphasises the importance of effective local delivery mechanisms for integration<sup>21</sup> ‘Integration lives and breathes, and indeed dies, at the level of the community’.<sup>22</sup> The report also stresses the critical importance of evidence-based policy in the integration field.<sup>23</sup> While a significant amount of research in the area has been conducted, serious gaps in information about migrants remain. The report itself contains only a few brief references to non-EEA migrants.<sup>24</sup>

In its publication *Realising Integration-Creating the Conditions for economic, social, political and cultural inclusion of migrant workers and their families in Ireland* the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland which works to support migrant workers and their families assert that ‘Real and sustainable integration must be concerned with tackling racism and promoting equality and interculturalism’<sup>25</sup> and that any integration strategy must be underpinned by these principles. The report outlines a number of key pillars of inclusion which form a benchmark for the integration of migrants in Ireland. MRCI have carried out extensive research on the experience of migrants from outside the EEA and have been to the forefront in documenting this experience at a national level.

At county-level, the report, ‘Engaging Difference: The Opportunity of Diversity in a Changing County Meath’ was published in 2008. This report was funded by the Meath County Development Board and Meath CIC in the main with supports from

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Meath Migrant Research, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Migration Nation, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> For example, that non-EEA migrants are the main beneficiaries of services at Burgh Quay relating to immigration and citizenship matters, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Realising Integration-Creating the conditions for economic, social, political and cultural inclusion of migrant workers and their families in Ireland, MRCI, p. 25

other stakeholders. It contains useful information and contextualises many issues relating to migrants, however, the report acknowledges the lack of information available about non-EEA migrants living in Co. Meath specifically and acknowledges that migrant communities differ significantly in ‘levels of expressed need, linguistic competence in the English language, employment sectors, national origins, legal status, or even levels of socialisation’.<sup>26</sup> This lack of information at both a county and national level provides the rationale for Cultúr undertaking this Community Profile.

The Meath report cites the ESRI (2005) in remarking, ‘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’.<sup>27</sup> It is noteworthy that Ireland is quite unique in the sense that it is one of only five EU countries where most non-Irish residents are EU citizens.<sup>28</sup> Barrett et al conclude that there has been little or no integration of EU migrants since EU enlargement.<sup>29</sup> No reference however is made to the particular experience of migrants from outside the EEA. The Meath report references earlier work carried out by the MITE project (Meath Investment in Training and Education) 2005-2007. This work identified a number of barriers and potential solutions related to employment for migrant workers as well as key areas for providing assistance.<sup>30</sup>

Issues raised by migrants themselves in ‘Engaging Difference: The Opportunity of Diversity in a Changing County Meath’ would equally apply to migrants outside the EEA e.g. English language training, securing and maintaining employment, supporting families, lack of public transport, learning more and integrating with Irish culture, building resources for eventual return to country of origin and recognition of existing qualifications.<sup>31</sup> There are other issues too identified later in this Community Profile which impact specifically on migrants from outside the EEA.

Other areas of concern identified by statutory agencies included: the need for more English language training, the need to deliver quality services that meet identified

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<sup>26</sup> Meath Migrant Research, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 23

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Engaging Difference: p22 of summary report

needs, need for specialist resources and expertise, training for staff in cultural diversity, policy planning and service co-ordination, improved awareness of rights, entitlements and services and the need to tackle substandard or exploitative employment conditions.<sup>32</sup>

NGOs and voluntary based organisations in the county also outlined their concerns in the report. These included the need for the following: a co-ordinated institutional and agency approach, language competence, social and cultural engagement, proactive welcome strategies and support initiatives for migrants, social support and contact, the creation of a forum for learning and exchange [between NGOs], promotion of integration where desired, resources as required to achieve targets, proactive responses to meet needs so that problems do not emerge in the medium or long term and finally the need for advocacy and networks of NGOs.

The Meath County Development Board has identified four priority areas for 2009-2012. Social Inclusion Measures are identified as one such area although it is pointed out that social inclusion should constitute an overarching theme in all actions.<sup>33</sup> The report highlights the need for county-wide strategies on inclusion of foreign national communities and notes the inadequacy of social inclusion funding.<sup>34</sup> In the new Local and Community Development Programme which will replace the LDSIP, Meath will have its own programme although the funding provided for this is significantly less than other counties of a similar geographic size and demography. Finally, The Le Cheile report highlights the value of Cultur's work and the importance of supporting it.<sup>35</sup>

At a county level there is a dearth of information available about the issues facing migrants from outside the EEA living in Co. Meath in terms of their lived experience and how their status as migrants impacts on their economic, political, cultural and social life in Ireland today. This community profile it is hoped will bridge some of the gaps in this regard.

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<sup>32</sup> Engaging Difference: p22 summary report

<sup>33</sup> Meath County Development Board Strategy Mid 2009-2012, An Mhi – Ag Obair Le Cheile, April 2009, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

## **Section 5 One to One Interviews**

As noted in the introduction section of this report, nineteen one to one semi structured interviews were carried out with migrants from outside the EEA. In appendix, a copy of the questionnaire is included which outlines the questions which formed the interview process with each interviewee. These issues are illustrated and documented under each of the thematic areas discussed with interviewees which are outlined below.

1. Background Information on the Push/Pull Factors to Migrate-Migration History
2. Immigration Status-Experience of the Immigration System
3. Economic and Educational Inclusion
4. Social Inclusion-Rights, Entitlements, Supports and Services
5. Discrimination and Racism
6. Political, Cultural and Social Inclusion
7. Any other comments/suggestions

### **5.1 Profile of those Interviewed**

In terms of the profile of those interviewed the following breakdown highlights nationality, language, gender family status, age profile, and average length of time living in Ireland, geographic location, educational achievements and employment status:

- A total of 19 participants were interviewed with ten interviewees who were male and nine interviewees who were female.
- In terms of nationality those interviewed were nationals of the Philippines, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, India and Belarus
- For a number of interviewees the interviewer spoke the same language as the interviewee where language was an issue, this was particularly the case for Russian speakers

- Eighteen of the Nineteen people interviewed lived in urban parts of the county with one person interviewed living in a village in a rural setting
- Age Profile: The age profile of those interviewed ranged from 28 years old to 53 years old
- Family Status: seventeen of the nineteen people interviewed have children with fifteen of the seventeen having one or more children living with them in Ireland
- Length of time living in Ireland: on average in terms of the nineteen people interviewed ten people have been living in Ireland for between two to five years with nine participants living in Ireland between 7-9 years
- Educational Achievement/Qualification and Employment Status: The majority of those interviewed thirteen people in total have third level qualifications or professional qualifications that were low paid in their country of origin which in eleven of the twelve cases acted as the pull factor for migration.
- The current employment for those profiled in Ireland included: three nurses, one chef, three restaurant and hotel workers, eight people were not working, two factory workers, one third level student and one person working in pastoral care.

## **5.2 Feedback from the One to One interview process**

### ***1. Background Information on the Push/Pull Factors to Migrate-Migration History***

The range of reasons professed by people regarding their reason for migrating to Ireland is what is commonly known as the 'Push and Pull' factors of migration were in many cases quite similar, these factors are highlighted in summary below.

