



Immigrant Council of Ireland Independent Law Centre

THE FEMINISATION OF MIGRATION

EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN IRELAND

Migration has resulted in profound economic, social and cultural changes in Ireland.

The Feminisation of Migration:

Experiences and Opportunities in Ireland

examines the particular role and impact of the contribution of women migrants in this country. It argues that there is a need for more gender-based analysis of migration to reveal specific gender-related policy issues that need to be addressed.

By drawing on national and international data, and through interviews with women migrants in Ireland, this study shows that there are some unique and gender-specific issues that need to be addressed if women migrants are to be equal, valued and recognised for their contributions to Irish society and the economy.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland is a national, independent non-governmental organisation that promotes the rights of migrants through information, legal advice and strategic litigation, advocacy, lobbying, research and publications, as well as training work. The organisation was set up by Sr Stanislaus Kennedy in 2001 in response to a need to support migrants coming to Ireland for purposes such as work, study, family reunification, self-employment or to visit.

IMMIGRANT COUNCIL OF IRELAND

2 ST ANDREW STREET, DUBLIN 2, IRELAND

Information & Support Service: Tel: +353 1 674 0200 / Email: info@immigrantcouncil.ie

Administration: Tel: +353 1 674 0202 / Email: admin@immigrantcouncil.ie

Website: www.immigrantcouncil.ie

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AND OPPORTUNITIES IN IRELAND



The Feminisation of Migration:

**Experiences and Opportunities
in Ireland**

Dr Jane Pillinger

Report commissioned by the Immigrant Council of Ireland

Written by: Dr Jane Pillinger
Independent Researcher and Policy Advisor

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2 St. Andrew Street
Dublin 2, Ireland
Information & Support Service:
Tel: +353 1 674 0200 or
E-mail: info@immigrantcouncil.ie
Administration:
Tel: +353 1 674 0202 or
E-mail: admin@immigrantcouncil.ie
Website: www.immigrantcouncil.ie

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About the Author

Dr Jane Pillinger is a Dublin-based independent researcher and policy advisor working on equality, migration and social policy issues. She has published widely and has advised and worked with international organisations, governments, trade unions, NGOs and employers across the world. She is a member of the Immigrant Council of Ireland's Research and Policy Advisory Group.

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FOREWORD

The ICI commissioned Dr Jane Pillinger to document the experiences of female migrants living and working in Ireland. The intention is to provide a thought-provoking and in-depth understanding of the feminisation of international migration. We hope that the report will add to the existing thinking on gender-specific issues relating to migration, particularly the inter-connections between migration policy and women's migration patterns and experiences in their countries of origin, transit and destination.

The ICI believes that consideration of gender-specific issues relating to migration is crucial to understanding Ireland's experience as a country of net immigration. Gender influences all stages of the migration process and is a crucial determinant of countries of origin and destination countries. Gender is deeply embedded in determining who moves and how those moves take place. To incorporate gender-related issues appropriately and effectively into our understanding of immigration and the development of appropriate policies and practices, we must take into account the more subtle, as well as the obvious factors that coalesce to create different experiences all along the migration spectrum. Further defining and understanding these forces and outcomes will greatly enhance our understanding of international migration in general and the individual experiences of migrant women around the world.

We believe that, to date, we have often failed to adequately address gender-specific migration experiences and reflect them in policy and legislative development. We are often unsure, for example, of the conditions under which women migrate to Ireland, or why there is a predominance of women in certain labour flows and not in others. The ICI wanted to gain a deeper understanding of gender issues in relation to migration, taking into account the many different types of migration, including temporary, permanent, irregular, labour, forced, and conflict-induced migration. Understanding these, and other more gender-sensitive issues, requires us to examine how a seemingly gender-neutral process of movement is, in fact, highly gender specific and may result in different outcomes for men and women. Feminisation of migrant labour reflects the changing demographics of migration, particularly the notable increase in female participation in both formal and informal labour migration. Women have always migrated but often, in the past, their movement was more directly related to family reunification or depended on a male migrant. Today, women are moving as primary migrants in their own right.

Over the past decade, the internationalisation and feminisation of migration have contributed positively to economic, cultural and social changes in Ireland. Women migrants' experiences are diverse and varied. On the one hand, many female migrants experience discrimination, with their lives affected by a combination of racial and gender inequalities. They are also over-represented in the most marginalised and lowest paid jobs. On the other hand, migration

has led to positive experiences for women. It has the potential to reshape gender relations and inequalities, and enables many women to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

This report documents the experiences of female migrants living and working in various sectors of the formal and informal economy. It documents these experiences within a global context and makes recommendations for change within the Irish context. Most importantly, it documents migrant women's diversity of experience, their strength and their contributions. Our sincere thanks to all of the women who participated in this undertaking and helped give us a greater understanding of migration and integration.

Acknowledgements

Many people contributed to this study on the feminisation of migration in Ireland. My thanks go to Denise Charlton, Ailbhe Bennett and Fidele Mutwarasibo from the Immigrant Council of Ireland for their help in contacting women migrants and in providing valuable insights into the research, to Ursula Barry for her helpful comments, and to other members of the Research and Policy Advisory Group who provided feedback on the report's recommendations. Also thanks go to Niall Crowley at the Equality Authority who contributed to discussions about the focus of the study and the use of data. Most of all my thanks go to the time and insights that women migrants gave to this study and for their willingness to be interviewed.

Dr Jane Pillinger, Independent Researcher and Policy Advisor, Dublin.

Summary

Migration has resulted in profound economic, social and cultural changes in Ireland. This report examines the particular role and impact of the contribution of women migrants in Ireland. It argues that there is a need for more gender-based analysis of migration to reveal specific gender-related policy issues that need to be addressed. By drawing on national and international data, and through interviews with women migrants in Ireland, this study shows that there are some unique and gender-specific issues that need to be addressed if women migrants are to be equal, valued and recognised for their contributions to Irish society and the economy.

The report shows that, although there is a wide diversity of migration experiences, positive and negative, the strength of women migrants is a common theme emerging from their experiences of living and working in Ireland. However, the invisibility of women migrants in the labour market and in society creates particular difficulties. It results in women being open to exploitation and specific forms of gender-based inequality.

Migration as positive and empowering for women

Migration can be a positive and empowering experience for women. It has enabled many women to gain autonomy and independence in their lives, contributing to the labour market and to their communities. They are shaping new gender perspectives and are contributing to the empowerment, independence and self-esteem of women migrants. This in turn creates positive changes that impact on gender relations between women and men.

In practice, women migrants are increasingly autonomous and independent, they are forging new gender roles and relationships, and are configuring new and positive forms of gender empowerment. This is changing traditional perceptions of women as being dependent. Women have contributed in ways that make them significant agents of economic and social change.

Migration as negative and restricting women's potential

Research shows that women migrants experience significant gender, ethnic and racial discrimination in their daily lives, in accessing the labour market, and in integrating into work and life in Ireland. Gender assumptions, which underpin the experiences of women migrants, are rooted in the policies that influence their arrival, integration and settlement. Although women's migration has been associated with dependence and the breadwinner model, there is little recognition of the fact that there has been an increase in women migrating alone and parenting from a distance. The under-valuing of the contribution of

women migrants and the lack of recognition of their potential is also a serious loss to the Irish economy and to the community.

The inadequacy of existing migration policies

Existing legal frameworks and policies on migration are neither gender sensitive nor do they take account of the actual roles and situations of women migrants. In some cases, legislation has restricted gender equality by forcing women into a dependent status. In other cases, restrictions on family reunification seriously undermine family relationships. This forces women into dependency on spouses and separation from children.

There is also an absence of a legal framework and policies to support the women who are most marginalised, exploited and vulnerable, including women who are undocumented working in domestic and other services, women who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation, and women who are dependent spouses and who have experienced domestic violence.

The report argues for a gender equality approach to be incorporated into the development of new legislation and policies on migration and integration so that some of the inequalities faced by women migrants can be resolved.

Women migrants' experiences at work

The report shows that women migrant workers are triply disadvantaged. They face inequalities in the Irish labour market that is characterised by gender inequality, they experience a second layer of inequality by virtue of their race or ethnic origin, and they are triply disadvantaged as migrant workers, often with limited legal protection or long-term security in the labour market.

Women migrant workers represent a wide diversity of workers. They are predominant in the lower skilled and lower paid areas of the labour market. However, they also represent a growing number of skilled women workers. Although women migrants may be earning more than in their countries of origin, they are clustered in jobs in sectors of the labour market that are poorly regulated and not unionised. Many, if not the majority of women migrants, continue to be working below their potential in jobs that do not utilise their education, training and skills. This is not only a loss to the economy, it also seriously under-values women migrants' labour.

Women's experiences in the workplace include negative experiences (such as discrimination, exploitation in terms of low pay or poor conditions of employment, harassment, social isolation, loneliness and stress), as well as positive experiences (which include opportunities for career development, progression and financial independence).

The women migrant workers that were interviewed for this study were often very invisible and tended to work in the highly feminised and low paid sectors of the economy. They were under-represented in the higher paid and skilled sectors of the economy. They can be found in large numbers in the cleaning, healthcare, hotel, and domestic sectors. Women migrant workers in these sectors tend to have high levels of skill and education but consider their work as important to gain new opportunities, higher incomes and the possibility to send money home to children, partners and other family members.

In most cases, women are very positive about their decisions to migrate. They are often highly valued by employers who experience skill shortages. It tends to be in companies with good human resources policies, including workplace equality and diversity policies and trade union coverage, where the best experiences can be found.

There is a limited range of data that examines the situation of women migrant workers. There is an absence of data on women's experiences of migration and integration, including their work and family status, working conditions, and pay.

Women's experiences of integrating into the community

Whilst many women migrants experience difficulties in settling into life in Ireland, particularly on arrival, many do settle effectively. However, women migrants speak about the difficulties in accessing economic and social rights. They often experience difficulties accessing information, housing, health, childcare, maternity, and other services. Particular problems exist for the integration of female spouses of migrant workers. In some circumstances, they continue to be disallowed from working and experience limitations on their entitlements to social welfare, health and other services.

Particular issues are raised in the report about accessing domestic violence services and the risks of exploitation and violence to which women are exposed. In addition, experiences of racism also hinder integration for some women. Social isolation is enhanced because many women migrant workers do not have family networks to help them with childcare and other support. Language and cultural understandings can also seriously impede the take up of information and services.

The research found that women migrants' integration will be assisted by a number of programmes and gender-sensitive policy developments. These include improved access to information that is tailored to women migrants' particular needs, access to English language training, interpretation and translation services, and access to culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive service provision, such as information about rights and entitlements, healthcare, housing, and education. These measures could help to avoid the longer-term isolation and exclusion of women migrant workers.

Recommendations

The following recommendations suggest that there is much that can be done to further the integration of women migrants in work and in the community. In particular, they highlight the importance of understanding that the feminisation of migration needs to be complemented with effective policies and programmes that are gender sensitive and gender specific. For example, childcare provision is particularly important to women migrants and to their integration. It can help to break down the isolation faced by some women migrants as well as providing important support for women who often do not have extended families.

Gender-based analysis is important to identify specific gender needs and the gender implications of proposed policies. The objective should be to ensure that there are equitable outcomes from this analysis. For example, all immigration policies and programmes should ensure that visibility and systems of protection are put in place for the most vulnerable groups of women migrants, such as domestic workers, women who are victims of trafficking, undocumented women, and refugees. This gender-based analysis should apply to all agencies that provide services to the public, including health, education, training, housing, and social welfare.

These recommendations should be implemented in line with the provisions set out in the National Action Plan Against Racism, the forthcoming National Women's Strategy and the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. In *Towards 2016*, it is proposed that a new framework on integration policy will be developed in the form of a comprehensive strategy for all legally resident migrants.

Recommendation one: Improve the legal status of women migrant workers so that they can have autonomous and independent status

- a) Women migrants should be given an autonomous legal status that promotes their integration and rights. This should encompass 'rights based' and best practice approaches, and should enable all migrants, including women working in lesser skilled sectors, to avail of opportunities to apply for long-term and permanent residency.
- b) Rights to family reunification for all migrants should be embedded in forthcoming immigration legislation on the basis that all migrants have a right to family life. Some of the barriers to the issuing of visitors visas should be removed and the timescale extended, particularly for women who need parental support at critical times around childbirth and childcare. More consideration of cultural and family norms should be given to family reunification and consideration should also be given to the rights of same-sex couples to family reunification.

- c) Future immigration legislation should be assessed for its compatibility with the promotion of the integration of migrants, including the specific issues faced by women migrants.
- d) Victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation or labour exploitation should be provided with greater protection. Trafficked women should be provided with the opportunity to regularise their status and to have access to services and support. The Government should fully implement the provisions of the Palermo Convention and the European Convention on trafficking into forthcoming legislation on trafficking.
- e) Legislative and/or administrative procedures should be transparent and provide opportunities for migrants who have become undocumented to regularise their immigration status. This is particularly important for workers who have become undocumented for reasons outside of their control, such as the non-renewal of an employment permit, loss of job or other factors.
- f) Victims of domestic abuses should be deemed to be habitually resident under the Habitual Residence Condition and should be afforded autonomous legal status.

Recommendation two: Introduce a gender perspective in all migration and integration policies so that the specific issues faced by women migrants can be highlighted

- a) Equality should underpin policy development in all areas of migration and integration. A gender-sensitive approach should inform the development of immigration and integration policies. Particular attention needs to be given to the barriers to integration resulting from current immigration policies, particularly as they affect women's access to permanent and independent status and family reunification.
- b) A systematic approach to incorporate a gender perspective and a system for gender-proofing legislation, policy and practices concerning migrant workers should be implemented to highlight the differential impact of policies and experiences of women migrant workers as recommended by the National Women's Strategy and advocated by the National Women Council of Ireland and the European Commission. This could be modelled on the Canadian gender-based analysis approach to migration policy, which led to the mainstreaming of the assessment of gender-specific impacts at every step of policy development and implementation.
- c) Measures to support the integration of women migrant workers will have long-term benefits. There should be a comprehensive strategy for the

integration of women migrant workers in line with the framework for the integration of migrants outlined in the National Action Plan Against Racism and in the light of the creation of the new office and Ministry established to progress an integration strategy. It is essential that the strategy be gender proofed for its impact on women migrants, with recognition that women migrants may require additional targeted measures in the light of gender-specific migration experiences, women's social isolation and marginalisation.

- d) The newly created Office of the Minister of Integration will be important in ensuring that relevant Government departments and agencies coordinate and develop targeted and mainstream actions that help to integrate women into the workplace and community life. It will be important that a specific gender focus is given to this work and that particular attention is given to gender-sensitive policy developments. Best practices from other countries should inform policy making in Ireland.
- e) The proposed Government Taskforce on Integration should have a specific focus on gender. There should be an equal gender balance on the taskforce, with representation from women migrants, and studies should be commissioned to highlight the specific barriers women face in the integration process.
- f) In addition, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations, trade unions and human rights organisations have a key role to play in the empowerment and integration of women migrants. This is important to addressing social, economic and legal vulnerabilities, and ensuring that women migrants have a voice in decision-making so that they are active in shaping and making policy.
- g) Migrant-led organisations and community-based organisations play a key role in highlighting the voice and support needs of women migrants, particularly those that are most marginalised and isolated. It is vitally important that these organisations are effectively resourced by the Government to empower and support women migrants.

Recommendation three: Improve the accessibility of services for women migrants

- a) Service providers should be supported in their work, through training and resources, to accommodate cultural diversity and gender equality in service provision.
- b) A key role is needed in highlighting the specific needs and rights of women migrant workers in relation to accessing services such as accommodation; childcare and children's services; healthcare, including crisis pregnancy

and maternity services; domestic violence and appropriate mental health supports; housing; education and training; and other relevant services.

- c) This means ensuring that equality-proofing mechanisms are introduced in health, education, housing and other areas of public service provision, and that they integrate a gender and race perspective. In this way, the specific impacts of policy and service provision on socially isolated, marginalised and vulnerable women migrants are addressed.
- d) Additional resources need to be put in place for programmes and resources to support women migrants, particularly those that are the most vulnerable and marginalised, including the provision of English language classes, the funding and establishment of women migrants' networks and organisations, mentoring programmes, and training and retraining programmes.
- e) Government-funded programmes are needed to reduce the social isolation faced by women migrant workers and to provide them with access to vocational training. In some cases, specific groups of women migrant workers may need to be supported through special programmes, for example, through effective training and skills pathways and in ensuring that women migrants can access employment that properly recognises and values their skills, qualifications, and experience.
- f) Key to integration is the development of programmes for language learning, the recognition of qualifications, mentoring, and cultural mediation programmes.

Recommendation four: Enhance the gender sensitivity of staff and agencies working with women migrants

- a) Programmes of in-service training in equality, anti-racism and cultural diversity should be made available for all staff providing front-line services, as well as leaders and managers of organisations that come into contact with migrants. This will be important to improve the integration of women migrants at both the strategic and front-line service delivery levels of organisations. These issues should also be integrated into all induction and mainstream training programmes for service providers.
- b) Ensure that staff who are dealing directly with women migrants are trained to be gender sensitive and culturally competent. This means increasing the range and scope of training for front-line staff and Government departments dealing directly with women migrant workers, for example in immigration, training, social welfare, and other services. This includes training for immigration staff who need to be sensitised to the needs of women migrant workers and particularly to develop awareness of the needs of women who are trafficked into the country, as well as women who are seeking asylum from gender-based violence. This could be achieved through training and

guidelines highlighting the specific issues that women are likely to face when entering the country.

- c) In healthcare provision, there is a need for a broad-ranging approach to ensure that staff on the front line of service provision are aware of different cultural traditions in health and specific issues women face, for example in the areas of child health, mental health or pregnancy. Fully implementing the Intercultural Strategy in Health and an investment in the training of staff will be important to this.

Recommendation five: Enhance the availability and timeliness of all data and ensure that data is disaggregated by gender

- a) Data in all areas of migration, settlement, work and integration is inadequate. There is a need for comprehensive data on all aspects of migration to be compiled and made publicly available. This should be used to inform evidence-based policy on immigration and integration and for the planning of services. There is a need to ensure that all data is disaggregated by gender.
- b) A key finding of this research is the need for an improved understanding of gendered migrations, and the role and value of female labour, to provide more evidence-based policies and for monitoring migration flows. For example, current immigration data is not longitudinal and tells us little about immigration flows over time. Data also needs to recognise the diversity of women migrants' immigration, their labour market position, family reunification, language skills, qualification levels, and different needs and entitlements.
- c) More detailed data would help to provide more targeted provision and policies. Data on employment and work permits, working visas, PPS numbers, and other data concerning women migrant workers such as working conditions, age, and marital status, should be published and disaggregated by gender.
- d) The Central Statistics Office (CSO) should use the model of disaggregated data that has been developed by Norwegian Statistics, which are broken down by gender in areas such as working patterns, age, marital status and immigration status. It is recommended that the CSO develop a specific project on gender data in areas such as immigration status, family reunification, sectors where women work, earnings and the gender pay gap, education and training, and access to childcare amongst other areas. This data should be collated and presented in a published report.

- e) There should also be regular targeted Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) publications around the various aspects of migration and with a specific focus on gender.

Recommendation six: Improve access to rights and entitlements

- a) Measures should be put in place to ensure that women migrants are fully aware of their rights and entitlements, particularly in areas such as childcare, maternity rights, access to health and children's services, services to support women experiencing domestic violence, and so on. Regular information campaigns should be put in place and targeted at all migrants, with strategies to identify ways of informing and reaching socially isolated women migrants, and courses of redress in the event of discrimination, harassment or exploitation.
- b) It is important that community-based organisations and NGOs working with women migrants should be effectively resourced so that women migrants are fully aware of their rights and entitlements, particularly in areas such as family reunification, labour rights, childcare, maternity rights, access to health and children's services, services to support women experiencing domestic violence, and so on.
- c) A comprehensive information guide on rights and entitlements, with gender-specific information, should be provided to all new migrant workers when they arrive in Ireland and included with contracts of employment.
- d) An information campaign should be targeted at all migrants, with specific information and outreach for socially isolated women migrants, and information about courses of redress in the event of discrimination, harassment or exploitation.
- e) A strategy should be drawn up to provide a broad-based campaign using the media and working with migrant-led organisations. This should include a funding line for service provision and outreach services for groups working with migrants in general and women migrants in particular.