In the case of four people interviewed who decided to come to Ireland, an opportunity for work arose in a particular profession or sector and the work situation was the dominant factor as opposed to the location of the country with many people citing the lack of knowledge they had about Ireland before arriving.

Four interviewees came to Ireland originally seeking asylum, subsidiary protection and leave to remain based on parentage of an Irish Born Child. One person is now a refugee and for three people interviewed political asylum and asylum on the grounds of religious persecution and political upheaval were the reasons they left their homes. One person who is not in the direct provision system and is awaiting refugee status to come through, a second person has already received refugee status. Two people have been granted leave to remain on the basis of their Irish born children (IBC are currently being renewed at present) and have stamp 4 which allows them to work and study in Ireland

In the case of six people who came to join a family member, they came either alone or with their children, their partner was employed in Ireland beforehand and they came as dependent spouse with no rights to work. For those who came as dependents, in the main they came after their families who initially came to work on their own when that family member had been in Ireland for a period of time, in some cases giving up jobs or careers of their own.

Four of those interviewed who are dependent spouses were not allowed to work when they arrived in Ireland and this was determined by the immigration regulations at that time which did not allow them to take up employment, this situation has changed in recent years.

The final five participants cited reasons such as joining friends in Ireland who were employed and told them about a job that was available if they came to work there, accessing paid employment the general labour market which in the case of four people was in essential unskilled work.

The need to support immediate and extended families in the country of origin was also identified as a significant push factor, particularly in economies where income attainment levels even for qualified and educated professionals is extremely low.

Out of a total of nineteen people interviewed, thirteen have third level qualifications or professional qualifications that were low paid in their country of origin which in eleven of the twelve cases acted as the push factor for migration.

## ***2. Immigration Status-Experience of the Immigration System***

The breakdown of the immigration status of those interviewed includes their status when they arrived and at the present time in summary:

- Four people originally came to Ireland on a two year Green Card or work visa as it was also known and at the present time, one has stamp 4 and has applied for naturalisation, one still has a Green Card, one has a specific work visa linked to their profession and one has Long Term Residency.
- Five people came on work permits also known as Stamp1 with three people in this grouping having accessed Long Term Residency, a fourth person having applied for LTR and a fifth person who has stamp 4 and has applied for EU treaty Rights as they are married to an EU citizen.
- Six people came as dependent spouses initially with no rights to work and from that group; three males and one female now have dependent spouse work permits with two females remaining on dependent spouse work permit since they arrived.
- Two people applied for asylum with one person accessing refugee status, one person awaiting same and one person has leave to remain and with the final person having leave to remain under the Irish Born Child scheme post the change in the legislation.
- Two dependent spouses interviewed had experience of working illegally in Ireland before the regulations were amended to allow them to work; they are now working legally through the work permit system.

The experiences those interviewed had in relation to their interface with the immigration system was varied and conveys a number of key issues that would be probably resonate with many other migrants from outside the EEA living in Ireland today.

**The main issues identified were:**

The fact that the immigration system in terms of the rules and regulations are changing quickly and sometimes people are not aware of this:

*“The immigration system is actually quite volatile, it can change quickly but I suppose there are so many immigrants coming into this country they are learning. It is very stressful and there is no sense of security at....it can change tomorrow.”*

*“We have learned from experience that different agencies in Ireland have different opinions e.g. Garda Immigration Bureau, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment have different opinions and interpretations and have different answers and it was exhausting and we were lucky we got sorted in the end.”*

Some people interviewed cited their lack of information upon arrival about the system with a number of people indicating an ongoing concern about the lack of information they have about the overall immigration legislative system including its rules and regulations which are often amended and changed.

*“I didn’t have any idea at first [of the immigration system], only as the need arises did I find out.”*

*“Although I live here for such a long period of time, I feel I lack information or knowledge about the immigration system. That’s why I attend Cultur. They gave me information about applying for EU Treaty Rights.”*

The length of waiting times for applications for Long Term Residency and Citizenship to be processed was also raised by those interviewed who were currently or had been this situation with comparisons being made between Ireland and Canada which has a set time period that an applicant is to have lived in a country legally whereupon they can apply for citizenship and a set time frame for when that will be granted. In some cases this is causing stress and frustration for applicants:

*“This is the system here [citizenship application process] and I am getting upset about it, because first its 22 months to wait then 28 months. You feel uncertain because you are not sure about what is going to be in the future. We are worried about being refused; I know what a hard time I had getting my long term residency.”*

For one interviewee, the lack of knowledge about the immigration system resulted in their work permit expiring due to the employer not renewing the work permit and confusion about who was responsible for renewing the permit and the person not being aware of this fact and as a result the person lost their employment.

Another issue cited is the shift in stamps when a person is working and not working with one person citing the changes due to them caring for their child when they had to move from Stamp 1 as a worker back to Stamp 3 as a dependent spouse and back again a number of months later when they got a new job.

Other immigration regulations identified in a more positive light included the rights of dependents to work which has been changed enabling more migrants to access dependent spouse work permits. This has facilitated spouses of those who have been in Ireland five years or more, with experience and qualifications the opportunity to take up employment and for those who were previously not able to work this was a positive change to the system:

*“I arrived in Ireland with a Stamp 3 (as a wife of a husband working here) but later a law was issued that you can get a spouse work permit so I got Stamp 1 visa. I really love my work....”*

There still remains a challenge for dependent spouses with particular qualifications to access employment that they are qualified in due to the work permit categories of eligible occupations and this remains an ongoing issue for those in particular whose partner is operating within the work permit or green card system. For those whose partner is a long term resident the categories of work available to them is open and no criteria apply. More discussion on this will be outlined under the employment section of this report on the above. This situation was one that those dependent spouses who were interviewed felt strongly about.

*“Stamp 4 with unlimited rights to work and study should be given to all spouse dependents versus the limited work permit.”*

All of those interviewed professed their intentions to remain in Ireland in the long term and would see a future for themselves and their family here. This was expressed not only by those with long term residency but also by those who are currently on work permits and those with leave to remain e.g.

*“We would like to stay in Ireland long term, at the moment we renew work permits every year but we would like to apply for Long Term residency when we can.”*

*“I’m intending on applying for long term residency, I have one more year [on a green card] before I can apply.”*

For many people EU treaty rights (where married to an EU national), long term residency, citizenship as forms of immigration status provide long term security and reduces the worry people have in terms of their future status in Ireland:

*“I am still awaiting a response [EU Treaty Rights]. I hope to get it. I would be able to get a job for the long term with no complications with work permits.”*

*“I haven’t applied for Long Term Residency yet, but I am planning to do it. My husband had health problems last year so we had to postpone it. I would feel much more comfortable and secure with the residency. I want to get an Irish citizenship eventually.”*

Although this profile does not include a review of the direct provision system for asylum seekers the interviews with and the particular experience of the four participants who came to Ireland on these grounds is included below.

Feedback of the issues in summary included:

- The length of time those interviewed had to wait for their applications to be processed was deemed too long, coupled with the legal issues that are intrinsically linked to the asylum process.
- The difficulties arising for those are not in direct provision who have no access to social protection or family benefits including child benefit while awaiting the outcome of their claim and who are relying on the support of family and friends.
- Family Reunification rights for those who are in Ireland as parents of Irish Born Children arose as there is no automatic right to family reunification in these circumstances and the difficulties this brings in terms of isolation for families with children living in different countries to their parents.
- The process for renewal of IBC and the fact that the renewable period is set for a number of years with no indication of the long term future of people in this category results in a sense of not knowing what the future may bring.
- The fact that those waiting the processing of their applications to remain in Ireland cannot work while their application is being processed and the impact this has on individuals and families. One interviewee cited an EU directive which provides for the right of asylum seekers to work after one year in the asylum process while awaiting the outcome of their application for asylum. Ireland has not transposed this directive.

### ***3. Economic and Educational Inclusion***

In terms of the educational and work experience of the nineteen people interviewed a breakdown of their educational attainment is outlined in summary below

- In total thirteen participants had third level qualifications including nursing, law, business, economics, finance, teaching , culinary studies and medicine
- Three people had professional nursing qualifications with one person having post graduate experience including two females and one male
- Three people had law degrees including two males and one female

- Two people had business qualifications including economics and business studies
- Two people had qualifications as doctors with one person practising as a nurse (see above)
- One person was currently studying for an undergraduate degree in journalism
- One person is a qualified chef, one person has a vocational qualification in meat and milk production, one person is a qualified in finance and education and one person is a civil engineer
- Five people had no qualifications, however three people had significant work experience in different fields including the hotel and care industry and of this group one person had run their own business before coming to Ireland, one person had significant care work experience and one person had attended 3<sup>rd</sup> level for one year

In identifying issues relating to their current employment status and opportunities for moving into new fields of work, including their qualifications and skills match some of the key issues raised that acted as blocks/barriers included:

- A lack of English language skills was noted by five interviewees as a block to accessing employment linked to their professional qualification or to accessing new employment for those currently working or who have worked in industries without having English, in this case predominantly factories and the restaurant industry.

*“Also the language barrier plays a big role-to succeed, you have to speak in English like Irish people do.”*

- Seven interviewees conveyed an interest in doing further training in areas related to their qualification or in new areas.

The main motivation for coming to Ireland as stated earlier was for economic reasons in the main with interviewees citing the low wage levels in their home country being extremely low, the need to support extended immediate and extended families was

also cited, with those coming through the asylum process outlining different reasons from the economic ones named above namely political and religious persecution.

### **Employment Status**

In terms of qualifications and current job status, interviewees were asked to discuss their current employment:

- Four people were working in fields matched to their qualifications,
- Eight people of the eleven working were working in areas not matched to their qualifications
- At present eight participants are currently unemployed with three people in this grouping not eligible to work due to their immigration status as two people are dependent spouses and one person who is an asylum seeker
- Eleven people are working full time
- Out of the eight people unemployed only two people have no qualifications and two people were prior to becoming unemployed were working in areas not matched to their qualifications

The reasons why they were not working in their field are three fold: some participants did not have the level of English required to work professionally in their field; the restrictions on the eligible job categories for dependent spouses of those in the work permit and green card system i.e. in Ireland less than five years where those with qualifications that don't match the categories are working in essential but low skilled employment in industries such as the restaurant and hotel industry and other manual labour intensive work such as factories. Finally, in some cases the qualifications that the person had were not recognised and they would need to get qualification recognition or in some cases do additional training or retrain.

### **Access to Employment and Training**

In terms of accessing training and new employment, those interviewed felt that due to their immigration status, the opportunities for further training and accessing employment for them is limited for a number of reasons, not least of all the current economic environment and the recession was outlined as a major concern:

*“I feel as a migrant there are no doors opening with jobs as there are no jobs at all, I see plenty of Irish people who are jobless, the preference would be to have them first as they are the country people.”*

A number of those interviewed outlined the prohibitive cost of third level education for migrants from outside the EEA as being discriminatory and unfair (in the case of those granted refugee status and stamp 4, they have the right to access 3<sup>rd</sup> level on a par with EU citizens).

*“But when I asked about the fee, they are charging 1200 euro and the man I spoke to is paying 200 euro as an EU citizen. My wife said, just wait until you get your Irish passport and do some education then.”*

In particular the issue was raised by one interviewee in relation to their dependent son who was unable to afford the fees for college and has had to defer attending college. This is in spite of his father having long term residency and awaiting the outcome of a citizenship application. Two other interviewees also outlined concerns about the children of dependents access to third level given the costs for those who have not attended schools in Ireland from a young age.

The current system of green card and work permit system towards dependent spouses who can only work in certain categories for the first five years has resulted in many people become deskilled in their field,, again resulting in some people having to retrain, losing their skills set and trying to explain to potential employers why they have not worked in their field in the last number of years.

In terms of accessing further training with state agencies that have a remit in labour market activation, the restrictions on work permit holders accessing FAS training services was also perceived as unequal treatment for workers from outside the EEA:

*“I have always had some difficulties in relation to my status [when a work permit holder]. When employers or an agency finds out that I am not an EU citizen applying for a job. FAS would not let me do any courses until I had long term residency. I*

*always have to show a lot of documents to prove that I really worked here for so many years and that I am legal. The fact that my husband is an EU citizen now helps a lot.”*

*“I have the impression that in their opinion [state training agencies] if someone is not from the EU, he or she will leave the country so there is no point in training them.”*

In one example, one interviewee who is a civil engineer outlined their lack of time to take up part time courses or education due to long and irregular working hours:

*“When I had to work I didn’t have time to attend any courses.”*

This is an issue echoed by other people interviewed who outlined their experience of working long hours and doing shift work which didn’t allow for additional time to study part time.

### **Work Place Rights**

A number of acute issues are documented below in relation to work place rights and protection for migrant workers relating to issues of equal pay, discrimination, promotional prospects and the particular vulnerability of workers in certain industries which have been noted for exploitation of workers namely the restaurant / hotel industry and factories operating with manual workers. The experiences highlighted below are experienced by workers from within the EEA also, but the particular vulnerabilities for those whose immigration status is directly impacted by their employment status underscores the potential for the exploitation of migrant worker from outside the EEA, in particular those working in non unionised and unregulated industries.

Those interviewed often described daily experiences of work place exploitation as *de facto* issues about which they felt powerless over or could do very little about, in the main they felt they couldn’t speak out about these issues and as a result were left in vulnerable work situations that didn’t change.