Recommendation seven: Improve the working conditions of women migrants, the value of their work and skills, and the enforcement of labour rights

- a) The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment should provide greater resources for the enforcement of legal minimum standards of pay and employment conditions for women migrant workers, and enhance the role and activities of the Labour Inspectorate in feminised sectors of the economy. In particular, more information about minimum wages and

industrial rates of pay should be provided to all migrant workers. Particular efforts should be made to ensure that invisible and vulnerable workers, such as domestic workers, are informed of rates of pay and the existing Code of Practice on the employment of domestic workers.

- b) The Equality Authority should be further resourced to improve access to redress for women migrant workers in the event of gender or race discrimination. More support could be given to informing and identifying potentially exploitative and discriminatory work situations, and to providing greater support in accessing equality legislation.
- c) The measures proposed in *Towards 2016* to address the exploitation of migrant and other vulnerable workers need to take full account of the requirements of the most socially isolated and vulnerable women workers.
- d) The Employment Rights Agency needs to ensure that attention is given to the most invisible and vulnerable women migrants. Particular awareness needs to be raised about the difficulties women migrants face in complaining against employers and working with Government agencies.
- e) The social partners should examine ways in which the provisions and principles of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families and the International Labour Organisation's (ILO's) Multilateral Framework for a rights-based approach to labour migration could be established in policy and practice as minimum standards concerning recruitment, employment and working conditions. In particular, specific attention should be given to provisions concerning the multiple disadvantages and discrimination faced by migrant workers on the basis of gender, race and migrant status. It is very important that women migrants have access to and the right to take up entitlements and services. In particular, this means ensuring that employment and social rights are made available to women in the most vulnerable situations so that they can claim their rights and entitlements.
- f) It will be particularly important that labour legislation be underpinned by relevant international conventions (UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, ILO Multilateral Framework for a rights-based approach to labour migration, ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), and Migration for Employment Recommendation (Revised), 1949 (No. 86); and ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), and Migrant Workers Recommendation, 1975 (No. 151)).
- g) There should be an examination of effective ways of accrediting prior learning and experience and the gradual and systematic recognition of qualifications in sectors into which women migrant workers are recruited.

Recommendation eight: Improve the rights of specific groups of vulnerable migrant workers, including women who have been victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, women working in invisible sectors such as domestic work, women refugees, women dependent spouses and undocumented women

- a) Women who have been victims of trafficking are often at risk and are largely invisible. Many end up in undocumented employment and/or experience exploitation in Ireland. Organisations working with victims of trafficking should be resourced to consider and learn from good practices in other countries.
- b) Legislation should be introduced that enables Ireland to deal with trafficking in best practice ways, particularly in providing victims with proper and effective forms of protection, security and support, and temporary leave to remain.
- c) Women with refugee status working in Ireland may have a range of support needs where there have been experiences of sexual crimes, violence and rape. It will be important for health and other services to respond to their needs in gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate ways.
- d) Women who are undocumented and working in invisible working situations, such as domestic work or entertainment, should be given the opportunity to have their status regularised. Regardless of their status, they should be given full access to health and other services that can help to support their integration.
- e) Women experiencing domestic violence should be given temporary leave to remain in the state and have full access to social welfare and other benefits for their children. Specific targeted support and outreach programmes should be funded for voluntary organisations working with women migrant workers, particularly women who are socially isolated and at risk of abuse or violence.
- f) Dependent spouses of migrant workers should be allowed to access employment, training, language classes and other services.
- g) Additional resources need to be put in place for organisations working with women migrants, including women migrants' networks, to provide outreach and support work and culturally appropriate domestic violence services.
- h) More attention needs to be given to the vulnerabilities faced by some women who are unable to access services because of cultural traditions, language and availability of services. There are particular problems

associated with the Habitual Residency Condition (HRC) and women experiencing domestic violence. Women experiencing domestic violence should be given temporary leave to remain in the State and be deemed HRC compliant.

Recommendation nine: Develop partnerships between unions and migrant-led organisations to ensure that women migrants have improved access to economic and social rights

- a) Building on good practices developed in some trade unions and migrant community organisations, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and migrant organisations should carry out more work in partnership with unions and migrant-led organisations in areas such as information, identifying areas of exploitative working conditions and in supporting the integration of women migrant workers.

Recommendation ten: Model good employment practices to improve the employment conditions for women migrant workers

- a) Employers, unions and the Equality Authority have a key role to play in continuing to model good employment practices and raising awareness about the business benefits of an approach rooted in equality and diversity, in line with the National Action Plan Against Racism. There should be specific and targeted information for women migrant workers as well as support for employers in progressing good practices in the employment of women migrant workers.
- b) The social partners should produce and disseminate a good-practice guide for employers of women migrant workers. This should also include guidance on what works and how to go about providing workplaces of choice. This could be informed by and developed with an interest group of employers engaged in good employment practices.

Section one: Introduction

In the past decade the internationalisation of migration has had a profound social and economic impact on Ireland. Women migrants, in particular, are making a significant and positive contribution to Ireland, economically, socially, and culturally. Their experiences are diverse and varied. On the one hand, many women migrants experience discrimination. Their lives are structured around a combination of racial and gender inequalities. They are also over-represented in the most marginalised and lowest paid jobs. On the other hand, migration has led to positive experiences for women. It has the potential to reshape gender relations and inequalities, and enables many women to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Consequently, the significant growth of women's migration globally, and specifically within the enlarged European Union (EU), has helped to forge new gender relationships and the empowerment of women.

The growth of the numbers of women migrants in Ireland is part of the global trend of the feminisation of migration. At face value, migration does not appear to be gender specific. However, in practice, women experience different patterns of immigration, family responsibilities, and access to economic and social resources (Kofman, Raghuram and Merefiefield, 2005; Pillinger 2006). Research on migration in Europe has shown that migration policy regimes operate within a breadwinner model, with assumptions about the dependence of women on men (Ackers, 1998). However, the past decade has seen significant shifts in migration patterns. With the increasing feminisation of migration, there has been a growth of women's autonomous migration.

Creating the conditions for gender equality for women migrants is an important subject of this paper. It addresses a number of important questions concerning the impact of the feminisation of migration on the types of gender-sensitive policy frameworks that are required to ensure that women migrants are not disadvantaged and their capacity, skills and contributions can be properly valued. It examines the types of gender-equality measures that are necessary for migration and integration policies to effectively address gender-based inequalities, including gender segmentation and discrimination in the labour market. Whilst migration policy often assumes that migration is a temporary phenomenon, the reality is that labour migration, particularly for high-skilled workers, will continue in coming years and there is evidence to suggest that many migrant workers are seeking residency status and wish to stay (Ruhs, 2003).

The global feminisation of migration

Women account for nearly half of the 195 million international migrants in the world today (UNFPA 2006). Globally women remit at a least half of the US\$233 billion sent through official channels in 2005 (International Organization for

Migration (IOM) 2005). The internationalisation and feminisation of migration means that women make up a growing share of those migrating to work, and they are moving in new ways and in larger numbers (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2006; Piper 2005; Yeates 2005; Pillinger 2006). Women no longer just migrate for marriage or family reunification. Many women migrate alone or with other women, and a sizeable number are primary breadwinners and are parenting transnationally. According to the Migration Policy Institute (2003), women are now the main source of family support, rather than dependents migrating with husbands. Many of these migrating women work in low-paid, domestic positions and are often viewed as dependents. As a result, Government policies often neglect to see women's migration as independent and view women as dependents of principle (male) migrants. Government also tends to see all migrating women as members of the lower classes...of the sending countries and translate their class bias by paying less attention to their issues (Migration Policy Institute 2003: 3).

Women's migration is often risky and open to exploitation. Poor working conditions, trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour, are all outcomes of the growing demand for care and domestic workers, and a global market that has seen a massive increase in demand for entertainment, hospitality and sex industry workers (UNFPA 2006; United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) 2006). Across Europe, women predominate in migratory flows from Eastern Europe and the Philippines, and make up at least 40 per cent of migrant labour from other countries such as Russia, Ukraine, Nigeria and Southern Africa. (Piper 2005, Kofman 2000).

Focus of this paper

The paper discusses the feminisation of international migration within the Irish context. As well as addressing the experiences of women migrants in Ireland, this paper also discusses the inter-connections between migration policy and women's migration patterns and experiences in countries of origin and destination. The paper captures the broad experiences of women migrant workers in Ireland today, including those that are documented and undocumented, those that are working, and those unable to work. Its scope will include women migrant workers in the formal and informal labour markets, skilled and unskilled, undocumented women, female spouses of work permit holders, women asylum seekers, refugee women who have the right to remain, and women who have experienced trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The paper reviews international and Irish literature and draws on the experiences of women migrants. Interviews carried out with women migrants as part of this research highlight the diversity of migration experiences.¹ Rather

¹ Thirty-two interviews were carried out by the author as part of a research study commissioned for the Equality Authority in 2006, and a further ten interviews were carried out in 2007 in order to

than being seen as victims or as dependents, women who have migrated voluntarily are often active and autonomous. However, as this paper shows, there are underlying problems and issues that hinder the potential contribution that women make because of the experience of discrimination, the undervaluing of women migrants' work and contribution, and because of restricted migration policy frameworks. Key issues are raised about the 'value' associated with women migrants' labour and the paper makes suggestions about how women's potential can be more effectively utilised. The paper also addresses some of the problems associated with international migration, including forced migration, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and the restrictions placed on women asylum seekers. It highlights the need for a gender perspective in policies concerning settlement and integration as well as migration policies.

The paper concludes by highlighting the need for gender-sensitive policy frameworks. This includes a discussion on minimum acceptable standards and rights-based approaches to migration, gender equality and migration, and the minimum service, employment, ethical, rights and democratic standards necessary for a new approach to a gender-sensitive migration framework. For example, I argue in this paper that this should be informed by a better understanding of the socio-economic position of women migrants, their access to or difficulties in accessing social and economic rights, and the extent to which policy programmes and legislation have a differential impact on women and men. This might include an assessment of the barriers faced by women migrants in their integration and in accessing services, and the specific issues they face in a highly segmented labour market.

The report looks at how political, social, economic and labour rights for women are realisable in practice. It also examines what gender-sensitive policy frameworks are needed to address some of the negative stereotypes of women migrants and to shift perceptions regarding their positive economic and social contributions to Irish society. Recommendations are addressed to policy makers, Government agencies, employers, trade unions, NGOs, and community-based organisations.

Methodology

This report draws on international and national data and research on the feminisation of migration. In order to exemplify the specific experiences and diversity of migration and integration experiences, the research for the study included 42 qualitative semi-structured interviews with women migrants living in Ireland. The interviews covered women from 21 different countries of origin (including Bangladesh, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Kosova, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Romania,

widen the focus of the study. Thanks are given to the Equality Authority for permission to use the data collected in the previous study (Pillinger 2006).

Russia, Sierra Leon, Slovenia, South Africa, Ukraine and Zimbabwe). The interviews were carried out in rural and urban areas across the country. They included high skilled and lower skilled women who were working, women who were not working or who were dependent spouses, women who were undocumented or who had an irregular migration status, and women who had been through the asylum process. Some women had children and families living with them, whilst others were parenting from a distance or had migrated independently. The majority of the women that were interviewed were working in highly feminised sectors, including cleaning, domestic work, nursing and care work. Interviews were also held with skilled women workers who were working as architects, engineers and in information technology, as well as women who were self-employed and working in community-based and migrant-led organisations. The women interviewed came from countries where poverty and lack of employment opportunities were commonplace and they migrated in order to make better lives for themselves and their families; in several cases women migrated to escape violence or persecution.

Section two: Data on women migrant workers

Introduction

The number of women migrants has been increasing since the 1960s. They account for 48.8 per cent of migrants in Ireland (Barrett, Bergin and Duffy 2005; Pillinger 2006). Globally, women migrants make up nearly 51 per cent of all migrants in developed countries and 46 per cent of migrants in developing countries (ILO 2003:9). The global trend towards women's economic participation in the labour market is mirrored by a growth of women's participation in migration for work. The crucial change that has taken place is that significant numbers of women are migrating alone and as the main income earners. However, the nature of women's employment in low paid and invisible forms of work (such as domestic work or prostitution) means that women migrants are often absent from official data sources and are much more vulnerable to working in undocumented work (Piper 2005; Kofman 2004). This means that it is very difficult to provide accurate gender disaggregated data.

Data from the 2006 Census (CSO 2007) show that there are approximately 400,000 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland (9.4 per cent of the population). The majority are from the EU (85 per cent), and around 30 per cent of EU migrants are from the EU's new member states. Around 5 per cent are refugees or seeking asylum. Of those migrating to Ireland, 42 per cent were returning Irish emigrants. The number of work permits has been decreasing in recent years (from 47,707 in 2003 to 27,136 in 2005 and 11,792 in 2007 (new issues and renewals). There are also 25,000 registered students (who have some rights to work while studying).

Gender disaggregated data

Although the availability of gender disaggregated data in Ireland has improved in recent years, significant gaps still remain in areas such as data on gender and education achievement, work experience, entry, settlement, integration, immigration status, family reunification, dependent spouse status, family composition, work status by gender, and migration status. Because women migrants are more likely to work in unskilled and irregular employment, their numbers will be under-estimated in official data sources. There is also an absence of data that reveals women's and men's differential roles, including access to resources and services. Similarly, there is no system for a gender-based analysis of immigration, integration, and settlement. Statistics Norway has overcome some of these data problems by developing a specific report on all groups of migrants in areas such as immigration, education, labour market, education, and income (Hauge Byberg 2002).

A further problem is that deficiencies in Irish migration data are compounded by the lack of coordination and synchronisation between the different agencies that

collect data on migrants, such as the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), the Department of Social and Family Affairs (regarding the issuing of PPS numbers), Department of Education and Science, and the Revenue Commissioners, amongst others.

Refugees and asylum seekers

There is limited information and data about women refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland, and there is no comprehensive information on the gender balance of asylum seekers and refugees. The 2006 Annual Report of the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner shows that 33.4 per cent of applications for refugee status were made by women in 2006. However, this data is not broken down by country of origin and the outcome of applications. This more detailed data is only available in France and Greece where special projects on gender mainstreaming have been established through the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and in Norway where there has been a detailed breakdown of applications for asylum and the outcomes (Hauge Byberg 2002). There is less known about the extent to which women asylum seekers are less or more successful than men in being recognised as Geneva Convention refugees or if they are able to gain the status of humanitarian leave to remain. In Ireland in 2006, there were 4,314 applications for refugee status, compared to 11,630 in 2002 (UNHCR 2006a, ORAC 2006); 483 applications for Family Reunification were received in 2006 and, as with the data for applications for refugee status, ORAC does not publish the outcome of cases (ORAC 2006). Although UNHCR does not break this data down by gender, it does highlight lower numbers of women, compared to men, seeking asylum and gaining refugee status in Ireland (2006b).

At the end of 2006, 4,861 people seeking asylum were being accommodated in direct provision while a further 489 people were accommodated in self-catering facilities. There is a young age profile of people in direct provision, with 2,559 of the total of 5,372 people accommodated via this system in 2006 being below 25 years, 1,436 of whom were under 12 years of age (HSE 2007b).

Working women migrants

Gender disaggregated data is available for work permit holders, but not for data on work authorisation and working visas, and on students who are working. The *Employment Permits Act, 2006*, which was enacted on January 24th 2007, introduced green cards for people earning €60,000 per annum and those earning €30,000-60,000 for migrants working in specific sectors; employment permits for migrants earning less than €30,000; re-introduced the intra-company transfer scheme; and the Graduate Scheme for international students interested in joining the Irish labour market on the completion of their course. Since 1996 there has been an upward trend in the number of migrants to Ireland, peaking in 2002 to a net migration of around 32,000. The 2006 Census shows that the total population of non-Irish nationals increased by 409,000,

although the share of female migration fell from 50 per cent in 2003 to 43 per cent in 2006 (CSO 2007). Between 2004 and 2006 women represented 36 per cent of migration from the new member states and 43 per cent of migration from the UK. Women work permit holders have an average age of 30 years. Table one shows that, since 2000, women have represented around 40 per cent of overall work permit holders. The issuing of work permits reached a peak in 2003 with 15,454 permits issued to women and 31,489 to men. In 2004, of the 33,209 work permits issued, 10,009 were issued to women and 23,200 to men. The number of work permits issued has continued to decline in light of policy changes that favour a shift towards skilled immigration and migration from the new EU member states.

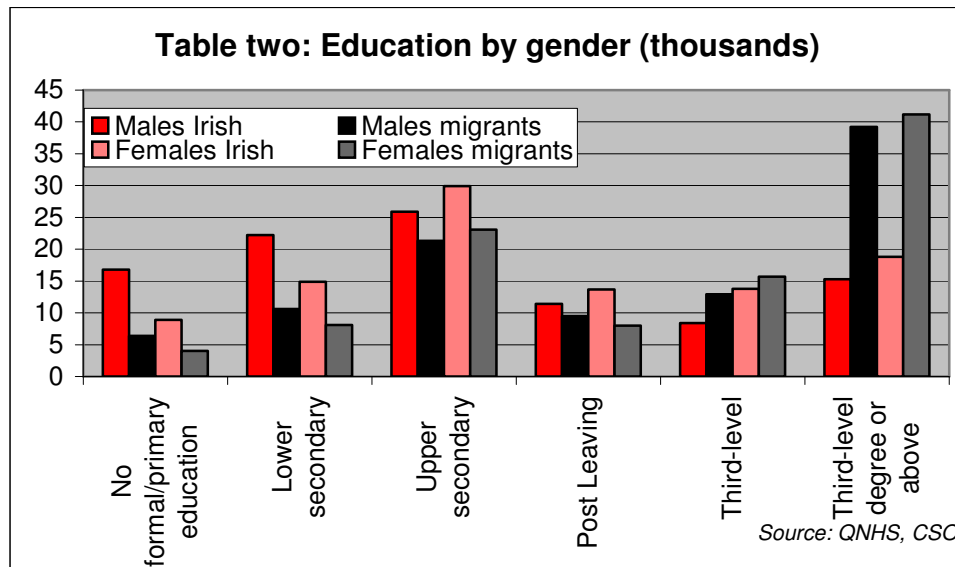


In 2005, the majority of women work permit holders were from the Philippines, South Africa, Ukraine, USA, Russia, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, India, Malaysia, and Moldova. Work permit holders tend to work longer hours and earn lower pay than Irish citizens working in similar jobs, and work in lower skilled work (Ruhs 2003, Pillinger 2006). Work permit holders from OECD countries tend to work in higher skilled occupations, whereas those from the new EU member states are concentrated in unskilled occupations, largely in agriculture, and in some semi-skilled occupations. This analysis shows a gender difference in those workers coming from OECD countries (who tend to be men working in more highly skilled occupations) and those coming from countries outside the EU (where there is an increasing share of women). In 2004, there were 346 new migrant workers to Ireland on work authorisation visas and 1,098 on working visas. These cover skilled and professional work in areas such as science, technology, construction and nursing. This data is not broken down by gender. Of these, the majority were issued to registered nurses (806 on working visas and 74 on work authorisations).