A number of issues namely issues relating to pay, discrimination, work place exploitation and promotional prospects were documented which are summarised below:

**Wages:** the non payment of holiday pay and no overtime for bank holidays in the restaurant industry which are established by the Joint Labour Committee (JLC) was cited by one interviewee who has worked in the same company for a number of years. The non payment of minimum wages and no provisions for wage increases was also cited by two other interviewees and in all of these cases no action was taken in relation to the employer:

*“My only wish is to get a higher salary. The salary that I am getting at the moment is less than the minimum wage. Starting in May 2009 they have stopped paying us an hourly rate and our overall wages, we have lost 150 euro. No one complains because everyone is frightened about losing their jobs.”*

*“I sometimes feel discriminated. I don’t know much about salaries since the payslips are closed. My salary is 9.95 for nine years being raised by only one euro per hour; I think it’s very little.”*

**Work place exploitation and Discrimination:** Many of those interviewed felt that they had been discriminated in the work place by their employer because of their status as a migrant worker and a number of examples were provided to illustrate this fact:

- The level of work they were asked to do was greater than other staff doing similar work;
- The fact that they were not allowed to take lunch breaks or that lunch break times were reduced below the statutory regulations;
- In some cases they were doing the jobs of two or three people due to staff cuts, where previously three staff had been employed before the recession;

- They were spoken to/ridiculed in front of other staff in an intimidating/bullying manner and this was also experienced by other staff (including migrant workers from the EEA)

The quotes below illustrate these issues:

*“If you are a migrant and if you can’t speak up properly people treat you like trash.”*

*“Irish people seem to think that as immigrants all the dirty work is passed on to you. For myself, I can do nothing. You came here to work and to earn money, even if you have rights as a worker, to earn money, but still you just keep quiet, even if they’re doing something you don’t like. Especially because it’s really hard to find a job these days, I’ve spoken to others [migrants] and they say they are really helpless with regards their work. They can’t complain, [about their treatment] otherwise their job will suffer.”*

*“My experience of the work place has changed because the workload is more and if you can just imagine that three people were doing a job that one person [me]now has to do so you have to be quicker and its nonstop from when you clock on to when you clock off. There was a ten per cent cut in the wages and they reduced the wages without the agreement of the staff. If I complain they will not fire me but will give me a hard time on the job, double the work.”*

*“When my husband arrived here, the situation was different; the attitude to newcomers was very welcoming because they really needed help. Now its much harder, at his work already, three owners have changed and the lunch time has been reduced.”*

**Employment Mobility/Status:** When the issue of promotion or opportunities for skills development was raised with interviewees, the majority had not progressed in terms of promotion within either their professional field or within the industry they worked in, with two people interviewed in the hotel and restaurant industry moving from and between similar positions low paid unskilled but essential work positions.

Only one person undertook further 3<sup>rd</sup> level training related to their professional field, which was funded by the agency they worked for and in spite of being qualified to work in that field and currently carrying out duties relating to that role they had not been promoted to date:

*“If any promotion arose that I knew I would be qualified for I would be notified at the last minute and it would be too late for me to apply....there are a lot of people [migrants]...for whom it is difficult to go up the career ladder, it’s not only me, I hear a lot of people from outside the EU saying this.”*

This lack of work mobility is in stark contrast to the opportunities available to the majority population during the Celtic Tiger and is resulting in highly skilled workers remaining in jobs that do not match their skills. The issue of improving their employment status was a concern for sixteen out of the nineteen people interviewed.

#### ***4. Social Inclusion and Integration-Rights and Entitlements***

A central element of social inclusion and integration strategies in any society is equality of access, participation and outcomes from services and supports with the state system for all and in this section of the interview participants were invited to discuss their experiences of accessing information on supports and services in Co. Meath.

Participants discussed in general where they accessed that information, what supports were provided and what blocks or barriers they faced in accessing this information on core areas such as health, education, accommodation and social protection. Those interviewed also commented on the specific services they had engaged with where this had taken place or where they had a comment to make. This feedback is summarised below:

- Language barriers impinged on access to information on services and were highlighted in particular by those interviewed coming from the former Soviet Union. When these situations arose, friends and family often acted as translator for the person where information needs arose, word of mouth and

what other people did in that situation was also cited. Language issues may not be as prevalent for those from the Asian and African continent as raised by those interviewed from both continents.

- Informal networks and ethnic led groups were often the access point for information where migrants received peer support on information issues from members of their own community who supported their induction to Ireland e.g. accommodation, schools for children, immigration rules and regulations etc

*“Basically, it’s like a ladder, whoever is here first will give orientation.”*

- Formal Induction events provided by employers, in the case of nursing the HSE provided induction for new workers which included information on services and structures within the Irish state.
- One participant discussed their membership of a trade union and the valuable information that it provides them with.
- For those in the asylum process (not direct provision), the challenges of accessing services due to immigration status is a huge barrier as the majority of services apart from access to health care and access to primary and secondary school for children of asylum seekers are prohibited.

The issue of immigration status needs to be resolved before people can access many services e.g. access to housing, social protection etc- having temporary rights to work while awaiting the outcome of a decision was named by one interviewee as a potential way to address these issues along with having access to limited social protection.

The level of need in terms of information including legal information is higher for people in this category who can access free legal advice; they are extremely limited in the general supports available to them. Asylum seekers can access community and voluntary organisations e.g. citizens information services. However, the supports provided by some community and voluntary

organisations may have eligibility clauses which preclude their participation in these support systems.

- In the case of those asylum seekers granted leave to remain, their level of knowledge about their rights was high as they had been engaged with information and legal services around their immigration status and related issues.
- Accessing the citizens information board website was also identified by a large number of those interviewed as the first port of call for information and the fact that information is categorised makes searching for information much easier and libraries were often the access point for this information
- The levels of awareness of the Citizens Information Service was very high among the majority of those interviewed who also heard about the service through word of mouth and through the internet
- The main types of information people were seeking their day to day lives included: information on rights as a refugee, the immigration system, social protection, accommodation, taxation and the education system
- A number of people outlined the lack of information they had about what supports were available, with a number citing the fact that it was only when they needed information that they sought out organisations that could provide this information
- The desire to access information in their own language where available in terms of accessing information, filling in forms etc was cited as important to six of those interviewed. Three people outlined their experience of going to Dublin for information on their rights and entitlements due to a lack of knowledge about the supports available in the county.

### **Accessing information on specific issues**

#### **Health**

Most people only accessed information about the health system when a health issue had arisen e.g. an accident at work, a new baby or attending a GP:

*“I did not have any contact with the health services until my wife gave birth to our son. Then in 2008 I could understand Basic English, so I understood what the doctor was saying and I could be an interpreter for my wife.”*

### **Local Garda station immigration officers**

The immigration service provided by the Gardai was also cited as a useful place to access general immigration information, however the Gardai, it was outlined are not in a position to assist people to fill in forms as this is not their role:

*“You need to have your questions ready and the completed documentation, otherwise they cannot help you. You have to arrange assistance yourself in order to complete your documents.”*

### **Education and Training**

In terms of education and training information and advice, the majority of those interviewed knew about the services provided by the VEC and FAS with a positive response to VEC services highlighted in terms of accessing courses, assessment of need, career guidance and qualification recognition.