There is a higher participation of women migrants in the labour market compared to Irish women (Barrett, Bergin and Duffy 2005). Women migrants

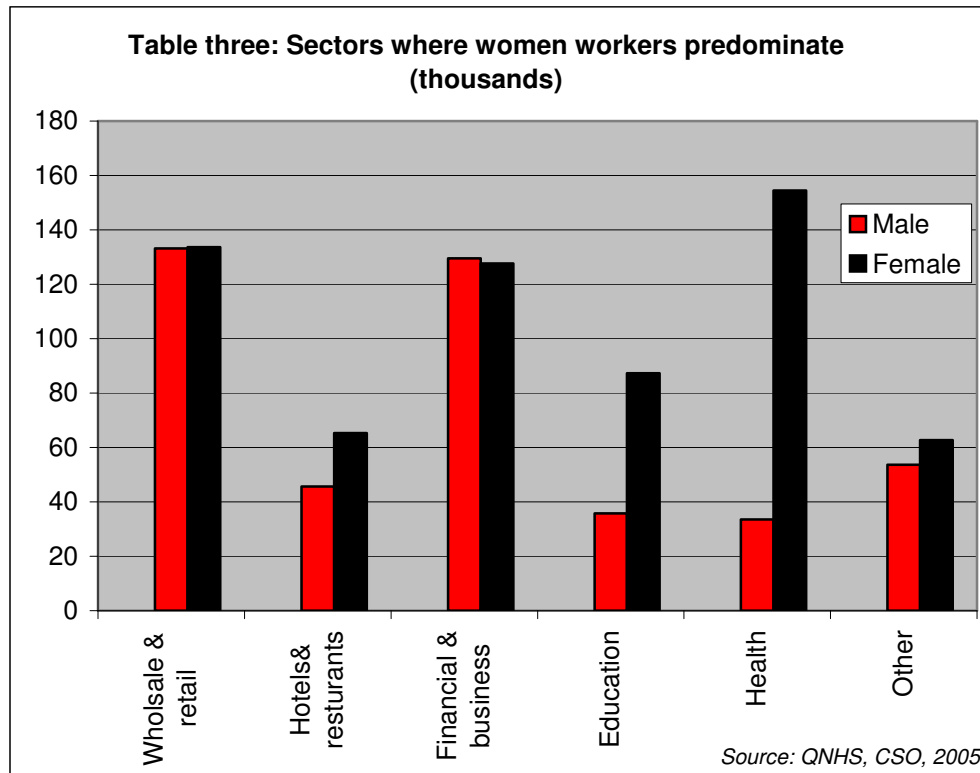
also represent a larger proportion of full-time workers than Irish women (39.8 per cent of women migrants in full-time employment, compared to 31.1 per cent of Irish women) and are a lower proportion of part-time workers and those economically inactive. One of the explanations for this is that employment permits are only issued for full-time employment. Women migrants have higher educational profiles than Irish women (41.2 per cent of women migrants hold third-level degrees or over, compared to 18.8 per cent of Irish women) (QNHS, Q4, 2004).

Barrett and Duffy (2007) found that, even when account is taken for educational levels, migrants, and particularly women migrants, were under-represented in higher-level occupations. It is important to note that many of these women are also over-represented in lower skilled jobs, compared to Irish women and Irish men, and are not employed in jobs that match their experience and qualifications (Barrett, Bergen and Duffy, 2005).



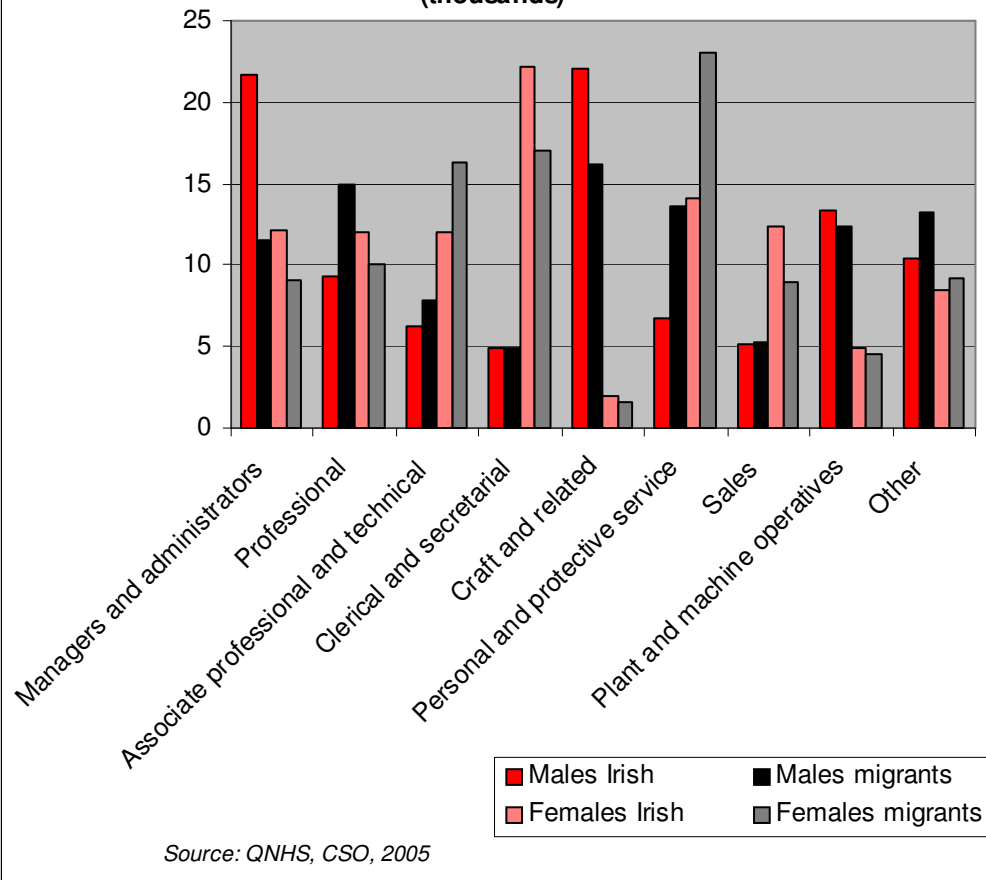
An assessment of work permit data between 2000 and 2005 (Pillinger 2006) shows that women work permit holders predominated in feminised sectors such as catering, domestic work, care, and health sectors. In nursing, of the 1,318 non-Irish national nurses that were registered by An Bord Altranais in 2004, 1,178 were women. There is also a gender difference between those workers coming from the OECD countries (who tend to be men working in more highly skilled occupations) and those coming from countries outside the EU (where there is an increasing share of women).

Table three shows the jobs where women are typically represented.



However, there are differences between Irish women and women migrants. The data also show that women migrants were over-represented in lower skilled jobs compared to Irish women and Irish men. Table four (overleaf) shows the occupational distribution of women and men who are Irish and those who are migrants. Women migrants are over-represented in associate professional and technical services (16.3 per cent), which include nursing and other professional care work; in clerical and secretarial work (17 per cent); and in personal and protective services (23.1 per cent), which include cleaning and other low paid care work. In contrast, women migrants are under-represented in managerial and administrative jobs.

**Table four: Occupational distribution of women and men
(thousands)**



Section three: The diversity of the feminisation of migration and its impact on Ireland

Introduction

The diversity of migration experiences and patterns of migration means that women migrant workers are not a heterogeneous group. Whilst there is a wide diversity of experiences, patterns of migration and labour market positions, the majority of women carry out traditionally female work and work in areas that are highly segregated and feminised. International data shows that men are over-represented in skilled occupations whilst women are over-represented in low skill occupations (Migration Policy Institute 2003, UNFPA / IOM 2006).

The diversity of women's migration experiences means that gender and migration can be looked at in three ways: migration as positive and empowering for women; migration as exploitation and discrimination; and a gender analysis of the social and structural factors impacting on migration.

Migration as positive and empowering for women

Migration can be a positive and empowering experience for women. It has resulted in new opportunities for women to shape and improve their lives, keep their families out of poverty, escape violent and oppressive social and political situations, and gain autonomy and independence in their lives. There have been many positive migration experiences and there are a significant number of women migrants working in skilled jobs and actively contributing to their communities. They are shaping new gender perspectives and are important agents of change, mapping out new roles and relationships. In this study, it is shown that, despite some of the negative experiences, many women migrants highlight the positive aspects of migration in providing access to resources, as well as giving women greater independence and self-esteem.

'In societies where women's power to move autonomously is limited, the act of migration is in itself empowering. It stimulates change in women migrants themselves, and in the societies which send and receive them. In the process, women's migration can become a force for removing gender imbalances and inequities, and for changing underlying conditions so that new imbalances and inequities do not arise. Women's voluntary migration is a powerful force for positive change in countries of origin and of destination.' (UNFPA / IOM 2006)

Migration can also impact on gender relations between women and men, particularly where women migrate from countries where there are restrictions on autonomy and rights. Whilst many women migrants experience difficulties integrating into work and life in Ireland, it is important to highlight the empowerment process that can result from migration. This positive identity for

women migrants also recognises the huge social and economic risks women migrants take, and their significant economic and social contribution to Ireland.

The positive contribution of women migrants

Several of the women interviewed for this study spoke about the positive contribution that they felt women migrants make to the Irish labour market and to society. Here are some comments from three of the women interviewed.

According to **Nusha**: 'Ireland changed completely in its exterior; I think that the clothes we wear, the coffee we drink, the meals that we eat, the quality of our life, is very much part of the presence of women migrants...they determine the needs of the market, they bring their purses with them, they want to achieve some very high standards in Ireland...women bring this. These are strong women. Women migrants take big risks. You do this because you are doing this for the better, to broaden your knowledge of the world and give your children new opportunities...it's an amazing experience...I don't know if women who migrate are stronger or whether they become stronger from migrating...but Ireland is a fantastic place to migrate to with the NGO experience and feminist experience...Ireland gives so much more opportunity to participate compared to my country. When I represent Ireland, I feel very proud.'

Marija believes that women migrants bring an added value to Ireland. As an architect she believes that her experience and knowledge have been beneficial: 'We are definitely contributing big time because the Irish are mostly conservative people. They try to keep what they have in architecture and you can't reproduce what you had there as the technology of the building goes forward...the changes we are making are palpable regarding the new architectural landscape, such as different constructions systems, more colour, we bring in more colour.'

As a woman architect, she believes that she also contributes as she is good at her job and in communicating with contractors. Coming from a country with a long history of gender equality has also benefited Ireland. 'Between men and women there are natural differences that come up...I'm good at openly expressing and taking communications...and I have found that men don't judge you for being female. I have had no bad experiences. And I come from a country with a long tradition of equality...men and women have been around for a long time and it is much better than here. Socialism helped a lot to get gender equality...it empowered me and gave me confidence...that's why I don't feel any difference to men.'

Marah has had a good experience of working in Ireland and feels that she is making a positive contribution to Irish society. As a Romanian woman she has worked with a community organisation: 'Personally, I really felt I had a positive influence as soon as I started volunteering in the organisation. I felt that I was helping people as a Romanian speaker. I have felt very positive. I have felt

more empowered. I have got to know my rights and am more aware. As well, for my family, they can see I am doing something that I am happy with. I now feel that I am using my skills and qualifications...since I started working here I have loved going to work. I like the life here, people are very nice and polite. I have integrated well. Being here has made me realise that I intend to stay. I want to go on to study to become a lawyer and have already taken some courses in law as a start. Working in this organisation has helped me to know that I am a valued person.'

Migration as exploitation and discrimination

The feminisation of the labour market, seen in the general increase in participation rates of women, has resulted in a labour market that continues to be characterised by occupational segregation of women into lower paid and lower valued jobs. In the past decade in Ireland there has been a range of political and policy responses that have shaped awareness about gender equality, including equality legislation that recognises the intersection of gender with other grounds of discrimination. However, women migrants face additional problems.

Similarly, economic and social relations are deeply divided by gender and the experiences of women migrants in Ireland continue to be structured around gender, ethnic and race divisions. As a result, many women migrants are vulnerable to exploitation, deskilling, isolation, and to health and other social risks. Because many women migrant workers work in areas of the labour market where they are invisible, they are more at risk of gender-specific forms of discrimination, abuse and exploitation.

This study shows that women's experiences in the workplace include negative experiences (such as discrimination, undervaluing of skills and experience, exploitation in terms of low pay or poor conditions of employment, harassment, social isolation, loneliness and stress), as well as positive experiences (which include opportunities for career development and progression, better support for families at home, autonomy, and financial independence).

There is also a diversity of experiences of integration in Ireland. This is closely connected to skill level. Women working in professional and skilled jobs tend to speak English and have access to information through their employers or professional associations. In contrast, low paid and low skilled migrant workers often experience difficulties settling into life in Ireland. On arrival, many have limited information about housing, health, childcare, maternity, and other services. Key problems exist for the integration of female spouses of migrant workers who are disallowed from working and the limited entitlements to social welfare, health, and other services experienced by many work permit holders.

Social and structural factors influencing migration

Through a gender analysis of migration, it is possible to identify the social and structural factors that influence women's and men's access to rights, resources and services associated with the different channels of entry, legal status and integration.

Because gender shapes access to power and social relationships, it has to be integral to the study of the migration process and a key element of migration theory and policy. On this basis, it is necessary for gender to be incorporated into migration theory, for example, through an understanding that economic decisions are not gender neutral, by showing that gender shapes access to rights and entitlements in receiving countries, and that migration can alter status and gender relations of women and men (Boyd and Grieco 2003; Piper 2005). This awareness is increasingly shaping the work of global organisations working in the area of international migration. Through a gender-sensitive approach to the migration process, this is leading to a growing awareness that migration is informed by specific gendered relationships (UNFPA 2006, UNRISD 2005).

Conceptualising women migrants' experiences in Ireland

The experiences of women migrants are conceptualised in four different contexts in this study.²

Shared issues with men migrant workers

Women migrants share a number of inequalities and experiences with men migrant workers. These are issues that are affected by their legal status and their position as migrants. Likewise, integrating into the community and into life in Ireland can also be affected by dependent status and/or responsibilities for children. In this study it was found that there are a number of issues that are common to women and men migrant workers, including racism in the workplace and in society generally, unethical and unequal working conditions and pay, and difficulties in accessing information and services. However, women may experience these difficulties disproportionately. The interviews carried out in this study show that women are often in more marginal situations than men in a labour market that is characterised by gender inequality. As a result, they often face greater barriers to integrating into the workplace.

Women migrant workers in a labour market characterised by inequality

The situation of women migrants has to be placed in the context of the existing gender inequalities seen in the segmented Irish labour market, which is typified

² This was a framework developed for the Equality Authority's research on women in Pillinger (2006).

by the persistence of gender inequalities and gender gaps in pay, conditions of employment, access to promotion and career development, and women in decision-making roles (CSO 2006, National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) 2004; Government of Ireland 2007). Women continue to experience vertical and horizontal occupational segregation and unequal pay. Women earn on average 15 per cent less than men in comparable jobs and there is a gender gap in the representation of women in senior and managerial positions. Women also experience a gender time gap, often working shorter hours and in part-time positions in order to combine work and family responsibilities (Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI) 2000, Gannon et al 2005). This can impact negatively on their career development and promotional prospects. Women's relatively lower wages has made them an attractive source of labour and many job opportunities for women migrant workers are in low skilled jobs that are generally considered 'suitable' for women. Women are also under-represented generally in decision-making positions and experience differential access to resources, services and social rights. Although women are participating in the labour market in increasing numbers and outperforming men in second- and third-level education, they continue to be under-represented in senior positions and in jobs deemed to be traditionally areas of male work. These societal changes have seen a move away from a male breadwinner model to a dual-earner model.

Specific experiences of women migrant workers

Women migrant workers have a range of experiences that are unique to their status. Because of gender stereotypes, women migrant workers are often viewed as dependents of male migrants, rather than women with financial independence. Globally, women migrate for the purposes of family reunification and, increasingly, to work in high skilled, low skilled and unregulated sectors of the economy in domestic work and the sex industry, and in sectors where there is a systematic under-valuing of their skills. The general under-valuing of women's skills is considered to be one of the main reasons for the persistence of the gender wage gap, which is thought to be substantially wider for women migrant workers (European Commission, 2005).

According to UNRSID, this means that:

'Discrimination against immigrants, combined with racial and gender inequalities, makes women migrants 'triple disadvantaged' and likely to be over-represented in marginal, unregulated and poorly paid jobs. At the same time, the experience of migration – whether by women on their own or jointly with men – has the potential to reconfigure gender relations and power inequalities. Opportunities emerge to improve lives and escape previously oppressive situations.' (UNRSID, 2005:15)

In particular, the interviews from this study show that some women who enter as migrant workers or as family members are located into poorly paid and

under-valued work. This is backed up by international and national data, which show that many women migrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation and deskilling (MRCI 2004, Pillinger 2006, Kofman et al 2003, Piper 2005, UNFPA 2006). In part, this is explained by the low value associated with domestic and caring work, the lack of social protection in casual employment, and so on. Many highly educated women carry out unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. They are deskilled when they migrate and the majority are represented in unregulated and low paid jobs. Women migrant workers experience double forms of discrimination (racial and gender).

The situation of women migrant workers has to be placed in the context of the existing feminisation of the Irish labour market and the persistence of gender inequalities, the gendered nature of the labour market, family relationships and women's migration flows. Migration patterns have traditionally been, and continue to be, highly gendered. For example, research on intra-European migration suggests that women's migration operates within a breadwinner model (Kofman et al 2000, Akers 1999), although there is growing evidence in more recent years of women migrating alone and parenting from a distance (Piper 2005, Pillinger 2006).

Evidence of gender-specific migration experiences has been particularly significant in the care and contract cleaning sectors, where there is evidence of a 'global care chain' (Van Eyck 2003; Anderson and Rogaly 2005), and in domestic work (MRCI 2004; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). In effect, this has resulted in a transfer of female labour from poorer to richer countries to fill the care deficit in work traditionally associated with women's roles as carers and homemakers. Much of this migration is associated with women's traditional roles of care, homemaking and sex (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003), in devalued, marginalised and flexible areas of production and services (Sassen, 2001), and in providing care for older people, children and disabled people in paid, unpaid, formal and informal capacities (Williams, 2003).

In the Irish context, the difficulties in finding affordable childcare and other supports for working mothers has seen the growth of domestic workers recruited in private households. In this area, there are problems of low pay and long working hours and, in some cases, physical and sexual abuse (MRCI 2004). At the same time, the ageing of the population and the demand for greater numbers of care workers to provide care for older people has increased the demand for home, community and hospital-based care provision, and a corresponding increase in private nursing homes.

Double burden of racism and sexism

The intersection of gender with nationality, race and ethnicity, as well as education, economic and social backgrounds and cultural capital, means that there is no one experience of migration. Women migrants have shared experiences of sexism and racism. This contributes to the double disadvantage

and discrimination and to how their identities, roles and situations are shaped by a range of inequalities. This intersection also helps in understanding the specific experiences of women migrant workers in Ireland, and how their identities, roles and experiences are shaped by a range of inequalities (Zappone, 2003). In turn, multiple discrimination has an impact on access to health, education, employment and residence status (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPD) 2006). As Slinckz shows:

'CEDAW notes that women migrants are faced with multiple discrimination in society at large and in their own communities. The intersection of gender with ethnic and religious factors negatively affects access to health, education, permanent residence status, work permit and employment.' (2004:10)

The ILO has reported a rise in specific forms of racial and ethnic discrimination, and in the double racism experienced by minority ethnic women where 'women tend to be at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy' (ILO 2003:4). This can be seen in the wider inequalities in pay and a wider gender pay gap experienced by women migrant workers. This persists throughout the occupational hierarchy whereby women migrant workers are either at the bottom of the pay scale or earn less than others with equivalent education and work experience. There is a particular connection between poverty and systematic discrimination in the workplace. This is closely connected to the coverage of unionisation and collective bargaining. These issues are addressed in the follow up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights in the ILO's global reports on discrimination (2003 and 2007).

A number of studies have shown that racism is a common experience of many black and minority ethnic people living in Ireland today (Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) 2004; National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) 2006; McGinnity et al 2006, Equality Authority 2006). There has been an increase in the number of cases brought before the Equality Tribunal (2006) under the Employment Equality Act. The 2005 *Annual Report* of the Equality Tribunal (2006) highlighted an increase in cases of discrimination brought before the tribunal under the race ground of the Employment Equality Acts (82 cases were brought before the Equality Tribunal, an increase of 61 per cent). Similar problems have been highlighted by NGOs working with migrant workers. A report by the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI 2006) examined the experiences of 89 migrant workers who made formal complaints about exploitation to the Labour Relations Commission and the Employment Appeals Tribunal. Migrant workers, in particular from the Philippines and the Ukraine, experienced significant levels of exploitation and had limited access to trade unions and legal support.

This study shows that the double discrimination experienced by minority ethnic women is also shaped by negative stereotypes, which affect their personal security and independence. These include negative and racialised stereotypes

of motherhood of black women and sexualised images of women migrants from Russia and the Baltic States.