*“I was looking for support and information in a few organisations....VEC, FAS. I was quite happy with those organisations, as I was registered with the courses I was looking for.”*

However frustrations were cited in relation to the restrictions implemented at a national policy level under immigration rules and regulations for those who are work permit holders in terms of their limited access to FAS online services, once people have become long term residents these issues no longer apply. Two people interviewed cited specifically their experiences:

*“I have never visited FAS because I don’t have long term residency.”*

*“I approached FAS; however they could not provide any assistance as I had not got my long term residence card.”*

Other migrants interviewed who fell under this category didn't approach the services as they were already aware of the restrictions with a number of people stating that they would wait until they had long term residence or citizenship before accessing such services:

### **Availability of Information**

Access to information in the form of booklets, organising information meetings and ensuring that available information is on the internet were cited as accessible means of ensuring migrants have the information they need. This was underscored by a need for information in a range of languages, again to ensure people had equal access to that information.

## ***5. Discrimination and Racism***

In this section of the interview, participants were asked to discuss in a general manner their experience of direct and indirect discrimination in Irish society and in particular Co. Meath. The majority of those interviewed described experiences of negative attitudes to them but were reluctant to name it as racism or discrimination and the reasons for this are complex. In some cases as the discrimination was not overt, it was deemed less harmful. In other cases, it was excused as just being an individual response based on ignorance of a lack of knowledge rather than a reflection of general attitudes in Co. Meath or in Ireland.

*“Since I am a person who does not draw attention to problems, I don't feel discrimination in Ireland. I think that is the person's problem, not mine.”*

*“I don't feel discriminated against at all and neither does my son. The attitude is warm and helpful. Although recently I have noticed Irish people have become wary towards immigrants-maybe because of the recession.”*

A number of those interviewed in coming to Ireland expected to meet some discrimination given their status as migrants and in this respect were not overly concerned when they encountered it as they had prepared themselves. In most cases

those interviewed excused the behaviour and didn't feel that it had impacted on them in any real way.

However, in contrast, when the earlier interview discussions took place about their experience of working in Ireland, interviewees were very clear about the discrimination they experienced in the work place. For those in unionised state agencies, protocols exist in relation to dealing with discrimination and for those who experienced it, these systems were accessed and worked well but were only used on occasions, as workers didn't complain each time they faced discrimination.

One person stated their experience of discrimination was only in the workplace- *Only in the workplace. I don't find anything wrong with people here, most of the time only in the workplace.*

*Well of course you experience discrimination it is from individuals [in the workplace]. Well you just have to keep quiet because I lived abroad and I'd say it's the same. Well it was initially there, there was some kind of loopholes but it has been rectified because the managers make sure there is no racism or discrimination....it's not tolerated."*

In terms of service provision, one person interviewed described their experience of not feeling welcome or being viewed suspiciously:

*"In the doctor's I have [experienced discrimination] and a couple of times when you go into expensive shops, they look at you, I know, I feel when someone does not like me, it's not what people say, I don't feel nice when it happens, it's not just in Ireland."*

One person interviewed outlined their experience of direct discrimination in a church car park, when their car was blocked, upon arrival back, the owner of the car when asked to move stated: *"this is my country, this is my church, I can do whatever I want."*

In this scenario another car owner supported the person who was being discriminated and this solidarity was appreciated.

In some instances interviewees named apparent incidences of discrimination as being about ignorance or just random acts of mistreatment by people not because of their identity but just being in the wrong place at the wrong time but acknowledging the feeling of discrimination that someone will feel and cited their acceptance of it as a fact of life:

*“I have heard stories about it [discrimination], to give my opinion when you are not being treated nice and you are a different nationality you feel you are being discriminated but I feel no matter where you go you will have discrimination, on a personal note in Dublin we were eating out, my family and a couple of youths were throwing stuff at us but it was just ignorance, if they were discriminating against us you would have to ask them, we may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, they might have done it to someone else.”*

On the flip side a small number of people cited their positive experience of living in Ireland and experiencing little or no direct racism.

*Talking about Irish people in general, I did not encounter any manifestation of discrimination.”*

The strategies migrants use to deal with discrimination and racism are put into practice to shield and manage the experiences on a day to day level as illustrated above. What is clear however is that for many of those interviewed racism is viewed as part and parcel of everyday life and has become part of their interaction with Irish society. The only onus put on Irish society by those interviewed related to the work place, however its clear from above that this issue needs to be addressed at all levels of society.

## 6. Political, Social and Cultural Inclusion

A key element of integration within any society is political, social and cultural inclusion and interviewees were asked to discuss their experience of participating in exercising their rights as voters, their participation within the local community in Co. Meath and their experience of exercising cultural expression of their identity.

Overall the level of participation in exercising their voting rights was extremely limited with many stating they had never voted and only two people stating they had voted in local elections. None of those interviewed has the right to vote in national elections as they are not EU citizens, however they do have the right to vote in local and EU elections with a number of people stating that they had little or no interest in voting at this point in time and two interviewees citing their experience of voting.

*“I do not know a lot about the Irish system, about current politics; therefore I do not take part in local elections.”*

*“I have voted once in Co. Meath elections. I am interested in Irish politics.”*

In contrast however, in terms of participative democracy and participating within decision making structures and initiatives seeking to raise the consciousness of migrants, many people expressed an interest in this area. Juxtaposing these two, it's clear that representative democracy may have been seen to have little relevance in particular due to the fact that migrants from outside the EEA cannot vote in national elections, however those interviewed expressed very real interest in projects that address the rights and promote their voice as migrants.

*“Representative groups should had time to meet county council officials face to face There should be public meetings with all migrants...and during that meeting, we can voice out our problems. There are many problems here.”*

*“Yes migrants should be discussing issues that affect them in the community because they don't even know what is happening, what is going on, that is why things won't change.”*

A number of those interviewed clearly stated the relevance of engagement between migrants and the local political system and the gap that exists between the issues that impact on migrants and how those issues impact on local policies relating to economic, social and cultural development in general.

### ***7. Equality and Social Inclusion***

In examining the role of civil society organisations including community and voluntary groups, trade unions, the churches and similar organisations, promoting and actively enabling the integration of migrants in general and specifically in this profile migrants from outside the EEA, a number of observations and comments were made by interviewees.

The potential role of Cultur as a community work organisation that of other similar organisations was identified as including providing information on rights and entitlements, bringing migrants' together, developing new information on relevant issues, facilitating the interface of migrants with those who formulate policies and respond to issue affecting migrants including politicians, trade unions:

*“A meeting with SIPTU and with politicians as they all help migrant people.”*

*“I think it's better to have a representative from the community [ethnic led group] through Cultur. You could help us represent ourselves so that we can express our concerns with regards our community...and other concerns.”*

Two main issues were identified by fourteen of the nineteen migrants interviewed: firstly the provision of a space and opportunity to share with other migrants experiencing similar issues in relation to living in Ireland coupled with the need to provide basic up to date information on rights and entitlements of migrants from outside the EEA.