The need for a gender analysis of migration

The absence of a gender-based analysis of migration policy in Ireland means that the specific migration experiences of women remain invisible. Migration poses many risks as well as opportunities; for this reason the opportunities and challenges of migration need to be viewed through a gender lens. A gender analysis of migration can help to inform policy makers and decision makers about the specific structuring of gender in both the labour market and society so that there can be appropriate responses to the social and economic dimensions of migration and integration. Similarly, the feminisation of migration needs to be understood in relation to the feminisation of poverty and, in turn, to the nature of gender inequalities in the family and in the labour market in both sending and receiving countries. With this in mind, it is evident that the feminisation of migration has the potential to reconfigure gender relations and inequalities between women and men.

Nicola Piper argues that a gender analysis of migration is needed.

'...Although policies governing the different categories of migrant worker are expressed in gender-neutral terms, in reality they affect men and women differently for three principle reasons: firstly, the concentration of men and women in different migratory flows based on gender segregated labour markets; secondly gendered socio-economic power structures; and finally socio-cultural definitions for appropriate roles in the origin as well as destination countries.' (2005:3)

As a consequence, legislative policies may not take account of the unforeseen consequences of immigration-related laws on women. Most receiving country governments tend to see migration as a short-term issue related to filling labour gaps and do not take account of the impact of immigration laws on women. It was in this context that the UN World Conference Against Racism argued that excessively strict immigration laws could be not only racist but also sexist, having a harsher impact on women than men. The absence of a gender analysis means that many women migrants are viewed as dependents of male migrants, rather than women with financial independence. As a result, the invisibility of many women migrants, particularly those working in low paid and low skilled work, has important implications for policy on migration and integration.

In some situations, a gender analysis of migration has been motivated by economic and workforce constraints. According to the European Commission, a gender perspective should be integrated into immigration and integration policies to counteract the impact of demographic changes, an ageing population and a shrinking workforce; these are signalled to impede the

achievement of Europe's economic, competitive and social goals, articulated in the Lisbon objectives.

'Effective and responsible integration of immigrants in the labour market and in society is one of the key factors for success in reaching the Lisbon targets. The gender perspective is to a large extent lacking in integration policies, which hampers the possibilities to fully utilise the potential of women migrants in the labour market.' (2005: 2)

Consequently, the integration of a gender dimension is linked to attaining the Lisbon targets. Alongside this, equality-focussed labour market policies and measures to reconcile family and work life are seen as important to enhancing the integration of women, including women migrants. These are important issues for women migrants and, although there have been moves to give women who have been victims of trafficking access to residency, this has not been extended to other groups of women migrant workers who may be at risk or vulnerable. The European Commission (2005) recommends that attention needs to be given to the different situations and conditions faced by women migrants and men in the integration process, with special attention to the double discrimination faced by women migrants in the labour market, and to measures to ensure that Community funding is used to integrate a gender perspective into immigration and integration policies.

A gender-based analysis should recognise the social differences between women and men and how these differences are perceived and implemented into policy making. Rather than gender being neutral, gender assumptions underpin our major social institutions and policy making. In particular, gender-based roles, expectations and identities result in women and men carrying out different roles in the migration process. This has an impact on the work opportunities open to women and men, on decisions to migrate, who migrates first, who takes care of the family, who learns a new language first, who takes time off work to care for sick children, and so on. Similarly, gender-based assumptions also have an impact on notions of dependency in the family and the role of family reunification policies, which in turn have an impact on access to the labour market and to integration into society.

It is only in Canada that a gender-based analysis has been integrated into immigration policy. This has been developed through the Government's Strategic Framework for Gender-Based Analysis (2005-2010) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006). This is a process that assesses the impact of proposed and/or existing policies, programmes and legislation on women and men. This makes it possible for policy to consider the impact of gender differences, economic situations, and the different social realities and life expectations of women and men. This policy focus has led to the mainstreaming of the assessment of gender-specific impacts at every step of policy and implementation. For example, this has resulted in proposals to increase the age of dependence from 18 to 22 years to take account of aiding

dependent daughters in some cultures that may stay at home until marriage or after divorce. Data is published annually on a range of gender and diversity indicators, in areas such as sex, age, head of households, refugees and asylum seekers, gender-based persecution, immigration category, and family status (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006).

Migration and development

In recent years the international community has begun to recognise the potential and positive impact that women's migration has on social and economic development in both sending and receiving countries. It also recognises that the human rights of women are integral to a properly managed approach to migration (UNFPA 2006; and as highlighted in the special UN session as part of the 2006 High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development).

Whilst this study concerns the situation of women migrants in Ireland, there are equally important issues that need to be raised about the impact of women's international migration on economic and social development, as well as poverty reduction, in their countries of origin. Women migrants provide vital resources for their families. Although remittances can contribute to the economic and social development of their communities of origin, there is an absence of a gender analysis of the impact of remittances and limited research that has documented the changes in family and community relationships brought about by transnational migration (Piper 2005).

Globally there have been some significant transformations in women's lives since the Beijing women's conference in 1990. Some of these have taken place as a result of economic development, but they are also directly related to the impact of social movements, including the women's movement, in progressing women's empowerment, and economic and social rights. According to a UNRSID review of gender and development since the Beijing world conference, despite continuing gender inequalities and an environment that is economically and politically working against women's rights, 'one of the remarkable achievements was in bringing issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights, violence against women, and inequality of power in gender relations to the centre of global and national debates' (2005:10).

However, in many developing countries the rise of women's participation rates has largely taken place in the informal economy which, according to the ILO, represents half to three-quarters of all non-agricultural employment in developing countries, as well as employment that is exploitative and devoid of labour protection and social benefits (UNRSID 2005). The migration of women from poor countries and the developing world to escape poverty and inequality has been a direct response to economic globalisation and the increasing emphasis on neo-liberal macroeconomic policies, where women have often been the casualties of economic reforms, privatisation, cuts in public services,

and a minimal role for government (UNRSID 2005, UNFPA 2006, PSI 2007).
According to UNRSID:

'The inference is that women will be equal beneficiaries, and that increased access to jobs, income and education can lead to greater gender equality. However, analytical insights and mounting empirical evidence provide scant support for such a prospect. This policy approach has not provided a supportive environment for improving women's well being, overcoming gender biases and eroding gender gaps in basic capacities, opportunities and access to resources. Nor has it brought about a fairer sharing between women and men of the unpaid work and the costs involved in caring for the family and raising children.' (2005:12)

As a result, many of the measures to improve gender equality and women's access to resources in countries of origin are linked to human rights and to the empowerment of women.

Section four: How does migration policy shape women's migration experiences?

Introduction

The concerns and challenges that are unique to the experience of female migrants are often overlooked in migration and integration policies. Women's patterns of migration are changing. In the past, the first point of entry for many women migrants was through family reunification, entering as wives and dependents. Because of restricted rights to work, dependent spouses are often forced into economic dependency and isolation. Women have also been less likely to enter on economic or humanitarian grounds compared to men. However, in the past decade there has been a significant increase in women migrating independently to access work. The shift to women's autonomous migration has also resulted in changing family structures and relationships, seen for example in the fact that significant numbers of women now migrate as primary breadwinners.

Migration policy and gender

In the past decade, international migration has been characterised by three trends: an increasing shift toward temporary migration for work; a growth in irregular migration, seen in the increase in undocumented migrants; and the feminisation of migration. Accordingly:

'...there is an emerging convergence towards selective migration, where highly skilled workers are welcomed, based on the belief that they will integrate more easily and contribute more to the economy, whereas low-skilled immigrants are regarded as hard on the public purse, and their numbers therefore ostensibly need to be controlled. Such stratifications are also gendered, given men's preponderance among the highly skilled strata.' (UNRSID 2005:18)

In the past decade, Ireland developed routes of entry for economic migrants who were welcomed to work in sectors of the economy where there were labour shortages. This was in parallel to the development of restrictive legislation concerning the rights of asylum seekers to work. In July 1999, a once-off decision was made to allow asylum seekers who were in the country for more than a year to access the labour market. Prior to that date and thereafter, asylum seekers have not had access to the labour market. More recently there has been a move towards the harmonisation of EU policies in areas such as illegal immigration and asylum, although Ireland has not ratified EU policy on family reunification.

Women's and men's patterns of migration and entry into Ireland are affected by the nature of domestic migration legislation as much as by the gendered structure of the labour market and rights and entitlements. Migrants' legal position opens up or shuts down access to entitlements such as family reunification, health and other services, and the labour market. The distinction, in terms of legal rights and welcome, between skilled and unskilled workers is also important; those that are skilled are welcomed whereas the lower skilled experience more restrictions and controls.

The differential legal rights conferred on different patterns of migration means that, in practice, women have fewer rights to family reunification than men as women tend to work in less skilled jobs, often in the poorest paid jobs. Nicola Piper argues that this is a reflection of the different gender dynamics involved in migration.

'...men and women circulate differently in the new global economy, with men occupying an elite space of flows in a masculine high-tech world of global finance, production and technology – the commanding heights of the knowledge economy. They have the right to be unified with their families, and it is the predominant scenario of such 'trailing spouses' to be women. Less skilled migrants (many of whom on temporary contracts of undocumented) do not usually have this right, with the notable exception of domestic workers in Italy who are allowed to bring their families.' (2005:20)

The Irish policy context

In recent years, the Irish State has actively encouraged and welcomed migration from highly skilled workers, in sectors such as nursing, information technology and finance, who are given greater security and possibilities to stay.³ The Employment Permits Act, 2006, has extended entitlements to higher skilled workers, including settlement and family reunification, who previously had more limited entitlements and whose legal status is more tightly controlled.⁴

³ *The Working Visa and Work Authorisation* scheme was introduced in 2000 to enable prospective employees with job offers from employers in Ireland to obtain immigration and employment clearance in advance from Irish Embassies and Consulates. Sectors covered include information technology, professionals in construction and registered nurses.

⁴ The Employment Permits Act, 2006, was enacted on 24th January 2007 and includes four employment schemes:

- Green cards (employment permits), which can be applied for in all professions if the salary is above €60,000 and in a restricted list of professions (mainly health, financial and IT) in the salary range of €30,000–€60,000
- Work permits (also called employment permits), which can be applied for in respect of particular job sectors having satisfied a labour market test and commanding a salary of above €30,000, and, in some exceptional circumstances, a salary below €30,000. Some jobs are ineligible
- Intra-company transfer for key staff and trainees in multinationals who have been based in the foreign office for at least one year and salary must be over €40,000

The introduction of the new employment permits system is part of a policy framework geared to limiting non-European Economic Area (EEA) labour migration to areas of skills or labour shortages that cannot be met from within the EU. In order to regulate exploitative working conditions and monitor labour standards, a National Employment Rights Authority has been established on a statutory footing (originally named Office of Director for Employment Rights Compliance), as well as the expansion of the labour inspectorate from 31 to 90 inspectors by end-2007. Changes concerning work entitlements for overseas students have also been tightened up for newly registered students.⁵

In 2007, draft legislation was published by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on immigration and residence. The *Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill* seeks to introduce an immigration policy for Ireland, including changes in the legal and other criteria governing immigration. The proposed legislation covers visas, entry into the State, residence permits and registration requirements, removal, and protection. It includes the introduction of a statutory long-term resident status as well as a number of controversial provisions, including identity cards and restrictions on non-Irish nationals' right to marry. However, no measures were proposed regarding family reunification and no gender analysis of the legislation was proposed. It is intended that the gaps in the legislation will be covered in secondary legislation and or policy statements.

The legislation is part of a broad policy objective for a framework of managed migration (NESC) 2006) and is a response to the demands of employers, unions and migrant organisations that have been pressurising the Government to introduce an immigration policy that could facilitate direct entry for migrants, and for securing permanent residency status for migrant workers already employed on temporary work permits. Consultations on the *Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill* (2005) have highlighted the need for a range of responses, including an appropriate immigration system that promotes Ireland as a 'destination of choice' to a wide skill mix of migrants, a transparent and efficient system (Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC 2005), an immigration system rooted in rights and entitlements with a comprehensive approach to addressing issues of racism and social exclusion (ICTU 2005), as well as ensuring that principles of international human rights law form the basis for an equitable policy on immigration (ICI 2005, Irish Human Rights

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- Students changing status after completing their course of studies. It will be possible for students to apply to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) for a six-month residence permit following graduation to enable job-search and application for employment permit

⁵ Since 18th April 2005 new students granted permission to remain in the State will not be permitted access to employment unless they are attending a full-time course of at least one-year's duration and leading to a recognised qualification. Students are entitled to work up to 20 hours per week part-time and full-time during vacation times. Students carrying out preparation courses leading to a full-time course will not be permitted to work until they commence the full-time course.

Commission 2005). Specific gender-related issues were raised by a number of organisations, with particular concerns regarding the need for a gender analysis to all migration policies, measures to address gender-based violence, access to women migrants friendly services, and the need for a positive framework on family reunification (ICI 2005; NWCI 2005). However, as mentioned earlier, no gender impact analysis or specific provisions on family reunification resulted from these submissions.

Migrants from the enlarged EU, with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, now have full rights to work and live in Ireland. The EU Directive 2004/38/EC on free movement of persons,⁶ implemented in 2006, allows entry of family members and partners of EU citizens who are in a durable relationship, as well as a new status of permanent residence for EU citizens and their family members after five years' residence in the State. There has been a narrow and restrictive interpretation of this by the State, to the extent to which non-EU spouses of EU residents are not automatically guaranteed residence.

In Ireland, there has been an absence of a policy framework on human trafficking, particularly regarding the support, security, health and care needs of victims of trafficking. Ireland has signed but not implemented the two main international conventions on human trafficking: UN's Palermo Protocol on human trafficking,⁷ and the Council of Europe Convention on Human Trafficking,⁸ which is a policy framework, including guidance on the support and security needs of victims. The health, accommodation and support needs of victims of trafficking have yet to be addressed in legislation and policy, and have been largely addressed by community-based organisations such as Ruhama.

Specific provisions are made for refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland. The system of direct provision and dispersal has led to concerns about social isolation and exclusion, and problems associated with access to services (Cáirde 2006; Irish Refugee Council 2004). In particular, issues have been raised about the limited supports for women asylum seekers with children, and of restrictions imposed on people's autonomy and independence resulting from the system of direct provision and dispersal for asylum seekers and refugees. The Irish Refugee Council (2002) states that direct provision contributes to the institutionalisation and deskilling of asylum seekers, arising from extended stays in direct provision, whilst social exclusion is a direct effect of restrictions on education and training and prohibitions on engaging in paid employment while waiting decision on their application. The health impacts of living in direct provision have been documented in the Health Service Executive's (HSE's)

⁶ (European Communities (Free Movement of Persons) Regulations 2006).

⁷ UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime includes a comprehensive approach to addressing trafficking in human beings, and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol, 2000, Supplanting the UN Convention against transnational organised crime).

⁸ Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (agreed by the Committee of Ministers 3rd May 2005, signing in Warsaw opened on 16th May 2005).

consultations for the *Intercultural Strategy in Health* (2007b) and by organisations representing minority ethnic groups (Cáirde 2006). For those who get refugee status, difficulties arise in finding accommodation and getting information about how to live independently and find accommodation, training and employment.

Global measures: labour standards and human rights

Ireland's policy framework on migration has the potential to be informed by a wide range of human rights and other international instruments on migration. Although migrants with regular or legal status have a range of legal entitlements, these are often not available to undocumented migrants. As a result of the lack of protection, migrant workers may be exploited, marginalised and subjected to discrimination. In response to this, there has been global action and measures that call for the improvement of the situation of migrant workers and their families, including minimum standards. Some of these make specific reference to gender equality and the rights of women migrant workers.

One of the difficulties is that women migrant workers' rights cut across a number of human rights instruments related to: human rights standards addressed specifically to women's human rights; human rights of workers; and human rights concerning migrants. The former two are stronger than the latter. However, the rights of women migrants have received relatively limited attention in human rights discourses and policy making, whilst a specific focus has been given to the rights of refugees under the Geneva Convention and, more recently, instruments have been developed in the area of human trafficking, under the Palermo Protocol. Rights for migrant workers are covered under a number of ILO conventions and the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families (which has only been ratified by a small number of sending countries). In recent years, international attention has been given to women's rights in the context of labour exploitation, specifically through the ILO Declaration, which includes conventions on non-discrimination in the labour market. In the past few years, the intersection between gender equality and race equality, as well as the rights of women migrant workers, have been highlighted in global reports on discrimination (ILO 2004 and 2007). International attention, from the ILO and UNIFEM, as well as from international NGOs such as Migrants Rights International, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and Human Rights Watch, has also been given to the situation of domestic workers.

Although there are a number of international instruments covering migration, there exists no international right to migrate for the purposes of employment.⁹

⁹ These include the ILO Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 No 97 (not ratified by Ireland); ILO Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention No 143 1975 (not ratified by Ireland); UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 1990 (not ratified by Ireland); Council of Europe Convention on the

Under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, refugees are entitled to recognition of their status and cannot be returned to the country in which they risk persecution. Ireland has not yet signed the Council of Europe's Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers in 1977, which sets out rights and entitlements of migrant workers, and provides for equal rights to migrants in areas such as healthcare, social security and working conditions.

Similarly, Ireland has not ratified the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICWM), which came into force in 2003. A migrant worker is defined as 'a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remuneration activity in a State of which he or she is not a national'. The convention, unlike ILO conventions on migration, guarantees fundamental rights to all migrant workers, including undocumented migrants, during the entire migration process, such as the protection of human rights, emergency medical care and education. Further protection is afforded to regular migrant workers and their families, including freedom of movement in the territory of the State and the right to participate in public affairs and vote. The ICMW recognises the active involvement and participation of women in migration. It is underpinned by the principle of equal treatment but not in respect of women's unequal position in the labour market. It provides for employment rights equal to those of nationals, equal rights to health and education, and the right to family reunification.

Other international instruments are the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (all ratified in Ireland). The ICCPR states that '...the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status' (Article 26). The ILO's non-binding Multilateral Framework for a Rights-Based Approach to Labour Migration (2005) takes account of labour market needs, with guidelines and principles for policies based on best practices and international standards.

Whilst the ratification and implementation of the ILO's Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration and the ICMW would possibly require some change of legislation in the employment, education, social welfare and taxation systems, the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) and the NCCRI (2004) have argued that, even if these conventions are not ratified and implemented, they should still underpin minimum standards in Irish policy. Specific references are made to women migrant workers including:

Rights of Migrant Workers (not ratified by Ireland); The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Social Charter (Articles 18 and 19).

- Giving special attention to the multiple disadvantages and discrimination often faced by migrant workers on the basis of gender, race and migrant status
- Ensuring that labour migration policies are gender sensitive and address the problems and particular abuses women often face in the migration process
- Establishing systems and structures for periodic, objective labour market analyses that take into account gender issues
- Promoting and implementing anti-discrimination legislation and policies, establishing or strengthening specialised bodies on equality and non-discrimination for migrant workers and conducting periodic gender-sensitive data collection and analysis on these issues

Legal status, channels of entry and immigration issues

As mentioned above, the rights of women migrants are largely determined by their legal status, channels of entry and access to entitlements. These issues raise some important concerns about access to rights for women migrant workers, many of whom experience insecurity and limited rights to residency. Migration policy is inherently inflexible and restrictive for some groups of migrants, particularly those that have an irregular status or that work in low skilled jobs. Restrictions exist in areas such as conditions of residence, the rights and conditions associated with family life and family reunification, access to services associated with residence/citizenship, and difficulties in making a transition between one legal residence and employment status to another. The limited claims to social welfare entitlements and the temporary status associated with employment permits disadvantage migrant workers, particularly women. In particular, the limited duration of the working visa and employment permits has been criticised by migrant organisations as the temporary status makes it difficult to integrate, plan for the future, enter the housing market and make long-term plans for their families. The Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) has recommended that working visas should be either of a longer duration or there should be an automatic process of renewal, and that spouses should be issued with a work permit prior to taking up an offer of employment (INO 2005).

Family reunification

Globally, family reunification¹⁰ tends to be a highly feminised form of migration. The lack of data in Ireland means that little is known about the extent of family reunification and the problems that are faced by some migrants in having rights to family reunification. In practice, high skilled workers have more rights to family reunification than lesser skilled migrants. Evidence from other countries

¹⁰ There are essentially a number of forms of family reunification depending on how family reunification takes place (Kofman 2004). First, family reunification migration takes place where members of the immediate family (spouses and children) join working spouses and, second, family formation migration, where migrants with settled status bring in marriage partners.

shows that, because migration for family reunification is largely female, this can create economic and legal dependency and thereby widen gender inequalities (Kofman et al 2000). There are significant implications for family reunification for some groups of migrants, determined by the immigration category under which the primary working migrant enters the jurisdiction. Non-EU nationals have, in some circumstances, few or no statutory entitlements to family reunification, although all migrants do have the right to apply for family reunification. In some cases, policies result in women becoming 'single' parents, for example through the refusal to grant fathers permission to join mothers and children who have been given residence through the Irish Born Children scheme.

Despite substantial changes in family relationships and family forms in the 21st century, there are still very strongly prescribed definitions of who is entitled to family reunification, i.e. to include married spouses and dependent children. In the Netherlands, the UK, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, for example, cohabiting or same-sex couples are included in family reunification if they have a 'relationship akin to a family' in the receiving society. Some other European countries allow family reunification of dependent older parents. In 2006, the Government established a working group on domestic partnership to examine possibilities for legal recognition of alternative forms of partnership or cohabitation. The Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) has sought clarification of how this applies to family reunification entitlements for opposite or same-sex partnerships (ICI 2006), although the working group has not made any commitment to implement any provisions at this stage (Working Group on Domestic Partnership 2006). The ICI and the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS) have shown in a recent poll that there are positive attitudes towards migrants' rights to family reunification. In the poll, 75 per cent believed that non-EU migrant workers should have the right to family reunification (ICI 2007a).

Although there have been legislative changes facilitating family reunification and spousal work permits under the Employment Permits Act, this has been restricted to skilled workers. Existing family reunification policies do not take into account the cultural context and the role of extended families or of caring responsibilities of other family members. This is particularly important in those countries where it is considered to be the main responsibility of female family members to provide care for parents.

The National Women's Council of Ireland argues:

'Family reunification is of immense importance to many migrants and in particular to women migrants who have been forced to leave their children and families behind when they emigrate to Ireland. This puts huge strains particularly on mothers of young children as well as on the children themselves.' (NWC 2005)

Restrictions to family reunification have adverse effects on family life, for example by limiting rights to family reunification for some categories of migrants and forcing families to split up over immigration and residence status.¹¹ The ICI and the MRCI have, in the absence of legislation on family reunification, campaigned for improved access to family reunification. There are no statutory entitlements to family reunification for non-EEA migrants or Irish citizens with non-EU relatives. According to the ICI (2006a), because the family is recognised in the Irish Constitution and in international law as a core unit of society, this should be reflected in legal changes that provide rights to family reunification. It also argues that the best interests of children should be a priority. It has recommended that entitlements to family reunification for legally resident non-EU migrants and Irish citizens should be set down in primary legislation, that the definition of family members who qualify should be broadened to include partners, including same-sex partners, and dependent family members, and that there should be more transparency in decision making by reducing ministerial discretion.

A number of legal challenges have been made by non-EU nationals and parents of Irish citizen children regarding their entitlements to family reunification. In addition, a number of people granted permission to remain in Ireland under the Irish Born Child (IBC) 2005 Scheme (based on parentage of an Irish citizen child) have lodged legal challenges against the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform's assertion that they have no family reunification entitlements. Applicants to the scheme (IBC/05) signed a declaration to the effect that, if they are granted permission to remain, this does not confer 'any entitlement or legitimate expectation' of family reunification. The Coalition Against Deportation of Irish Citizen Children (CADIC 2005) argues that this goes against the Irish Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Family reunification is a very important issue for women migrant workers since many women migrate to Ireland without their children (ICI 2006b). In interviews for this research, several women stated the difficulties they faced in being separated from their children.

Eva, a hotel worker, stated: 'We don't leave our countries because we want to...we are forced to leave because we have to ensure that our children don't grow up in poverty...I wouldn't have come to Ireland if I was able to earn a decent living at home and I would love to go home and be with my daughter. I feel very sad to be missing out on her upbringing. This is the hardest thing for a mother.'

¹¹ This is despite that fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child protects every child, irrespective of their nationality or immigration status. This includes their physical integrity, health education and the right to be free from discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Article 10 provides the right to family reunification.

Cerilyn from the Philippines had a different experience. She had been living and working in Cork and Kerry for four years and had been sending money home to her three young children. When she first came to Ireland her children were looked after by her mother at home in Cebu in the Philippines. She missed her children very badly. 'I kept telling myself to be strong as I was doing it for my kids.'

As a nurse she became entitled to family reunification under the working visa system. She now has her children living with her. She is very happy. 'I feel that my life is now complete...my children have settled into school and are enjoying life in Ireland.'

Marah wanted to see if she would be entitled to stay in Ireland as a sibling. She had been living with her sister and brother, both of whom had residence through the IBC scheme. 'My sister has a baby and my brother has two babies...my family are all here. I am very much part of their lives. My brother and sister both got IBC status and have the right to stay. I wanted to know if I could stay here because they are my family...but that was not possible.'

Separation from children and families

International migration has an impact on children and parenting in a number of ways. Children may migrate alone, with their families, they may remain at home with other relatives, or they may migrate because of war or conflict. Where children have been trafficked, mistreated or exploited, there are significant child protection issues that need to be addressed (Conroy 2005). In countries of origin, children may be affected in different ways by international migration. The impact of transnational parenting, care by grandparents or other family members on family relations and care of children is an area that has not been researched in any systematic way. However, there are important questions to be asked about the impact of restrictive family reunification policies on family life, including the rights of parents to temporarily return to their country of origin.

Several women interviewed for this study highlighted the crucial role they play in supporting their families. Maria's experience shows the importance of her remittances. She believes that her family has benefited from her migration. She keeps in close contact with her family.

According to **Maria**: 'I have one daughter and I wanted to support her studies as well as the rest of my family. My mother is bedridden and there is no financial support for them. That's why I came to work here...now my daughter is studying to be a nurse and I am very proud of her. She is doing really good. She is inspired by what I am doing and she says to me that nursing is in demand and I want to help you mama...her goal is to continue her studies in medicine. I will support her in that. Today most women are working rather than men. My husband is back in Manila. He is very good but he has no work. He is

very good as he looks after my daughter. When I send him money I break down what the money is for. All the money is really budgeted and the money goes to specific expenses. I am lucky as not all husbands are so reliable. In our part, leaving our countries, we really sacrifice a lot. We really miss our families, but the sacrifice is there. Knowing they can eat a meal every day and survive, that is my responsibility.'

There is some evidence to show that international migration can have a positive impact on children; for example, remittances can lift children out of poverty, provide access to education, and improve well being. Research by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is looking at the impact of remittances on children and the impact of development on child labour, discrimination against girls, education and health of children affected by migration. One study of migration of people from Mexico to the US shows that children who stay behind are less likely to drop out of school, whilst other studies show that transnational parenting arrangements can provide children with stability and love when they are in regular contact with their parents (UN 2005).

Female dependent spouses

In February 2004, the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment introduced a new category of spousal employment permit to attract highly skilled workers, particularly nurses, to Ireland. Although spouses are required to have an employment permit to take up employment in Ireland, they can apply for work permits for jobs that are ineligible under the conventional work permit scheme and no work permit fee is required. In 2006, the spousal work permit scheme was extended to the spouses of all employment permit holders, under the Employment Permits Act, introduced in 2007. However, there has been low take up of the scheme because of difficulties experienced by spouses of migrants in securing employment and employers generally have a lack of awareness of the scheme. Other problems include the absence of provisions for a part-time spousal visa to allow women migrants with children to have flexibility (ICI 2006c). Data from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment records show that 1,718 spousal work permits were issued in 2006, 1,168 were issued in 2005, and 739 were issued in 2004 (ICI 2006c).

Dependent status can represent a loss of autonomy and financial independence for women, compared to their home countries. This situation creates dependence and inequality with particularly important implications for support systems for women who experience domestic violence, pregnancy or social isolation. In particular, a number of organisations (Women's Aid 2005, NWCI 2005) have called for greater legal protection for women who experience domestic violence to be given independent legal status and the right to remain in Ireland, as exists currently in the UK. Without this, women are tied into dependency on their spouses, legally, financially and in accessing services.

Several women interviewed in this study raised issues about the rights of female spouses of migrant workers and the gendered assumptions underlying family reunification policies, which may be embedded in assumptions of women's dependence in the family. One woman stated that this is a discriminatory situation and that, because work permit holders are usually working in lower skilled work, family poverty and a range of difficulties arise if spouses are not allowed to work. One woman interviewed as part of this study stated that this 'contributes to creating poverty and social inequalities amongst ethnic minorities in the country' and forces women into dependency on their husbands.

A small survey of spouses of work permit holders by the Clare Women's Network (2005) identifies the problems associated with the work permit system for female dependent spouses leading to potential discrimination and inequality. Because work permit holders are usually working in lower skilled work, family poverty and a range of difficulties arise if spouses are not allowed to work. As a result, 'government policy only further contributes to creating poverty and social inequalities amongst ethnic minorities in the country'. The HRC renders many of these women invisible to service providers and they experience social isolation and poor access to rights and information.

One woman interviewed had worked in a number of jobs as an undocumented worker because she had not been allowed to work legally and this made her feel devalued. When told that she was not eligible for maternity benefits when she became pregnant she felt 'degraded and humiliated'. She felt it was a waste of her skill and potential contribution to the labour market to be legally prevented from working.

The stories of Nusha and Julia, both of whom have been autonomous working women in their countries of origin, exemplifies the problems for women that are forced into dependent spouse roles.

Nusha was a dependent spouse for a short time, although at one time she held a student visa. Through an error on the part of the immigration authorities, she received a stamp enabling her to work.

'I came to Ireland in 1997 to visit my husband who was working. He was transferred temporarily from his company for six months on a training visa and this was the quickest way the Irish employer could invite him. When he was offered a further contract for one year on a work permit I joined him with my two children. But as a dependent spouse I was unable to work. At this stage we had no long-term plans and, for the first time in Bulgaria, we had bought an apartment and we had planned to settle there...I was only planning on taking unpaid leave and my employer in Bulgaria kept my job open for me...We spent one year here and I loved it.'

Her husband was subsequently offered a two-year contract. 'Then I knew that this time around we were coming for good. But there was a mistake in the stamp that we were given [stamp number four instead of three]. It was only when I applied to work with a translation company that I found out that this was the case. However, when I had to renew my stamp, the officer, who happened to be an open-minded person, acknowledged that a mistake had been made...he agreed to change my status to a work permit holder [stamp one].'

Nusha was keen to work as soon as she could. 'I have always worked and found a position as an interpreter in Russian and Bulgarian for the Irish Refugee Application Commissioner, working with people who apply for asylum. We were trained by UNHCR. I went to DCU to do the masters in Intercultural Studies whilst working part-time as an interpreter. This opened my horizon higher.'

It was after that that her problems started. 'When I went to renew my stamp I was told that I had to be a dependent spouse again. There was a real tightening up of the regulations as, at this time, the new member states had accession to the EU; the controls got tighter. I felt that I was no longer at home. I was very bitter at that time. Citizenship is not the way to sort out someone's immigration problems...if [there had been] the legislation that has since been introduced allowing for spousal permits I would have been much happier. I was not happy to remain at home. I had always worked and I wasn't the type of person to be at home...I felt I was losing my confidence and my family was affected...I was really developing strong symptoms of depression. I couldn't concentrate, I was always crying over stupid things. I wasn't able to sleep and I was getting sick...my immune system had given up for some reason.'

'I think that women should not be put in boxes on this issue...every family should have been given the choice of what is best for them. I hate traditional roles. When I was first working in Bulgaria I earned more than my husband...in our family we always sat down and made decisions...but this situation was not our decision, it was imposed on us. I was approaching my 40th birthday and I felt a complete failure. It was my decision to join my husband and I was hoping that there would be a place for me but that was not to be.'

'I am really happy for myself and my children to be resident in Ireland...I am happy because I am allowed to work...in the past, spousal permits were only available to people on working visas, but my husband's employer kept him on a work permit even though he was an IT engineer.'

Since then Nusha and her family have been granted citizenship and she is now working for an NGO.

Julia is from Russia where she worked as a non-clinical doctor in public health, mainly in the area of health promotion. For the past six years, she has been living in Ennis, Co Clare, where she joined her husband who is working on a

work permit as a computer engineer. During her first two years in Ireland she worked as a housekeeper in a hotel on a work permit. Since then, she has found it very difficult to be legally employed under the work permit scheme, introduced in the 2003, because of restrictions on work permits for certain occupations. For the past two years she has been unemployed and seeking work. She applied for two HSE jobs in the area of health promotion and community development but was unable to take up employment because of work permit restrictions covering this type of employment. She says that she felt very 'humiliated and undermined' by this experience. Her experience of Ireland is that she has to work illegally or in low paid unskilled/unqualified jobs. Consequently, she feels very deskilled.

Julia believes that dependent spouses of work permit holders (who are most often women) are discriminated against. 'The denial of the right to work creates a very vulnerable position for these women. The vast majority stay invisible to service providers and to the Irish Government in general.'

Julia has worked as a volunteer with Clare Women's Network, providing information and support to the Russian-speaking community. This has included writing an information booklet for Russian-speaking women about services and information. The network has experienced an increasing number of requests for help and information from spouses of migrant workers and women migrant workers.

Julia's experience shows how migration policy resulted in her being dependent on her family. This situation led her and her partner to seek residency and employment in Canada. 'It has been very frustrating for me and the main reason why we are moving [to Canada]. The new registration only came in this year and we had already decided to move. At a certain point, I stopped pursuing anything in my career because I was emotionally drained and tired and decided to focus on my daughter. It was very frustrating not being able to further my career. I did expect there would be difficulties and I didn't imagine that I would work in a professional capacity, but that I would do that in time and I didn't expect it to be so difficult.'

She is very positive about moving to Canada as she will automatically have rights to work and residency. 'I will have residency status in Canada – I will be a person on my own. Here I am only considered as a spouse, which I don't mind, but I don't think it is politically correct for six years now. Also in Canada I know that, for the spouses for work permits holders, they actually can work without restrictions. It's a shame that that didn't exist in Ireland. Thankfully, my family situation is good. What if it got different, if there was a separation? That would be the end of my life here.'

She says that, although her husband recently gained long-term residence status, '...it was not automatic that I get the same. I still have to register each year and my status is independent from his status. That's the case for anyone

on a long-term permit...In Canada, once you are approved to work there, you get permanent residency status. This enables you to work and reside and study – you can apply for citizenship after three years. It is so much better than Ireland.'

Section five: The experiences at work - women migrant workers

Introduction

As the previous sections have shown, the wide diversity of women migrants' experiences is closely connected to gender, ethnic origin, labour market stratification and migration status. Women migrant workers are affected by the gendered nature of the labour market and, as in other developed and developing countries, Ireland has a highly segmented labour market. It is clear that the lower the skill level, the weaker the rights and entitlements, the more likely a woman migrant will slip into undocumented work. This has an impact on possibilities for integration. Evidence from the ILO's 2007 global report on discrimination finds that national migration policies tend to 'provide for equal opportunities and treatment between nationals and migrant workers in high-skilled positions than those in unskilled and low status jobs' (2007: 31). Consequently, women are more disadvantaged by the imposition of restrictions in areas such as conditions of residence, the rights associated with family life and family reunification, access to services and rights associated with residence and citizenship, and difficulties in making a transition between one legal residence and employment status to another.

Although the majority of women migrant workers work in typically feminised sectors, there is also a significant increase of women migrating into skilled jobs. However, women enter an already segregated labour market and men continue to form the majority of skilled migrants within the OECD, working in information technology and science (OECD 2002). It is in the traditionally female jobs – health, care work, social work and education – that there has been the most significant increase in migrant labour. For example, the demand for nursing and healthcare staff is a response to a crisis in national recruitment, where there has been a significant demand for migrants.

Women migrant workers have a wide diversity of experiences in the labour market. Most of the research on migrant workers has focussed on the negative experiences, documenting exploitation or discrimination in the labour market, although there are also many examples of migration acting as an empowerment process for women. Two specific Irish studies have documented the experiences of women migrant workers, the first on women's experiences in the workplace (Pillinger 2006) and the second highlights how women migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in domestic service (MRCI 2004). The latter report documents experiences of women who have used the MRCI and highlights issues such as exploitation, long hours, lack of regulation in this highly feminised sector, vulnerability to sexual harassment, and the absence of rights.

There has also been a number of small-scale studies that, while not gender specific, have drawn on specific gender issues (in the South of Ireland: Conroy and Brennan 2003; Migrants Rights Centre 2004; ICI 2005; and in the North: Bell et al 2004; Animate 2005). Two studies in the North (Animate 2004, Bell et al 2004) found a number of examples of women experiencing discriminatory employment practices, including unfair dismissal, non-recognition of overseas qualifications, deskilling and prejudice, and language barriers. Research by the ICI (Kelleher Associates 2004) has similarly highlighted a number of gender-related issues, notably limited rights for migrant workers and their families, separation from family members, inaccessibility to general equality and labour law legislation and machinery, vulnerability of female dependent spouses experiencing domestic violence, and discrimination in areas such as education, training and access to welfare benefits.

There are a number of common and shared issues in the workplace. Wages of migrant workers are regularly forced down, despite the fact that the qualifications of migrant workers are higher than those of the indigenous Irish population. However, women are often in more marginal situations than men, in a labour market that is characterised by gender inequality. As a result, women often face greater barriers to integrating into the workplace. Research for the Equality Authority (Pillinger 2006) found that women and men migrant workers experienced common problems in the labour market, including racism in the workplace, unethical recruitment practices and payment of recruitment fees and fees for work permits, absence of contracts of employment or employment contracts that did not provide for minimum entitlements to pay, holidays and other terms and conditions of employment, underpayment or non-payment of wages, including wages below the national minimum wage, and unfair dismissal. There are also a number of examples of bondage labour (including withholding passports and travel documents). In interviews for this study, several women spoke of the double discrimination they faced in their lives, ranging from racism on the streets to fear and insecurity of violence. These women stated that they frequently experienced gender inequality combined with ethnic/race inequality, alongside an additional level of inequality which comes from being a non-national.

Experiences of women migrant workers at work

As we have seen, women migrants work in typically feminised sectors. Some of the more positive experiences have been from women migrants working in skilled work, in the voluntary and community sector, and those that have sought to establish their own businesses or are self-employed in order to combine work with family responsibilities and break out of disadvantaged positions in the labour market.

Women migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to unethical recruitment practices since women tend to be over-represented in the sectors where unethical recruitment practices tend to predominate. In interviews for this

research, several women spoke about the difficulties that this presented. Irish recruitment agents who had no credentials were the point of contact in several sending countries. Elsewhere, international recruitment agencies were working on behalf of Irish employers. In the research for the Equality Authority (Pillinger 2006), 11 of the 33 women interviewed were recruited through employment/recruitment agencies in their home countries (of these, three women from the new EU member states had previously been recruited on work permits but were now allowed to work as EU citizens). Eight of these 11 women had paid fees to recruitment agents ranging from €500 to €3,500. These women were working in highly feminised jobs; picking mushrooms, meatpacking, contract cleaning, and hotel cleaning. They received no information about their jobs and, in some cases, were not sure about the job they were going to.

Several women interviewed for this study stated that the intermediaries were often women. One woman thought that this was 'to befriend us and make sure that we were not too scared to travel abroad...we did not realise we were being deceived'.

Another woman said: 'I just paid the cash to a woman who gave me no information about who she was'.

And another said: 'The woman was from Ireland and she came with us from South Africa. She seemed to be some kind of intermediary working for Irish companies'.

However, one of the interesting findings of women's employment and migration patterns is that they are often not prepared to be victims of bad employment practices. With support from migrant organisations and trade unions, and using their own networks, women migrants have found possibilities for bad employment practices to be exposed and for women to be empowered to move into better employment. Shani's story, below, exemplifies this.

There are equally positive stories of women who have been recruited into companies that provide them with decent employment conditions. Women interviewed for this study reported a number of positive recruitment and employment experiences in larger companies that have union agreements in the hospitality and retail sectors, as well as in international and national IT companies, where equality and diversity policies have been introduced. Women recruited to these companies were not charged fees, they were given information pre-departure and were supported in their initial arrival and settling in, including help with accommodation.