*“Immigration, work related rights and entitlements would be the information needs of outside the EEA migrants and people would have questions and might be*

*experiencing problems with taxation, work permits and sharing experiences with other people who have also had this issue is very useful.”*

*“An organisation like Cultur could inform people about their rights and entitlements. A safe place to come and talk about rights and entitlements, yes it is needed.”*

*“I would be interested in an information meeting for migrants. I have a lot of questions and I would be glad if I could get some answers, I would be glad to get some more information, I am sure there are many things I do not know.”*

*“If there would be any information meeting I would gladly attend them. Booklets would be great. When we need some information from work we ask our friend who understands English better than we, so he helps us with interpreting sometimes.”*

*““I think migrant forms or migrant information meetings would be a great idea, as legislation changes, there are a lot of new and existing regulations we do not know about.”*

Other comments and suggestions made by participants, eight of whom discussed in detail the current and potential role of a dedicated migrant organisation and specific work that it would engage with, included comments on their perceptions about the organisation, its potential role in acting as a support system to migrants, its potential role in supporting asylum seekers and refugees and the training and education needs of particular groups of migrants who are dependent spouses:

*“I thought this place was only for migrants from the EU. Now you have a connection...this is very useful as there is someone who knows us.”*

*“Its great to have an office (Cultur) like this as a good support system. People should be told that if they have problems they can come to the centre, share their experience because sharing problems would lessen them.”*

*“It would be very helpful to have an organisation which helps people that are in a situation like myself (asylum seeker). It’s easier for people who are part of the EU,*

*but not for those who are not from the EU. I am asking you to create such a group for people like me.”*

*“I suppose to provide courses for dependent spouses who come here with no skills whatsoever or maybe they are skilled in something that is not applicable here.”*

### **Integration and Social Inclusion**

Integration and social inclusion are not mutually exclusive and the central focus of integration may not necessarily be about social inclusion as integration includes not only those who are socially excluded as integration includes all migrants.

Those interviewed were very aware of the complexities involved in integration and the dynamics at play in terms of their own role and the role of wider society in this process. All of those interviewed spoke of Ireland as their home and their long term plans to remain here, yet they all expressed clearly the challenges they faced in terms of integration.

*“Acceptance is a big challenge for migrants and to feel that you are part of the community but I have always said.....if we want to be part of the community we have to play our part in our own way. I think that people may see you here as filling in the gaps for the time being in labour and see you as temporary.”*

The immigration system itself, in terms of social inclusion access to services and supports as migrants as determined by immigration rules and regulations, experiences of discrimination in particular in the work place and the ongoing challenges in terms of participating within their local community with many citing very little interaction in some cases underscored by language problems.

*“Immigrants are often not seen as participating..... but the reason many immigrants don’t participate is because they don’t know it’s for everyone, they think it’s just for locals, that is what I think.”*

In terms of enhancing community participation, participation in local sports clubs, volunteering and opportunities for Intercultural dialogue were among the ideas put forward as potentially enhancing participation and the social inclusion of migrants:

*I have not sought any volunteering opportunities either, but if I heard that kind of help is needed I would gladly spend my time helping others.*

*“...More activities that will promote and inform the local community] about the different lifestyles and culture so that the local community will know about us.”*

*“Maybe creating or joining clubs, social or sports, as Cultur is doing now, just like what you are doing. Because it helps, it really helps.”*

## **Section 6 Focus Groups**

### **Introduction**

Cultur invited a cross section of community, voluntary and statutory organisations to attend two focus group meetings to gauge the issues arising for key agencies working with migrants, including the interventions and supports provided by these agencies in Co. Meath.

The feedback from the focus groups with service providers has been collated into thematic areas under which:

- The key day to day issues are highlighted
- The potential responses by local services and policy makers in the county to the issues are documented
- Finally any additional issues were also grouped according to its particular thematic area

### **Language Supports**

Language Supports were identified as a cross cutting issue impacting on a number of areas of life for migrants in terms of accessing services and supports e.g. English language was cited by many agencies as a barrier for some migrants from outside the EEA, in particular by frontline services working on family, welfare, access to further education, training and employment and information issues. A small number of agencies, however, stated that they were not experiencing difficulties in providing information in terms of language provision.

### **Information Provision**

The information provision needs identified by focus group participants included access to information on the Irish social welfare system linked with the language barrier which in turn impacts on migrants being able to navigate and understand the systems and procedures of social protection.

A number of agencies cited the need for training of frontline staff e.g. train one person in each organisation on the rights and entitlements for migrants as frontline staff may be the first point of contact working on a one to one basis with migrants. In

this respect they should be able to provide basic information on services and supports that migrants can access.

Focus group participants also expressed their view that the expectations on services can be high as the needs of the individual may be high and cited the importance of working with a person even just providing a referral so that a person is not left without any information. This in turn places an onus on agencies to have clear communication channels with agreed referral protocols in place between the relevant agencies involved.

### **Immigration issues**

Immigration status was perceived by agencies as a very real issue in terms of its impact in all areas of the day to day life of migrants. Two particular areas were mentioned as examples of acute issues e.g. immigration issues for migrants who become undocumented and social protection issues for those who may not meet the Habitual Residence Condition requirements<sup>36</sup>.

Concerns were raised about the difficulties that migrant workers on work permits face due to the recession. This included the potential impact on them if they are not able to obtain new employment within the timeframe of six months as set out in current government policy. These difficulties are interlinked and include updating their immigration status after the six month period and the potential for these workers to

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<sup>36</sup> Habitual residence means you have a proven close link to Ireland. Proving you are habitually resident relies heavily on fact. If you have lived in Ireland all your life, you will probably have no difficulty showing that you satisfy the factors which indicate habitual residence – see list below.

The term habitually resident is not defined in either Irish or EU law. However, the following 5 factors, which have been set down in Irish and European law, will be examined to find out if you are habitually resident in Ireland:

- Length and continuity of residence in Ireland or other parts of the Common Travel Area
- Length and purpose of any absence from Ireland or the Common Travel Area
- Nature and pattern of employment
- Your main centre of interest
- Your future intentions to live in Ireland as it appears from the evidence.

become undocumented linked with unemployment status and not being able to access social protection for those who do not meet the Habitual Residence Condition.

A number of issues were cited in relation to the experience of dependent spouses including the difficulties dependent spouses experience in relation to accessing work permits in their own right and the impact this has on families due to the work permit eligible criteria for dependent spouses.

The difficulties in accessing information on immigration from the Immigration and Naturalisation Service due to the high volume of contacts that agency are dealing with were also highlighted in the main by agencies with an information provision role.

### **Supporting Migrant Families**

The support needs of migrant families were highlighted in general with the particular needs of vulnerable families as a priority. This would be a case in point in the situation of family break ups, particularly where issues of violence have occurred to ensure that all the available supports are accessible to these families. The very limited interventions available for migrant families experiencing financial difficulties who do not meet the HRC condition is an issue on the agenda of many frontline agencies working with families in Co. Meath who do not meet the Habitual Residence Condition. Many of these agencies are documenting statistical information on this particular issue as a social policy issue for the county.

### **Violence against women**

Agencies working with migrant women experiencing violence outlined that migrant women are facing multi faceted issues relating to their immigration status e.g. dependent spouses currently do not qualify for legal aid. Migrant women who do not meet the habitual residence condition are also not in a position to access free legal aid which means they have no legal redress.

In terms of due process victims of violence who attend court in Co. Meath are not eligible for translation supports these costs are borne by the supporting organisation working with the woman or the woman herself. This is in spite of the fact that defendants in a legal case have a right to translation supports. The Habitual Residence

condition is again causing financial strain for women experiencing violence who cannot access social protection and the particular agencies seeking to support them are providing supports with very limited resources.