Shani is from South Africa and has been working in Ireland since 1999. She also has an Irish-born baby and now has residence. She works as a supervisor in a fast-food restaurant and previously worked as a meat packer.

She met several representatives of Irish companies in South Africa through a recruitment agency that was working on behalf of Irish companies. Her employer told her that if she was stopped at immigration 'they were to say that they were coming to Ireland to carry out training. We had training visas, that's what we were told. We eventually got our green book though.

'We were a group of women that were brought over together with the Irish woman who recruited us. Our airfare was paid for. I was in a batch of six and we were met at the airport and taken to Cavan. We were given accommodation and help settling in. Altogether the company brought more than 30 people over.

'We all signed seven-month contracts with pay of £130 a week. That seemed loads considering where we came from. Many of us were working from six in the morning till eight at night in order to earn as much money as possible. After a while it didn't seem so much money because we had to buy food to eat. On my second contract I earned more.

'...The big problems started when the employer changed...we were still doing the same job but then we found that we were getting lower pay and worse conditions of employment. It felt like a kick in the teeth. When I questioned and kicked up a fuss, I was told that they had to let me go.' Shani was sacked but got support from her union, SIPTU.

Although Shani lost her job she went on to find better paid employment. Her mother is now living with her and provides help with childcare.

Her story mirrors that of many other women workers, who arrive in Ireland with little knowledge of their rights and entitlements. However, through help from her union she was able to gain some recourse from the bad employment practices. She has moved into a job with responsibilities and better pay. She and her child have settled into living in Ireland and she intends to stay in the long term.

A significant number of women interviewed in this study, who had worked in low paid and exploitative employment, had changed jobs since they first arrived in Ireland, availing of better jobs as the opportunity arose. Employers often use informal networks in different language and ethnic communities to identify women who can work in jobs for which they held work permits. In some cases, women had moved from difficult, exploitative or poor quality employment into less exploitative jobs with better employers. Of interest is that women migrant workers use their own networks and resources to identify which are the good or bad employers. A group of women interviewed in a focus group as part of this study stated that they first applied for their jobs as bus drivers and administrators because they had heard that Dublin Bus was a good employer of women and migrant workers and that it had a positive record of equality and diversity employment policies.

Eva's experience exemplifies this issue very well.

Eva is from Moldova, where she worked for several years in a skilled position. She has two university degrees and speaks English very well. She first came to Ireland to do cleaning work with a contract cleaning company. Although she realised that she was very deskilled in this work, she saw it as a way of gaining experience and a route into other less exploitative work in Ireland.

She was originally recruited by an agency in Moldova to whom she paid €2,500. She thinks that this was for the work permit and her flight. The money was paid over to a Moldova woman who she thinks worked for the recruitment company. She worked for the recruitment agency doing contract cleaning for seven months. She had a very bad experience working for this employer, was paid below the minimum wage and was not paid her full wages because she was required to pay for accommodation provided by her employer.

As soon as she had worked her contract she gained a new work permit job as a cleaner in a hotel. This has been a very positive experience and she considers her employer to be very good. Staff are provided with support and information about their rights and entitlements at induction. The human resources department provides ongoing support for workers and there are opportunities for career progression. 'This created a good atmosphere in the workplace so that we enjoy our work and, after all, isn't that good for the employer?'

Since she took up her post she has been promoted twice, first as an accommodation supervisor and then as a receptionist. There have been no problems getting work permits renewed for these new jobs. She says that 'the work can be very stressful, particularly at busy times of the year', and she works very hard.

The provision and receiving of information can be a highly complex issue for migrant workers, in particular information that meets the needs of women migrant workers.¹² Many of the women interviewed in this study were not aware of their rights and entitlements, particularly on arrival in Ireland. Many subsequently found out about their rights and entitlements through community-based and migrant-led organisations or through their own networks. One woman believed that the withholding of information was a mechanism to stop women workers claiming their rights, such as minimum wages, holiday entitlements, and working hours. However, some women spoke about the positive experiences that include information provision pre-departure and on arrival. In the case of one woman:

'I was given information before departure and was given support when I arrived and help with accommodation. [My employer] has given us lots

¹² Under the Employment Permits Act 2006 employers are required to provide a statement of rights entitlements in the employment contract.

of information about life in Ireland and our jobs. We were told to ask for whatever help we needed and were given the name of someone to contact in the company for this. We were also given a phone card so that we could phone home when we arrived.'

Within the small group of women interviewed in this study there exists a wide diversity of terms and conditions of employment, and good and bad employers. Good practices included being paid fairly, good conditions of employment, decent working hours, information provided through induction, access to training, and career development. It is clear also that women workers in unionised sectors and in companies with effective equality and diversity policies were more likely to experience good working conditions. However, evidence does show that, overall, work permit holders earn 14 per cent less than Irish workers (Hughes and Quinn, 2004) and that women migrants experience a larger gender wage gap as compared to the gender wage gap experienced by Irish women (Pillinger 2006).

Overall, this study has found that it is in the typically feminised sectors of the labour market – in contract cleaning, care and domestic work, hotel and hospitality, as well as in the horticultural sector – where some of the more significant experiences of poor working conditions exist. In interviews carried out in this study, women migrant workers perceived that they were regularly earning less than other Irish workers, including working in poorer conditions of employment, experiencing harassment by employers, and working longer hours. Often women were not in a position to complain or question their bosses for fear of losing their work permit or status. As one woman stated:

'The Irish girls were getting the minimum wage but the rest of us were not. But when I told them that I was going to stay in Ireland they did give me the minimum wage.'

As Ina stated:

'Most women have no idea about their rights, things like minimum wages, working hours, maternity benefits...no one tells them and they end up working from nine in the morning until nine at night with low pay. No one is prepared to complain. Most women are frightened to complain in case they lose their job. Something needs to be done to give these women information and to make sure that they know their rights.'

The changes brought into effect through the Employment Permits Act 2006 will be important to the protection of migrant workers who have experienced a bonded labour relationship with their employer. This will avoid the experiences of several women interviewed who believed that they were being exploited as bonded labour.

It is important to note that large numbers of women migrants work in jobs below their skill levels. If women are working below their skill and experience potential, it is a missed opportunity for the Irish economy. In this research, the majority of women migrant workers were educated to second and third level, although they were not working in jobs that were commensurate to their qualification levels. The interviewees for this study included women working in contract cleaning with university degrees, women carrying out routine service jobs who are qualified teachers and university lecturers, and women working in hotels and bars who have masters level qualifications. According to Maria, from the Philippines:

'I was working as a civil servant in the Philippines, but pay was very low. The rest of my family were not so lucky...so I came to work as a domestic worker because my family couldn't survive.'

Women migrants working on work permits feel particularly insecure. Before the Employment Permits Act was introduced in 2007, migrant workers had relied on their employers to renew their work permits on an annual basis. One woman had been under the impression that her employer had renewed her work permit. When she discovered that this had not happened it was too late and she became undocumented. She has been in undocumented work since then. The insecure work position that Marina works in exemplifies this.

Marina works in a beauty salon as a hairdresser and doesn't know if she will have a job in six months time because she is on a work permit. She pays her employer €500 in cash every year for the work permit. She is worried that if she complains she will lose the job. All the staff working in the beauty salon are overseas workers and all have to pay the fee.

Marina said that Irish employees have not been happy working there. There is a high turnover of staff and it is difficult to recruit Irish women. Most do not work more than three months because the pay and conditions of employment are bad.

Marina believes that the system in Ireland encourages the owner to use foreign staff and that this is exploitative. 'The system is not good enough. I am always scared I will lose my job. I can't switch my contract and change job.'

Women migrants also have fewer opportunities for promotion and career development and often miss out on training and development opportunities, particularly where their employment contract is temporary. The temporary nature of migration clearly works against this. Even where women have a residency status, they stated that they are often overlooked in promotion with preferences being given to Irish workers, with access to training, language and permanent legal status working against their career development. As one woman said: 'Who would employ a Chinese woman over an Irish woman or man? It just wouldn't happen'.

In addition to a segregated labour market, women migrant workers experience a range of specific issues that are unique to their status. The juggling of work and time was a constant stress for women migrants with children. This is partly because their workplaces offer limited work-life balance and family friendly working hours, but also because many women migrants do not have family and other social supports as a back up. Although none of the women interviewed had experienced problems associated with pregnancy, a report by the ICR in the North found that several Portuguese-speaking women working for employment agencies had been sacked for becoming pregnant or for asking for information about employment rights (Bell et al, 2004). Two women interviewed stated that they were fearful of becoming pregnant as they did not believe that they would have any entitlements to maternity leave.

However, there are some workplaces that have developed appropriately targeted policies and practices that have been inclusive of women migrants' situation. One woman interviewed has been a bus driver with Dublin Bus for just over a year. She was very positive about her employer, who has helped to arrange flexible working hours. She is a single parent, whose son is looked after by a child minder after school hours and, although she no family networks to turn to for help if she was working a late shift, her employer had helped to facilitate family friendly working hours.

Dublin Bus employs nine women migrant workers as bus drivers. They have good policies on equality and diversity and good employee relations. Dublin Bus has been examining ways to improve the representation of women in areas where they are under-represented and in supporting women migrant workers.

Safina is from Burundi where she was a qualified teacher. She is a single parent and has a nine-year-old son who is looked after by a child minder after school hours. Safina came to Ireland in 1997 as a refugee and gained refugee status in 1999. During those two years she was unable to work and she said that this was very frustrating. Her first job was working for Dunnes Stores.

Safina came to work at Dublin Bus through a recommendation from a friend who suggested that Dublin Bus was a good and reliable company to work for. She has been a bus driver for just over a year and is very positive about her employer. She does have difficulty in combining childcare with shift work. She thinks that driving a bus in Dublin is more stressful for women migrant workers because they are very visible and often experience racism and negative comments. However, she enjoys her work and feels that her employer does a lot to facilitate her work-life balance. She also believes that it is very positive for minority ethnic women to be seen publicly in jobs such as bus driving; this presents a positive image for women migrants and is very empowering.

Experiences of women in specific sectors

Skilled workers in health, architecture, science, and technology

Women migrant workers also represent skilled labour in some sectors of the employment market. This is particularly the case in the welfare and social professions (education, social work and healthcare) where recruitment of overseas nurses has been a response to shortages of nurses. Skilled migration also has gender divisions and men account for the large majority of those taking up skilled jobs in transnational corporations and in the knowledge society. Women predominate in skilled occupations associated with education, health and social work.

Skilled women interviewed in this study also felt that their skills were under-valued and that they experience subtle forms of racism and discrimination. Skilled women interviewed from the IT sector experienced similar forms of under-valuing of their skills and some stated that they were confronted with racism and xenophobia, whilst others had very positive experiences.

One woman interviewed is a self-employed fitness instructor. She spoke about the indifference and lack of encouragement towards her attempt to establish herself in self-employment. However, she has now successfully set up a business that is doing very well. Several women were working in domestic labour and unskilled work to fund their education and training to improve their economic position. This temporary loss of status was considered to be a necessary route to becoming qualified or skilled, sometimes in the area for which they had already gained qualifications in their country of origin.

A woman from China working in the IT sector stated that she experienced a doubly disadvantaged position as a Chinese woman and would be overlooked in promotion stating 'my employer naturally will give preference to an Irish person, and most probably to a man...I have to accept that I will not progress far here'. However, Siobhan's experience of working in the IT sector has been positive.

Siobhan is from China and works for a multinational software company. She had formerly been a lawyer in China and decided to retrain to work in the IT sector where there would be more job opportunities. She has been in Ireland for four years, two of which were on a student visa as a language student. She is currently on a working visa. Her workplace is a very positive environment to work in and team working means that there is plenty of connection with other employees. She works in a multinational team and enjoys her job very much.

Marija's experience of working as an architect has been very positive. In recent years there have been shortages of skilled workers and women are now working in larger numbers in this area. Working for a local authority has also been important to her in giving her access to maternity and other leave

arrangements. Coming from a former communist country, Marija was used to having gender equality in the workplace.

Marija is from Slovakia and has been living and working as an architect in Ireland for 11 years. She currently works for a Local Authority. Her experiences of living and working in Ireland have been very positive. When she finished her degree in architecture in Slovakia 12 years ago there were few opportunities to pursue her career and the pay levels were very low. She moved to France and worked as an architect for a construction company and also followed her postgraduate studies in urban architecture. She says of the time: 'I had a scholarship, it was wonderful, and the food and sunshine were fantastic'.

After returning to Slovakia she moved to Ireland and found work in a private company. Her employer first employed her on a student visa and then on a work permit. At this time 'there were difficulties in employing foreigners and my boss used the fact that I had a qualification in urban architecture to enable me to gain a work permit, but it was a long process, although there were not many people at the time that had these qualifications in Ireland'.

In this and her second job in a private company she was assisted by her employer and colleagues in integrating into work. 'They were excellent people and very helpful...I was the second foreigner and they welcomed foreigners and coped with language problems, particularly as I had to learn a lot of technical language about contracts and regulations and construction details etc.'

She later worked for one of Dublin's local authorities as this provided her with the chance to work on a larger number and variety of projects. Although she was on a temporary one-year contract for four years, she did eventually become a permanent employee. 'I was worried that I would lose my job and a group of us started pushing for interviews to be set up for permanent employment, as after four years it was not possible to have your contract renewed.'

She felt very welcome in Ireland. 'My first impression of Ireland was absolutely amazing. I was almost the first foreigner and I was very welcomed, very warm. This was very different to Slovakia where the turmoil from transition from communism made life very difficult, laws were changing from week to week and the social network was crumbling...the whole system was collapsing and people were used to some security...I wanted to make my contribution but it wasn't possible. Many people were getting rich quickly...it was palpable the suffering of the people. I wanted to leave and couldn't contribute.

'In my first job, people were eager to help me and included me as a family member...it was amazing...that doesn't happen in Slovakia. In the beginning, I was made to work as a student before I got the permit. The employer did this to

keep me while the permit was being worked out...after that work for architects took over because so many employers wanted you...they wanted to help you.'

One of the benefits of working for a local authority is that their policies on maternity leave and work-life balance enable women to juggle their work and family life. Marija is due to have a baby soon and she finds this a real benefit. 'Being an architect is a hard job. In private practice you are often working overtime and weekends. It's good for women to work here in Dublin City Council. You get time to go on maternity and they give you time off if your children get sick.'

Nursing and healthcare

Migration has affected Ireland's social care and health services in positive ways by alleviating labour shortages in the health sector. Many of these workers are women (NESC 2006; HSE 2007a). In some cases, highly qualified health professionals or university graduates who have come to work in Ireland are working in jobs that do not utilise their skills and potential, resulting in an economic and social loss to Irish society (NESC 2006; HSE 2007a).

The increased global demand for care workers arises because of socio-demographic, labour market and welfare factors. As Yeates argues:

'The ageing of the population, changes in family structure, the feminisation of the labour market, the masculinisation of women's employment patterns, and a shortage of public care services all make it difficult for female family members to perform reproductive work.'
(2005:4)

In some cases, this also results from changing global patterns of care and, in the case of Ireland, the shift from a developing country (that exported its nurses) to a developed country (that imports its nurses on an unprecedented scale) (Yeates 2004). International nurses now make a significant contribution to the running of Irish health and care services. They are the most important sector of female migrant employment, particularly from the Philippines, South Africa, India, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, China, the EU and Australia. There are approximately 6,000 overseas nurses and midwives in Ireland (INO 2005) and the indications show a continued shortfall in nurses with a projected increase in new overseas nurse registrations. This poses a huge challenge for the HSE and care providers in providing culturally diverse employment and recruitment practices, developing an inter-cultural workforce, and combating racism in the workplace (HSE 2007a). The INO's Overseas Nurses Group has been established to support overseas nurses because of a lack of 'formalised and regulated support structures for the smooth integration of migrant nurses and midwives into the Irish Health Care System' (INO 2005:2).

Van Eyck (2003) has documented experiences of racism and gender discrimination amongst women migrant health workers and the high social costs that women pay to work in receiving countries. In her study of women healthcare workers in the global economy, she showed that many women migrant workers found that employment in the host countries did not meet their expectations and many experienced debt and a lack of career progression. Many women were engaged in work that is deemed 'dirty, demeaning or degrading' and many were under-employed as care workers and domestic workers.

Difficulties for women overseas nurses and doctors include gaining access to promotional positions and an under-valuing of their skills and experience. For women doctors this relates to difficulties gaining access to senior positions in an already male-dominated area, short-term contracts and gaining access to consultant positions. This is backed up by evidence from other countries where healthcare staff, from low skilled through to high skilled occupations, experience some devaluing of their skills and experiences, with evidence of difficulties in gaining promotion and career development (Piper 2005).

Although women are represented in some areas that are male-dominated or where there is no significant gender difference, there are specific gender issues that can be drawn out. For example, a woman hospital doctor from Pakistan who was interviewed as part of this study, and who wished to remain anonymous, cited her experience of double discrimination. The discrimination was based on her gender and child caring responsibilities and working in a male-dominated job where women tend to be overlooked in terms of promotion and experience more limited career progression than men. She also stated that, as a Muslim woman, her ethnicity and religion were additional factors that contributed to her lack of progression through the Irish healthcare system.

Experiences of racism and exploitation have been reported by the INO and the *All Ireland Journal of Nursing and Midwifery*. The majority of these are found in nursing homes and the private care sector. The INO states that this might be explained by the absence of a regulating body to monitor activities (INO 2005). Abuses such as reduced terms and conditions of employment, unequal pay and long hours, lack of dignity at work and racism have been identified in the private care sector. In the majority of these cases, recruitment took place through work permits, where significant problems of exploitation and lack of regulation of recruitment agencies was reported. Fees of between €1,500 and €7,000 are regularly charged for securing employment.

Issues raised in interviews with women migrant nurses and the INO's Overseas Nursing Group range from problems concerning the full recognition of overseas nurses' qualifications and experience, lack of progression and career development, and regular experiences of overt and covert racism in the workplace. Many nurses state that they work in positions that are below their skills and experience, often working on lower levels of the pay scale and being

passed over for promotion. In some cases, nurses have been recruited to work in private care homes as low skilled care assistants, which under-values their professional training, skills and contributions. A similar experience is reported by nurses working in the North where there are a number of barriers to the progression of nurses (Animate 2004). In both jurisdictions, women put this down to prejudice when migrant nurses with experience and qualifications were put onto the lowest pay scale. Two interviewees in this study had each worked for ten years as lecturers in nursing at the University of Manila, Philippines. They believed they were coming to Ireland to work in a local hospital but the job turned out to be a home for people with learning disabilities. They were unable to move beyond the lowest grade of the pay scale because they did not have the Learning Disability Nurses qualification required of nurses in Ireland. They found this situation to be highly discriminatory and viewed the situation as deskilling and under-valuing their general nursing qualifications from the Philippines, which included nurse training in learning disability.

In some cases, delays in nurse registration have kept migrant nurses in lower skilled positions. One woman spoke about the deliberate and persistent delays in gaining nurse registration that were instigated by her employer in a private nursing home 'to avoid having to pay me the proper rate for the job'. The experiences of Marie and Cerilyn show that there were significant differences between the nursing jobs they held in Ireland.

Marie trained to be a nurse in the Philippines and, although she loved her job, she earned very little. Following her training and a period of working in the Philippines, she was recruited by a Manila-based nursing agency to work in a nursing home in a rural town in Co Kerry. She signed the contract in Manila and paid a fee of €500.

Marie hated the job and was very isolated and lonely. She experienced harassment and was treated badly. She felt discriminated against. She was often told to go into the basement to do the laundry. 'They often don't respect you. They don't really take you seriously because you are from the Philippines.' Sometimes she would be told off in front of other colleagues or her manager was rude and inconsiderate to her and her professionalism undermined.

Marie has since taken up a position in a HSE nursing home where she has a proper contract and full pay. She also received proper induction and has access to training and career development. Although Marie had five years' nursing experience, she was paid at the bottom of the pay scale and her experience was not taken into account. She did eventually get recognition for her experience (with support from the INO), but this took some time.

She says that a lot of nurses with experience did not know that they could do this. She sees it as a cost-saving exercise by the HSE to avoid paying the proper levels to those with the skill and experience.

Cerilyn is from the Philippines and has been living and working in Cork and Killarney for the past four years. When she first came to Ireland she had three young children. They were looked after by her mother at home in Cebu in the Philippines. She missed her children very badly.