### **Supporting those in Education (Formal and Informal)**

The importance of actively supporting integration within schools particularly at second level was named as vital. This is case, in particular for young people who have not attended primary school in Ireland and who may face greater challenges in terms of inclusion and integration. In order to achieve this, working in partnership with parents and engaging parents equally in tandem with young people was seen as vital to supporting young people in the school setting. This however can be difficult where languages are an issue as again translation supports are not included within core budgets and young people often act the intermediate between parent and school which all agencies agreed is not an appropriate situation.

In terms of access to further education and training for adult migrants access to English language training was cited as important for unemployed migrants who have limited English-it was acknowledged that this is not an issue for all migrants and that for those who have English. A separate concern was raised about the immigration status of certain groups of migrants e.g. those on work permits, should not impact on their access to mainstream education and training initiatives e.g. those on work permits not being allowed to access FAS training services.

### **Work Place Exploitation**

In terms of the work of agencies such as the Trade unions and those with information provision role, cases of work place exploitation are a prevalent issue and are acute in particular industries.

Other work place practices discussed which are would also be defined as exploitative include not providing P45 to people who are being let go, salaries being cut without consulting with workers or seeking the agreement of workers who have wage agreements, non payment of wages and refusal to sign redundancy forms citing inability to pay, workers becoming undocumented through non provision of work permits or non renewal of work permits but employment continuing on.

There has been an increase in the number of people taking cases to the Employment Appeals Tribunal supported by a number of key agencies including Meath CIS and Trade Unions. In many cases workers are still fearful about coming forward about work place exploitation fearing potential job loss.

### **Translation**

Access to interpretation supports were cited as important in the case of some migrants from outside the EEA but not all. For agencies working with migrants the importance of accredited and professional translation services being used, particularly in addressing sensitive or confidential issues was seen as vital.

However, many statutory agencies are not funding or resourcing translation needs due to budget constraints within their own agencies at a local or national level and this results in issues such as lack of translated information on preschool for migrant parents, tenant leases not translated for migrants through local authorities (these are local examples cited in Co. Meath)

### **Role of the Community and Voluntary section in supporting migrants**

There was a perception that there were particular challenges for some nationality groupings to build networks within their own community and the difficulties that this may cause in terms of isolation for migrants who may have no or little family contact in Co. Meath.

In these situations supports for individual migrants not linked or affiliated to groups was viewed as vital. The importance of linking with the churches to engage with and support people was also acknowledged as an important outlet for migrants and a way to highlight information, events and initiatives.

Finally, the equal participation of migrants themselves in shaping the responses to the issues impacting on their lives was also cited as a vital to any engagement process with migrants living in Co. Meath.

## **Focus Groups with Ethnic Led Groups**

### **Introduction**

Two focus groups were also held with ethnic led groups and a number of questions were posed to frame the discussion in order to glean the experiences of ethnic led groups whose members are migrants from outside the EEA living in Co. Meath. - these questions are highlighted below. A focus group was held with executive board members of Filcom a network group for Filipinos living in Co. Meath which has a membership of approximately 100 members is affiliated to a national network representing the Filipino community in Ireland. A focus group was also held with the board members of the Africa Caribbean Forum which has a branch in Meath and Cavan.

We have summarised below in two separate sections the issues raised by both organisations in response to the focus group questions and the final section outlines the common issues raised by both groups.

### **Summary of feedback from Filcom**

In the main Filcom believe that many of the issues impacting on migrants within their community stem from their immigration status and immigration regulations. Many of their members came to Ireland on employment permits or green cards and in summary they identified the following issues e.g. the immigration system, training and education issues, access to information and community participation. These issues are outlined below:

#### **Immigration system**

The changes to the immigration system, which appears to be changing all the time, can result in people not being clear about the current rules and regulations and often what is implemented is different to what is set down in writing.

Dependents of those who have work permits or green cards face difficult issues in particular children who turn 18 and want to go to college who have to pay non EEA fees even if they attended part of their second level education in Ireland. .

In terms of dependents that turn 18, if they don't attend 3<sup>rd</sup> level they have to apply for work permit as they are no longer eligible for Stamp 1 status, however, many of them will not have the professional qualifications on the eligible categories list.

Filcom cited their concerns about their male members in particular who have expertise and experience and are now at home and are not in a position to use their skills to support their families due to the work categories criteria. The green card and work permit system doesn't take into account that many migrant workers who provide necessary services to Ireland e.g. nurses bring their families with them and not allowing these family members to work is not fair or equal and the voice of families are not heard.

The work permit system presents particular problems for those who are applying for work permits now as many employers do not want to wait the number of weeks required to advertise the position before they can employ someone from outside the EU on the work permit system.

### **Training and Education**

There is a lack of awareness about the training and educational opportunities that are available at a local level among Filcom members but this could be an important support for dependent spouses who are not in position to work and information on what is available and accessible for dependent spouses and those who find themselves unemployed is vital.

### **Access to Information**

Information on rights and entitlements comes from a number of sources including the Filipino network in Dublin, the internet and local citizen information services in the county.

### **Community Participation**

In order to foster community participation and in identifying what NGOs could do to support ethnic led groups working with migrants a number of initiatives were identified by the group, including: greater clarity about the work of other NGOs working with migrants in Co. Meath, access to proper information on immigration

e.g. naturalisation for dependents, work permit information and updates and information on the immigration status and work rights of dependent spouses.

The provision of solidarity and support on these issues e.g. campaigning and lobbying and other issues that relate to migrants live in Co. Meath. The group also acknowledged the need for Filcom members to be involved in participative and representative democracy so their issues could be highlighted. In terms of integration access to community facilities and services at reasonable costs which allow all groups to participate.

## **Summary of feedback from Africa Caribbean Forum**

### **Education**

An issue raised by Filcom resonates with AFC in relation to access to 3<sup>rd</sup> level for the children of migrants who have attended 2<sup>nd</sup> level education in Ireland. As their parents have Stamp 4 linked to their residency status and are not naturalised they do not qualify for third level grants as dependents.

Qualification recognition is an issue for many migrants not just those from outside the EEA, but for migrants from the African continent it is an acute issue which has resulted in many people retraining in a profession they already had or a new profession with many people working and in education part time. In some cases the professional recognition of standards may vary from country to country e.g. accountancy, nursing and are not transferable without additional training been undertaken.

### **Unemployment**

The issue of unemployment is a difficult one but is not relating just to migrants but for AFC the issue of reduced work for agency workers is challenging as many of their members who were engaged in this work are no longer employed.

### **Immigration issues**

From an African experience as migrants many arrived in Ireland as asylum seekers and received leave to remain so their status changed over time and many now have

leave to remain and many are in the process of applying for citizenship or indeed may have citizenship. Many of AFC members are living in Ireland for a number of years with some here since the late 1990s.

A small number of Africans who are professionals work in Ireland within the work permit or green card system. In this respect they don't have the restrictions in terms of their status as many of them have long term residency and have free movement in the labour market.