She responded to an advert in the paper from the Irish Nursing Homes Organisation, which was recruiting for nurses. She was one of 20 nurses recruited out of 350. She considered herself to have been selected because she had more than five years of nursing experience. She started work in a private nursing home in Cork with a two-year contract on a working visa that has to be renewed every two years.

Cerilyn was unaware at the beginning that the working visa entitled her to work anywhere. She thought she was required to work only for the employer that recruited her.

At recruitment she was told that her accommodation would be free. However, on arrival she discovered that €200 a month would be deducted from her salary for this.

In the private home, she was on a lower rate of pay than she would have had working for the health board. She also had to carry out domestic work and tasks that were not within her job description. 'I felt very deskilled.' Her work was exhausting and her hours were very long (four 12-hour days). She received no training and was particularly concerned when she was asked to take on the responsibilities of a manager/matron. Cerilyn also took an additional nursing job on her days off in order to save enough money to send home to her family.

Cerilyn said that it was very hard at the start being in Ireland. 'I kept telling myself to be strong as I was doing it for my kids.'

When her contract with the private nursing home ended she took up a full-time position in a HSE nursing home. This has been a much better working experience. She has better terms and conditions of employment. She has had access to study days and training, and there is better health and safety.

Cleaning and domestic work and the global care chain

The migration of domestic and care workers has been fuelled by a growth of demand for domestic, health and social care workers. In particular, the 'maid-trade' is a distinct form of labour migration from poorer to richer countries. In 2002, up to 1.2 million women were working outside their own countries as foreign maids. Each year about 75,000 women leave South and South East Asia to work as domestic servants, nurses and service industry workers in Australia, Canada, the USA and Western Europe. Demands for domestic, childcare, health and other service-related jobs are closely connected to shifts in the feminisation of the labour market in Ireland. Increasing employment rates

for women have resulted in demands for domestic services as part of a global care chain. The Philippines is the largest exporting country of female labour. The restructuring of the economies of Eastern and Central Europe have been a significant driver for migration, brought about by rising unemployment and loss of jobs for women.

Women's independent migration is a relatively new phenomenon as women face pressures to migrate and assume a breadwinner role because of unemployment and poverty. The global economy of care is driven by supply and demand from South to North and from South to South. Care workers are a valuable export from poorer countries and a valuable import for richer countries (Yeates 2004; Piper 2005). In the case of Europe, care migration takes place from Central and Eastern Europe to Western Europe, facilitated by the enlargement of the EU as much as from changing patterns of employment and care in Europe (Lutz 2002).

International migration has forged significant changes in both care and gender relations. This has been examined in research by Fiona Williams and Anna Gavanas (2005) on the intersection of gender, 'race', and migration in the changing care regimes of UK, Sweden, and Spain. In particular, they show that the shift from single earning households (breadwinner model) to dual earning households (adult worker model) is directly related to the global economy of care. As a result, gender-specific migration experiences are particularly significant in the care and domestic sectors where there is evidence of a 'global care chain' (Van Eyck 2003, Anderson and Rogaly 2005).

As mentioned above, the nature and scale of the international migration of women in the care and domestic service sector arises where the development of the market in domestic care, such as cleaning and childcare, has emerged in response to the higher participation rate of women in the labour market and a corresponding growth in care provision needs for children and older people. Consequently, working women have used domestic labour from overseas for childcare and other domestic support. In effect, this has resulted in a transfer of female labour from poorer to richer countries to fill the care deficit in work traditionally associated with women's roles as carers and homemakers (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).

Different migration regimes (covering immigration policies and practices) also intersect with care regimes (covering different types of care provision in the public, private or domestic settings). In some countries, for example in the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Finland and France, there has been a recent shift away from the provision of services by the state to the providing of cash payments, tax credits or tax incentives to pay child minders, relatives or domestic workers for their services. These 'direct payments' have also enabled older people or disabled people to buy in support and assistance. The impact has been the development of home-based, often low-paid care or domestic

help that is directly related to policies that encourage the employment of women migrants as domestic/care workers.

Cleaning and domestic work are highly feminised areas of the labour market. Several women interviewed for this study had worked in these sectors. They expressed concern about the lack of protections and rights for domestic workers, leading to problems of exploitation.

Magdalena is from Poland. She came to Ireland with her teenage son in 2005 to join her husband who had taken up a job as a bricklayer. Her husband earns a good income. He has a good employer and experiences no discrimination. However, Magdalena's experience is not so positive.

She works for a contract cleaning company and earns very little. She got work through a friend of hers, although she doesn't know who her employer is. She was given no information about her rights and terms and conditions of employment when she took up the job. Although she did not sign a contract, she does receive pay slips. Her pay is €7.95 per hour and she does not receive holiday pay. On average, she works 20 hours a week but she does not know from one day to the next how many hours she will work. She has to wait for a phone call each morning to get details of the jobs for the day. She is picked up in a van and brought to the places of work. She would like to change her work as she is not that happy in the job. Her work is dirty and heavy and she has to start at five o'clock in the morning. Some days she has no work or just a few hours.

Magdalena worked for over 30 years in a Polish horticultural company. She lost her job when the company was privatised after the end of communism. Her biggest barrier is not speaking English and she realises that she has to learn English to move into a better job.

Tanja is from the Ukraine and has been living in Ireland for 13 years. She has worked in low paid jobs as a housekeeper, cleaner and waitress. She is now on a widow's pension and works with older people doing some cleaning, shopping and social support. In her home country, she had her own company in property sales and industrial equipment. She is university educated in business and economics.

Tanja has refugee status. Her husband was a political prisoner for five years during the Soviet era. He was released from prison and allowed to leave the country on a special arrangement for Jewish people. The family gained refugee status after one-and-a-half years. She and her husband had not been allowed to work prior to that. She received good support when she and her family arrived in Ireland 13 years ago. She had good support from a migrant solicitor and viewed the system to be very good in providing more choices to people than at present. The family had help with benefits and assistance with schooling for the children, language school, social welfare sufficient to feed the family,

and a free place to live. They also received a medical card and were given full access to services. The Community Welfare Officer (CWO) was very helpful when her husband died. Although Tanja has had a positive experience of living in Ireland, she believes that Irish people gave them dirty and bad jobs that didn't pay well and were insecure. However, she was free to go and work anywhere and had no problem on arrival and with social welfare and assistance.

There has been a similar growth of domestic workers recruited in private households. In some cases, there exist problems of low pay and long working hours and, sometimes, physical and sexual abuse (MRCI 2004). Because much of the care and domestic work takes place within private households, the vulnerability of women migrant workers to exploitation and abuse is further exacerbated by the invisibility of women working in this sector (MRCI 2006c; Anderson 2000). It is clear that the oppressive and exploitative nature of much domestic and care work is closely linked to race and class inequalities, as well as the increasing privatisation of care and the employment of domestic workers in the home.

Maria is from the Philippines. She was recruited into a private household in Ireland as a domestic worker. She thought she had been employed to care for a disabled child. She then found out that she was looking after all four children in the family and was expected to cook, do the laundry and clean the house. 'I loved the child and I was very happy to care for him...but I didn't expect all the other things I was told to do...I felt powerless to complain.'

She was given very little time off and was paid €220 per week. Her employers told her that her board and lodging was deducted from her wages. She ended up working six days a week and was expected to be available 24 hours a day.

'My sister worked there before me and she didn't know about the law...she lost her job when she got pregnant and she only earned €120 a week. When I got the job I knew nothing about my rights...they really abused us...I was earning €220 a week. Then my sister had a miscarriage and they tried to get her back as she had earned less than me...it was incredible. I started 7.30 in the morning and finished 9.30 at night. Sometimes I had to work longer...there was abuse and no respect. I only stayed there longer because I loved the boy that I was caring for.'

One Christmas Day, after she had prepared Christmas dinner for the whole family, she was told to leave the house and return when the visitors had left that evening. 'They didn't want me around in case it was embarrassing for them to be seen to have a domestic worker from the Philippines doing all the work for them...you can imagine how I felt. It made me feel bad about myself. It was all about self-pity and then you want to go back to the Philippines but there was not enough money to do this. My employer only gave me a one-way ticket from Manila.'

Maria left her job because it was too hard to continue. She has since joined SIPTU. She is now campaigning with SIPTU for the rights of domestic workers.

'Now I have a new employer and she has applied the Code of Practice on Domestic Workers.¹³ She will be a good employer.'

Horticulture and agriculture

In the horticultural and agricultural sectors in jobs such as fruit picking, mushroom picking, vegetable and meatpacking, there has been a significant increase in women migrant workers. Often work is seasonal and it is a sector that has traditionally employed women workers, whose labour has largely been substituted by that of migrant workers. There have been a number of cases of exploitation found in evidence collected by the MRCI (2006c). A number of cases have been taken to the Employment Appeals Tribunal concerning low pay and long hours worked by mushroom pickers. One case supported by SIPTU and the MRCI was taken on behalf of three women from Latvia, Ukraine and Russia, who claimed they were paid around €2.00 per hour and regularly worked a 16-17 hour day without days off. Many of the women working in these positions have replaced low paid Irish women workers, who are working in better paid positions. As one woman interviewed for this study stated: 'These are jobs that Irish women won't do now...that's why they bring the Latvian girls over'.

The experiences of a group of women working in mushroom picking interviewed for this study shows that poor and sometimes unsafe working conditions, a lack of knowledge about rights and entitlements, and isolation from Irish society all compound to make their experiences negative. For many of these women, being in contact with SIPTU and the MRCI has helped to highlight their conditions of employment. SIPTU now has a full-time organiser working with mushroom pickers and a mushroom pickers' support group has been established by the MRCI with SIPTU.

Martha is from Latvia and, until recently, worked in a mushroom factory. She spoke about the bad conditions of employment, concerns about chemicals in the polytunnels, poor light conditions when picking, and being treated with a lack of dignity. All the workers are women from Latvia and Lithuania. 'They

¹³ The Code of Practice for Protecting Persons Employed in Other People's Homes sets out the entitlement of domestic workers in the area of employment rights and protections available to other employees and regarding employers' obligations to inform employees of their rights. The Code was developed as a measure under *Towards 2016* by the Labour Relations Commission, following pressure from MRCI and SIPTU.

know they can exploit us because we are from Latvia, we have no power and no right to complain.'

Although normal working hours are around 40 hours a week, it is not unusual for her to work 80 hours per week. She said that one of her colleagues had only earned €60 one week because she was a slow picker and was inexperienced. They have a piecework system (being paid for each tray picked), which is very unfair. No one is guaranteed minimum weekly earnings for hours worked. Another woman she works with was paid €3 overtime for an additional 2 hours work picking the small mushrooms.

Her average weekly earnings were €160-€200, which included overtime, but that is still much more than she would earn at home. There is no consistent system for holiday pay and €14 per week is deducted for travel.

Martha had recently spoken out about the bad conditions of work and exploitation and was sacked. She is considering taking a case for unfair dismissal and is being supported by SIPTU. She said: 'I feel that I am nothing here. I go home [to Latvia] to feel somebody...I am not valued as a person, but I still earn more than I would at home, so I carry on doing the work'.

Anita used to work in the horticultural sector, picking mushrooms, but was sacked for speaking out against low pay, which averaged 50 cents per hour. She felt very strongly that women migrant workers in the horticultural sector should be supported by unions and that there should be more detailed inspection of workplaces. She said that on the surface 'everything looks fine, it's only when you look under the surface that the exploitation and bad treatment of women is found...many women are too scared to speak out in case they lose their jobs...they have no rights'.

International students

Many female students, particularly those from China, are working in Ireland in part-time and temporary jobs. Very little is known about the situation and experience of working students, many of whom would like to remain in Ireland in the longer term and permanently. One study carried out by NCCRI (2007) on the Chinese community in Ireland found many examples of exploitation of workers. Many female students, particularly those from China, are working in Ireland in part-time and temporary jobs. The examples of Kim, Lin and Lee exemplify three different experiences of many young Chinese people working in Ireland today.

Kim is 21 years old and has been in Ireland for three years on a student visa. She works as a waitress on four 12-hour shifts Thursday-Sunday. She works in a very busy restaurant and the work is stressful. However, she is happy with the

work and her employer treats her well. She earns minimum wages even though she has taken on additional responsibilities.

She has worked in a number of different low paid jobs, including cleaning in the Four Courts and various nightclubs. At one time she had three jobs and was only able to get two hours' sleep a night. She says that she needed to work such long hours in order to get enough money to pay her language school fees. She has normally found jobs through word of mouth in the Chinese community and has regularly been 'sold' jobs, which is usually a fee of two weeks' wages.

She has seen a lot of exploitation of young Chinese people by employers in Ireland and recognises that she and others are in very tenuous employment positions.

Kim attends language school three days a week. She attends 25 weeks a year and is required to do this for the annual renewal of her student visa. She wants to stay in Ireland and eventually go to university. She feels that there are few opportunities for her at home in Northern China, although she recognises that she will have to return by the age of 30 as tradition says that she has to marry by then. She would like to have residency in Ireland to get more security.

Lin has been in Ireland for six years. She studied English for the first nine months, which was preparation for studying at Portobello College for a three-year degree in accounting. She is currently working (on a three-year contract) in an accountancy company as part of her training. She would like to apply for residence in the future but this is not possible. She has no interest in being an Irish citizen, but thinks it is unfair that her three years of working (as part of her accountancy training) is not included in the citizenship rules. She thinks the immigration system is unfair and that there should be a green card system.

Lee worked on a student visa for an international company as part of her accountancy training. She was first an English student in Dublin for six months and then went on to accountancy training, and a Masters. Lee is already a qualified accountant in China but has to do two years' training and three years' work experience before she can become fully qualified in Ireland. She would have preferred to have been able to do a conversion course as a short cut to gaining her accountancy registration. She is fearful that she could lose her job because she has been told that people from Eastern Europe will get preferential treatment. She worries what would happen to her qualification if she returned to China. She would like to stay in Ireland.

Voluntary and community sector

Women have used their skills and experiences to develop services and employment in the community and inter-cultural sectors, providing services such as advocacy, cultural mediation, translation and other community-related activities. In recent years, there has been a growth of employment possibilities

and employment experiences in the community and voluntary sector, where women migrants are providing interpreting services, advocacy and information services, mediation, and community and support work. The demand for this work and the development of new migrant support organisations are helping to empower women and provide good employment conditions. These experiences show how women migrants are shaping new types of community organising and community-based services.

Women migrants working in the community and voluntary sector, who were interviewed as part of this study, have stated that the sector provides them with good employment experiences. Bayo's experience has been a positive one.

Bayo comes from Nigeria. She has been living in Ireland for six years and is looking for work. She has worked in a number of childcare jobs in the voluntary sector and holds a diploma in childcare, which she attained in Ireland.

Bayo is a refugee and gained residence five years ago. She has two children, aged five and eight years, who live with her. Her youngest child was born in Ireland.

Her last job was as a childcare worker. She had a two-year contract in a community organisation. She worked part time and had pro-rata terms and conditions of employment. She considers herself to have been fairly treated. Working part time enabled her to study at college. She also combined her work and study with her own childcare responsibilities.

'My working conditions were excellent and my employer had good working practices...I had on-the-job training in computer literacy and food and hygiene training; this was the same as all other staff. What made the job good was the sense of teamwork and cooperation with work colleagues.'

Self-employment

An increasing number of women are opting to establish their own businesses in Ireland to combine work with caring and family responsibilities and to gain autonomy and independence at work. Because women, and particularly minority ethnic women, experience discrimination and disadvantage at work, including hitting the notorious 'glass ceiling' in their careers, self-employment becomes an interesting alternative. Two women interviewed as part of this study were working in a self-employed capacity. A further woman saw self-employment as the best way to utilise her skills and combine her work with her childcare responsibilities. All of these women saw self-employment as a route to satisfying work, progression of skills, autonomy, and control of their working lives.

Ina is from Nigeria. She first came to Ireland in 1987 on a student visa and completed her leaving certificate. During this time she worked in various casual jobs including a fish and chip take away. She returned to Ireland to work in 1993 and established a successful hairdressing business, which began as a mobile service and is now run from a salon in Rathmines. She employs two people. In Nigeria she had been involved in politics and had been a secretary to a politician.

Ina talked about her experience of living and working in Ireland as being largely positive. She received good support from her bank and local enterprise centre when setting up her business, including help with writing a business plan and gaining a start-up loan. She is actively involved in the Church of Ireland and hopes to become a full-time clergy.

Ulyana is from the Ukraine. Five years ago she came to Ireland with her 14-year-old son to join her husband who was a refugee. As a wife of a refugee she had no entitlements. She was separated from her husband shortly after she arrived. This was a 'terrible time for me; I had nothing; I did not know where to turn for help'. She managed to borrow money and, with her small savings, she found a place to live and then found a job.

Ulyana had worked in a university as a lecturer in sports studies in the Ukraine and was educated to Masters level. She got a job as a fitness instructor in a gym in Dublin city centre. She was treated very well by her employer and was given help with learning English and settling in.

She later worked for another gym in County Dublin, which was a very bad experience. She started as a gym instructor and was very quickly promoted to a gym manager, with a range of responsibilities including staff supervision and training. She felt she was treated with no dignity and was paid minimum wages to supervise and train other staff as well as run fitness classes. She felt undervalued and deskilled in her work and knows that this unfair treatment was because she is from the Ukraine. She was sometimes asked to do the cleaning and do the chemicals in the pool (something that was not asked of Irish women she was supervising). Although she took the job of gym manager she never received the higher rate of pay for this, despite constantly asking for her pay rise. She was very unhappy in the job and eventually left due to stress.

Ulyana has since established herself as a self-employed fitness instructor and her business is going very well.

Françoise is from the Ivory Coast and has been living in Ireland since 2001. She speaks English and French fluently and has a degree and Masters in politics from Guildhall University, London. She has two Irish-born children who live with her. Her oldest child is living with her grandparents, one of whom is Irish born. She gained residency in March 2005.

When she completed her studies in London in 2001 she had planned to return home. However, the war in the Ivory Coast had begun and she realised it was not safe to return with her young child. She spent some time in Belfast before coming to Dublin. Because she has two pre-school children she has found it difficult to work. She has recently been trying to establish her own business selling wedding accessories and handmade cards. She is studying for a diploma in travel and tourism through the VEC so that she can open a travel agency.

Irregular migrants and undocumented women

Undocumented women are the most vulnerable of all women migrant workers. There is very little known about their numbers and experiences. They are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and harassment, and have no or limited rights to education, health, child support services and welfare benefits.

Several women interviewed in this study had worked in an undocumented capacity on a number of occasions. There are blurred lines between documented and undocumented work and women often become undocumented when their permits run out or if they lose their job. It is not untypical for women migrants to move between documented and undocumented work, particularly in the care, entertainment, hospitality, cleaning and domestic work sectors.

One of the problems is that there is an absence of data on irregular migration. Much of the evidence tends to be anecdotal and based on individual stories issued from NGOs supporting women migrants. In the area of trafficking, there is substantial international evidence to show that the majority of those trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and children; whereas both women and men experience trafficking for labour exploitation.

Anna's story shows how she was able to get out of undocumented work and find a better job.

Anna is a 30-year-old woman from Russia. She has been living in Ireland for four years. When she first came to Ireland she worked in Co Galway for seven months as a waitress in a pub and a take away restaurant. Her employer did not give her a work permit or a PPS number and she didn't receive the green book (registration document). She felt that he 'wanted to keep me as a slave with no rights'.

Anna eventually went to the Garda station to complain. She was sent to the Galway immigration registration office. Her English was poor and she was entitled to interpretation. The Garda also found that her employer was employing Chinese people with no wages (just providing food and accommodation). The restaurant was subsequently shut down.

Anna felt she was treated very badly and was very deskilled. The place was very dirty and her employer didn't care about staff. Conflicts between her and her employer started when she was told to wash dishes when her contract said she was a waitress. Anna believes it is important to stand up for your rights. On trade unions she said: 'You are kidding me. What mean the trade union in Ireland?'

After this bad work experience she came to Dublin where she worked for a short time as a domestic worker and cleaner. She has a degree in Business Economics and Law and worked as a sales manager. She is currently an executive assistant in a large Dublin company. This has been a good experience and more akin to her skills and background.