### **Racism and Discrimination**

Initially when people from Africa arrived ten to twelve years ago, it was a relatively new phenomenon and Irish people were not informed about migration or integration issues which since then has come into the public domain more. For some migrants from Africa your employment status can impact on your experience in terms of what is acceptable in a work place environment in terms of racism and discrimination.

For many people they deal in their own ways with discrimination, racism doesn't stop or cease to exist but the impact can change when you know how to deal with it. Focus group participants expressed their opinions that the experience of racism and discrimination by migrants is not unique to Ireland. In terms of Irish society the understanding of and acceptance of difference can vary between generations of Irish people and that means as migrants you have a range of experiences in your interactions with Irish society.

### **Community Participation and the role of AFC**

The AFC described the experiences, backgrounds of members as very different '*we are not all the same*'. The role of the Africa Caribbean Forum is to act as a support for migrants and board members who have expertise or knowledge in particular areas will link with migrants experiencing these issues e.g. immigration and education issues and this knowledge is pooled and supports are provided to people who may not be comfortable going to an external agency and to create a supportive environment. The churches also provide a support mechanism to some members of the African community living in the county.

The AFC members provide this support on a voluntary basis and have been working on a strategic plan and a website has been developed and the board have officers with roles and are seeking to work in partnership with other organisations in order to support the integration of the African Caribbean community in a way in which culture is maintained and supported.

Representation in participative democracy is important to the group as part of their involvement in the community and having a voice in participative structures e.g. county council would be important in conjunction with other community organisations.

The importance of raising awareness about community, voluntary and statutory organisations among African communities was also cited. Some of the ways this could be addressed would be through groups working in partnership with the AFC, inviting participation in initiatives impacting on the lives of migrants with other migrant groups represented. An event providing information for African communities jointly organised would also provide an opportunity to raise awareness of the organisations in the county.

### **Blocks to Integration identified by AFC**

The immigration system itself in its structure can act as a barrier to integration in terms of a number of acute areas e.g. waiting time for citizenship applications and the uncertainty which can give the impression that this issue is not a 'priority'. The individualised structure of the immigration system and the fact that family unit is not taken into account in a number of key areas e.g. education and family reunification rights of those with different immigration status.

## **Conclusion**

This profile has explored some of the key opportunities and challenges facing migrants from outside the EEA living in Co. Meath. Indeed many of the issues they face have national policy contexts and are linked to a wide range of government policy.

However, migrants live in local communities and strategies to address their needs must come from the ground up and be informed by the local context in conjunction with national policy and it is vital that this link is clear and responses to the needs of migrants from outside the EEA is framed in this context.

The profile has reviewed the issues from the perspective of migrants themselves, ethnic led groups working with migrants and finally key agencies that work with migrants on a daily basis, knitting together the issues, experiences and ideas for developing responses to the needs of migrants from outside the EEA.

At the outset the Community Profile had the following aims:

The overall aims of this profile were to explore:

- the needs of migrants in terms of information provision and access to general services e.g. health, education and will identify gaps in services and policies
- their experience of working and living in Co. Meath
- the links between migrants immigration status and their rights and entitlements

It is our contention that this profile achieved these aims and that it produces some useful findings and recommendations that are practical and achievable in a local context and can also inform national responses. We look forward to working towards the implementation of the key recommendations of this profile.

## **Section 7 Recommendations**

**The recommendations outlined are based on the collated findings in the body of this report and are set out below**

1. To provide increased supports in terms of information provision to migrants from outside the EEA
2. The development of engagement strategies with migrants from outside the EEA to be developed by community, voluntary and statutory agencies
3. Identify and seek ways to address work place exploitation for migrants living in Co. Meath in conjunction with the relevant agencies
4. To ensure that all relevant anti racism, social inclusion and integration strategies in Co. Meath are inclusive of the particular needs of migrants from outside the EEA
5. To seek to identify the further training, education needs and employment needs of migrants from outside the EEA, in particular those who are unemployed

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## Appendix One



### Community Profile Semi structured Questionnaire

*Name:*

*Gender:*

*Ethnicity:*

*Living in Meath (Rural/Urban setting and location):*

*Age:*

*Family Status (Married/Single/Children: if family are living in Ireland):*

*Languages spoken:*

*How long they are living in Ireland:*

*Employment/Educational attainment/Qualifications*

#### **Background**

1. Can you give some background information on your life before you came to Ireland and how this life experience may have influenced your decision to come and live in Ireland?

#### **Section 1 Migration History**

2. In terms of your immigration status can you discuss your migration history i.e. immigration status when you arrived and now and any difficulties you faced, have you applied for Long term residency or citizenship?

## **Section 2 Economic Inclusion**

3. Can you describe your experience of working/seeking work in Ireland and what challenges you think you faced as an outside the EEA migrant worker?
4. Can you describe what you think are the barriers in terms of accessing and participating in further education and training in Ireland and what challenges you think you faced as a outside the EEA migrant worker?

## **Section 3 Social Inclusion and Integration-Rights and Entitlements**

5. What has been your experience of accessing information and supports or services in Ireland?
  - Where did you go for information and supports?
  - What supports did you get?
  - What were the main blocks or barriers (problems) you faced in getting information on your rights and entitlement in relation to
  - What worked well for you?

### **1. Health**

### **2. Accommodation**

### **3. Education**

### **4. Social protection/social welfare**

## **Discrimination and Racism**

6. Have you experienced discrimination or racism since arriving in Ireland, if so how and where?

#### **Section 4 Political/Cultural Inclusion**

7. In terms of living in Co. Meath, what supports or initiatives do you think could be put in place to support the participation of outside the EEA migrants and their families in their local community and what role do you think an organisation like Cultúr should have in supporting this?

#### **General**

8. Are there any other comments you would like to make about what other issues or the challenges do you think outside the EEA migrants and their families face coming to live and work in Ireland?

## Appendix Two



### Focus Group Questions

#### Service Providers

1. What are the key day to day issues affecting outside the EEA migrants that you work with and how do these issues act impact on the integration of outside the EEA migrants living in Co. Meath?
2. What supports/services are provided by your agency in addressing the issues you have already raised and what challenges do you face in providing these supports/services?
3. What could local service providers and policy makers in Co. Meath do in relation to responding to some of the blocks and barriers that you have identified in question 1 that impact on integration of outside the EEA migrants?
4. What role do you think an organisation like Cultúr could play in supporting outside the EEA migrants living in Co. Meath?
5. Are there any other issues/comments you would like to raise/make?

#### Ethnic Led Groups

1. What do you think are the key day to day issues affecting the members of your group/organisation as non EU migrants e.g. immigration related issues, employment, education, health, racism etc, what do you see as the blocks and barriers in relation to integration in Ireland?

2. What supports are available or accessible to the members of your organisation in addressing the issues they experience daily (including within your own organisation) and why do these supports work well i.e. what makes them successful?
3. What could local service providers and policy makers in Co. Meath do in relation to addressing some of the blocks and barriers that you have identified?
4. What role do you think an organisation like Cultúr could play in supporting non EU migrants living in Co. Meath?