Marah's story typifies many experiences of women migrant workers who have been undocumented.

Marah is from Romania. She worked in cafés and pubs. She never received a contract or a work permit, and she was paid in cash weekly.

She came to Ireland to join her sister and brother when she finished college in Romania. She got a job in a café working for cash in hand. 'I enjoyed the job. I think we were paid much less than the Irish workers and the employer never used to give us the tips. The employer was a very nice person and we didn't feel like we could say anything. I used to work from seven in the morning till seven at night. During the whole day there was only a half-hour break. I worked from Monday-Saturday; it was never possible to get a day off.

'At the beginning we didn't realise what our rights were. There was one time when I was sick and he wouldn't let me go to the doctor. Then I just realised that I had to find something else.

'After that I worked in a pub in the evenings and a café during the day, I worked from eight in the morning to 11 at night. I used to go home when I finished in the café at five, have a shower, and then start work in the pub. Both were cash-in-hand jobs. I worked Monday to Saturday in the pub. I really liked it as they paid a bit more and I got my tips this time. I became the number one, I was very good at my job and they were happy with me and I made good tips. Most people working in bars and restaurants get paid cash in hand, they are not all bad employers...but that is just how it is done.'

However, Marah's undocumented status meant that she was unable to apply for residency. 'I have been here for seven years but I can't use the years I have been working to gain residence or citizenship as I was undocumented...it's not a fair process. An amnesty would be a good idea just to recognise people are here. If you have been here for three or four years or have strong connections to the State, you should be allowed to become documented. They don't want to admit there are loads of undocumented people...there are many...it's one of

the category of people. There could be domestic violence and no one would know. You are too afraid to go to the hospital. I have friends who have said that you want to run away from the hospital. Being undocumented you are stuck into something you don't want to be, you are standing still, you are not moving forward in a personal and professional way. And then integration is impossible. I couldn't travel anywhere, I couldn't go away with friends.'

Women who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation

Little is known about the lives and experiences of women who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation or labour, and evidence is patchy. Although the level in Ireland is lower than other countries, there has been a recent and worrying increase in human trafficking, the majority of which is for the sexual exploitation of women and children. The 2006 *Report of Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform and An Garda Síochána Working Group on Trafficking in Human Beings* states that 'Ireland is at risk from the same threats as those facing its EU partners and, in particular, our nearest neighbours. Garda operations have uncovered a small number of trafficking cases.' A series of press reports and RTE's 2006 *Prime Time* documentary on trafficking, as well as reports from organisations working with trafficked women and children, such as Ruhama and the HSE's Women's Health Project in Dublin, point to a substantial increase in the number of women and children experiencing trafficking for sexual exploitation (Pillinger 2007 forthcoming).

In the absence of a legal framework concerning the protection, support and security needs of victims of trafficking, most of the attention has been given to the prosecution of traffickers. There are also some concerns that the disappearance of unaccompanied minors in Ireland is linked to young people being internally trafficked into sexual exploitation and exploitative forms of employment (Irish Refugee Council 2006, Conroy 2003).

Trafficking of women and girls for sale into domestic work and as sex workers has become known as the modern day form of slavery. Victims are often deceived by traffickers that they will be entering into jobs such as domestic work or entertaining, only to find that they are forced into working in the sex industry. These women not only experience discrimination because of their gender and race, but also because of their irregular status, which means that they are unable to access healthcare and other services. It is for this reason that NGOs and migrant support organisations have campaigned for access to services such as shelters run by NGOs to protect trafficked women, and improved legal protection for trafficked women, including rights to access health and other supports. The accession of the ten new member states in 2004 helped to focus EU attention on the rising number of trafficked women and children into Western Europe (estimated by the European Commission as 120,000 trafficked women and children each year).

It is perhaps in the area of trafficking that there is the greatest invisibility of women migrants. There is little or no data. To date, no research in Ireland has highlighted the support and security needs of trafficked women and children, and the challenges they face in return and reintegration programmes in countries of origin. In 2007 the ICI commissioned a major research study on the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation in Ireland. The outcomes of the study are intended to inform the development of policy, as well as of measures to provide for the support and security needs of trafficked victims.

Section six: Women migrants living in Ireland and accessing services

Introduction

The diversity of migration experiences not only has an impact on working conditions but also on the experiences of integrating into life in Ireland. This chapter looks at women migrant's experiences of integration, living in Ireland, and of accessing services. The social integration of migrants has been linked to the need for policies to combat discrimination (Rudiger and Spencer 2003, MRCI 2006a), as well as to ensuring that migrants are not excluded from service provision in areas such as health, education, training, language provision, and access to information about rights and entitlements (Pillinger 2006 and 2007, Kelleher Associates 2005, MRCI 2006a).

There are a number of challenges for Irish policy and particularly the social inclusion and integration of migrants. These challenges are multifaceted and, according to NESC, the challenge for integration policy is to respond to the scale and diversity of migration by improving capacity and service developments. 'These include improving the collection and use of data, enhancing the ability of staff to deal with a diversity of users, understanding the vulnerabilities of women in the migration-integration process and providing the public with better information on service entitlements and standards.' (NESC 2006: xvi)

Positive and negative experiences of integration

Many of the women interviewed as part of this study saw migration to Ireland as a means of lifting their families and themselves out of poverty. The majority intended to stay in Ireland in the longer term and wanted to integrate fully into Irish society. For some women, migrating to Ireland had also meant adjusting to new gender roles, some of which were connected to being autonomous and independent. For others, migration led them to become more dependent on their spouses because of their dependent status.

In interviews with women migrants, several stated that, through their integration into life and work in Ireland, they were freer to be an individual, compared to their home countries, which often restricted their roles and independence. Two African women, interviewed as part of this study, spoke about the greater opportunities to live independently than in their home countries, where they were often subjected to sexual harassment and violence. However, because of the association between migration and the dependency of female spouses on male migrant workers, several women spoke about the system reinforcing dependence on husbands/partners, which often represented a loss of financial independence for them compared to their home countries. One woman spouse

of a migrant worker who was unable to work felt she was forced into a position of complete dependence on her husband.

Although women interviewed in this study had no complaints about local community life, the majority of women felt that they were not fully integrated in their local communities and rarely socialised outside of their homes or their national communities. For some women, accessing services such as healthcare was highlighted as a major problem, particularly where cultural, communications, and information barriers existed.

For some women the experience of integrating into Ireland has been a positive one. This can be seen from the experiences of Nusha, Marah and Marija.

Nusha says: 'Our moving to Ireland was part of our maturity. I now read newspapers and I know more about what happens here politically than I did in Bulgaria. I have a strong bond with Ireland. It is a great democracy and it can't be compared with countries that are just trying to establish themselves democratically. Now I see things in an Irish way. When we moved to Ireland for the first time, the parent liaison officer came and visited me after a month of my child attending school. We hit it off immediately and she has been ever since my friend, our tutor, my mother and my daughter's grandmother. I have come across the most amazing people in Ireland. I have found my friends here.'

Marah says: 'It is a really positive thing that has happened to Ireland and my experience has been really positive. There are more women migrants than men. They are here and they contribute loads. It's nice to see all this diversity. What I would like is that women should be looked at without looking at nationality. No matter where you come from, you do the same thing. Women have a lot in common no matter their nationality or background. Women are a driving force.'

According to **Marija**: 'I feel settled. I don't know about if this is for good...we both have possibilities to go back to Slovakia as things are picking up there and there is a lot of new investment...I heard that they had €7 billion being invested for new infrastructure...it may pick up really well...we may think about going there.'

Racism in everyday lives

Despite these positive experiences, many of the women interviewed had experienced disadvantage and discrimination in their daily lives and in settling into Ireland, including experiences of racism and xenophobia. Most women felt that Irish people were generally friendly and helpful, and that some people went out of their way to welcome them. However, many stated that there was a real absence of knowledge of their own cultures and backgrounds. This often resulted in inappropriate and negative assumptions and stereotypes.

In the interviews, women migrant workers associated the racism they experienced with negative stereotypes associated with them as women and as migrant workers. This included assumptions that they were unjustly claiming benefits for themselves or their children, or taking jobs from Irish people. There were many examples of highly sexualised racism and sexual harassment on the streets or in the shops. Some women spoke about their coping tactics: 'I just kept my head down'; 'I socialise in my own community'; 'I stay at home to socialise'; and 'I don't go out at night'. The younger women migrants would like to make friends with young Irish women but they find it difficult to make friends, and to take part and be welcomed in Irish culture. A number of women highlighted negative stereotypes associated with women migrant workers, which affected their personal security and sense of independence. These included racialised notions of black women as bad parents and sexualised images of women migrants from Russia and the Baltic States, with their roles being associated with lap dancing clubs. These negative images made it very hard for women migrants to forge new and autonomous roles.

Several women talked about the distress that this racism caused them. Black women experienced the highest levels of racism, including stones thrown at them by children and regular verbal abuse. One woman stated that she felt very vulnerable when walking home from the bus at night. She worked shifts and felt scared at night, particularly at weekends. 'It's when Irish people are drunk at night that it is the worst...the racist and sexist abuse to women is terrible, they can be really nasty.'

However, the experiences of racism were diverse. Some women said that they had experienced fewer incidences of racism and xenophobia in recent years, whilst others felt that, as the number of migrants had increased in Ireland, their experiences of racism had grown. Some women stated that they felt vulnerable if they were out alone at night, for example travelling home from a late shift at work. Black women experienced more racism than women from the new member states of the EU, who had few experiences of direct hostility or racism. In some cases, the lack of understanding of cultural traditions and differences in culture were often cited as problems leading to difficulties in communication, misunderstandings and racist assumptions. In some areas, the subtleties of Irish culture were not understood by women migrant workers and this had led to difficulties, particularly in jobs that had front-line customer contact or in accessing services, such as healthcare. In other cases, negative assumptions and stereotypes about women migrants were commonplace. These were found particularly concerning black women's parenting roles and sexualised images of women from Eastern Europe, which in turn worked against equality and integration.

Access to services

Most of the women interviewed knew little about the services that they were entitled to and many had experienced difficulties in accessing health, education and other services. Most women stated that, on arrival, they had little knowledge or understanding about how the 'system' operated or where to go for help. Some women felt disadvantaged because of the limitations on their claims to welfare benefits, medical cards and other services. Several women stated that they would like to see information support, support with accommodation and healthcare, and free language courses being made available to spouses of migrant workers and women migrant workers, particularly those that are very isolated and vulnerable. This is borne out by the NCCRI's study on *Improving Government Service Provision to Minority Ethnic Groups* (2006). It argues that public service provision will be enhanced if emphasis is given to mainstreaming, targeting, benchmarking and engagement between decision-makers, service providers and NGOs.

Access to health services

Whilst there are some positive developments shaping the provision of culturally appropriate and competent health services in Ireland, significant gaps still remain in provision, awareness and understanding regarding the experiences and situation of migrant and minority ethnic women. The majority of women interviewed for this study had either never or had rarely used health services. They had limited information about services and did not know how to access them. One woman visited her dentist every year in Moscow when she took her annual trip home, another woman had returned to China for medical treatment, whilst others relied on the pharmacy for medications if they got sick or they went home to access medication or treatments. One woman said:

'I just hope I don't get sick as I don't have insurance. Is that what I would need, insurance? You see, I don't know what to do to get healthcare. I was told you had to pay for it.'

Another woman had difficulty in registering with a GP.

'I have had problems with the GP. I tried seven GPs before they would take me on to their books. They told me that they were full but I knew they were still taking people on to their books.'

Another says:

'The Irish health is, compared to Slovakia, pretty bad...it's actually scary...I have VHI because I was frightened to stay in public hospitals as I heard a lot of bad stories. What happens when you get sick is that

we all go back to Slovakia...basically now I can't pay my health insurance in Slovakia because there has been a clamp down on people not working there....I still go there but I have to pay now, although it is about a quarter of the cost to see the doctor or the dentist. Now that I am pregnant this is the first time that I am taking the health service in Ireland. I have gone semi private, which means that we paid €800 from our pocket and the rest comes from VHI. So far the experience has been excellent, although I had to go back to Slovakia for one of my scans as they were all booked up here. It was cheaper for me to pay for the flight and get a scan in Slovakia than to wait and pay for one here.'

Several women have had babies since they have been working in Ireland. They spoke about their vulnerability when pregnant and having no information about services, although they made no complaints about health services overall.

Research in Northern Ireland has shown that social isolation amongst young mothers has had serious health consequences. In particular, 'post-natal depression amongst migrant worker mothers was felt to be a very serious and worsening issue. This was often exacerbated due to not having family in the area.' (Craigavan and Banbridge Health and Social Services Trust 2005).

In this study, women migrants raised specific gender-related health issues concerning how women's cultural, ethnic and religious identities shape access to services. In other consultations, women migrants have stated that information and communications about services and access to services needs to be culturally mediated in gender-sensitive ways. For example, a recent consultation exercise for the development of the HSE's Intercultural Strategy in Health (HSE 2007a) highlighted the need for culturally competent service provision as well as an emphasis on empowering women in minority ethnic communities, through community participation and community development, so that they can be better informed and resourced to improve health outcomes within their communities. Much of this requires attention to principles of human rights based on the importance of minority ethnic health as a human rights issue (on the basis of Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)¹⁴, equality, inclusion, and involvement and participation of minority ethnic communities. Similarly, there are important points raised about the need for gender issues to be taken into account in planning, delivery and monitoring so that services are gender proofed for their impact on women in migrant groups and communities.

Specific issues raised about access to health services in the consultations for the HSE's Intercultural Strategy in Health showed that there are a number of ill-

¹⁴ "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

health problems related to cultural traditions and gender roles (HSE 2007b). These include language barriers, respect for religious practices, a woman's right to see a female practitioner, family responsibility, and issues concerning the need for gender-sensitive services in areas such as maternity services, child and family services, cervical screening, and domestic violence services. In the area of pregnancy, it was found that minority ethnic women often receive inadequate or no antenatal care, and experience higher levels of still birth and infant mortality. A number of submissions made by women's organisations to the HSE's strategy refer to the need to ensure that a gender mainstreaming approach is put in place so that gender is effectively integrated into the planning, design and monitoring of services (Women's Health Council 2007, Cáirde 2007, Women's Aid 2007). These organisations also raised issues about the health needs of particular groups of women who experience exclusion from participation in health and, in particular, the health needs of vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors, women and children who have experienced trafficking for sexual exploitation, people who have experienced trafficking for work, spouses of work permit holders, and migrant workers who do not fulfil the HRC. By advocating a gender-based approach, it is possible to identify the issues that are unique to minority ethnic women, particularly in areas such as childcare and maternity health, and specific targeted support and outreach programmes for women who are socially isolated and at risk of abuse or violence.

In particular, the consultations for the HSE's Intercultural Strategy in Health identified a number of barriers experienced by minority ethnic communities, including poor access to information, communications and language barriers and, as one participant stated, 'bearing the shame of saying that you don't understand'. Groups and organisations cited a lack of knowledge and competency about different cultural practices, alongside racism and discrimination, as contributing to specific health issues being neglected. In particular, the impact of immigration status on people's capacity to improve their health and well-being has been raised by a number of organisations. This includes difficulties faced by undocumented workers in accessing health services (ICI 2007b), and barriers faced by women migrant workers in accessing healthcare, particularly for those women working in isolated and low paid sectors (MRCI 2007). It also included the need to address inequalities in health resulting from poor access to services, bad housing, and finding secure and decent employment and education opportunities, all of which have an impact on poverty and social exclusion (Cáirde 2007). Although immigration status can affect entitlements to services, it also has an impact on people's own perceptions of their health.

Specific gender-related health issues have been raised in the consultations for the HSE's Intercultural Strategy in Health (HSE 2007b). The Women's Health Council argues that gender is a key determinant of health and that minority ethnic women are doubly discriminated against because of gender and ethnicity. 'This double discrimination in turn affects all aspects of their lives

including their health.’ Recommendations are made to integrate gender as a social determinant of health, to introduce a positive duty to promote equality, to implement a whole systems approach that addresses the mainstreaming of services as well as specific targeted actions, and a community development approach. Four main priorities are identified: access to information and services; mental health; reproductive and maternity care; and violence against women. It was also found that asylum seekers, refugees and Traveller women require additional supports related to their specific situations and experiences. In particular, women asylum seekers need support in adjusting to new gender roles. Specific issues of gender-based persecution and female genital mutilation (FGM) need to be addressed, as well as the traumas associated with migration, mental health, sexual health, and reproductive health. Muslim women¹⁵ were also found to have specific health needs, including access to a female doctor, particularly when physical examinations were taking place, and the need for respect for and knowledge of religious practices, cultural norms and beliefs.

The health needs of refugees and asylum seekers living in direct provision are also of concern. According to the Combat Poverty Agency: ‘Not having the right to work, to participate in third-level education, to cook one’s own meals, to appropriate accommodation, especially for families, all contribute to high levels of poverty, stress, mental illness and poorer health status among asylum seekers’ (Combat Poverty Agency 2007: 5). Cáirde similarly states that ‘asylum seekers are experiencing negative effects of direct provision accommodation on their health and mental health, in particular due to poor living conditions, lack of mainstream entitlement to health and social services/benefits (this leads to poverty and exclusion), and lack of entitlement to educational and employment opportunities’ (Cáirde 2007: 3).

Providing culturally appropriate healthcare services requires service providers to be more imaginative in their approach. This includes community development and empowerment approaches, and the provision of cultural or intercultural mediation to improve access to and enhance the quality of care to women minority ethnic users. The cultural mediation programme operated by Access Ireland is an example of how women from refugee and minority ethnic groups are trained as mediators, many of whom have had extensive experience in health and social work in their own countries. A Roma Cultural Mediation project, funded through the EQUAL programme, has helped to provide Roma people, including Roma women, with greater equality of access to health, social and educational services, and to develop appropriate professional and intercultural competences amongst service providers.

A strategic focus to equality in health by the Equality Authority has resulted in a number of initiatives to promote equality in health through Equal Status Reviews of health services. These have taken into account the intersection of

¹⁵ Focus group with Muslim women, the Islamic Cultural Centre, Dublin, December 2006, as part of the consultations for the HSE’s Intercultural Strategy in Health.

gender, race and ethnicity in the provision of health services. The publication *The Equal Status Act and the Provision of Health Services* (Equality Authority 2006) and the development of a National Framework of Equality in Health have included measures to ensure that health services become 'culturally competent', within a framework of equality and diversity, by taking account of the needs of migrants in the planning, delivery, and monitoring of services.

Access to information

Many of the women interviewed prioritised information (in their own languages) as key to their integration and settling in. Many would have liked some basic information on arrival about rights and entitlements, accommodation, health services, childcare and education, maternity services, reproductive services, English language classes, and training courses. One woman said that 'there should be information leaflets in shops, ethnic hairdressers, schools, places where women go so that they know what their rights are'.

Magdalena from Poland would like to integrate more but the language barrier means that she relies heavily on the Polish community here. She goes to church every Sunday.

'It is an important part of Polish people's lives here as it serves also as social contact, with people staying on after church to meet with Polish friends and talk. I think if I spoke more English I would be more able to integrate into the community.'

Informal information giving and receiving was often the most important source of information for the women in the least skilled jobs, many of whom were extremely marginalised from Irish society and had few language resources to draw upon. In these situations, informal women's networks in their own communities were an important source of support and help with finding accommodation, sharing and pooling childcare, and support in finding health and maternity services.

Several women spoke about the importance of their local churches. Ina was involved in her local church. She had been involved with a group of churches in writing a booklet on how to welcome people to Ireland. In many cases, as with social contacts, information was sought and provided in specific shops, such as the Latvian shop, the Lithuanian shop, the Russian shop, and various African shops.

Marija says that networks are really important for people when they first arrive.

'If people can get in contact with other people that's good, this could be done through a website, you could get information as well.'

A large number of interviewees gained information from newspapers e.g. Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish or Russian newspapers. One woman thought that Citizen's Information Centres were only for people who were Irish citizens. She did not think that she was entitled to use them 'because I am not a citizen'. This particular woman had been seeking information about maternity benefits and did not know where to go for information. One woman had found a Citizens Information Centre to be very helpful in giving her information about employment rights and social benefits.

Access to education and training, including English classes

According to research by the ICI (Healy 2007), access to English language classes is a key to integration. However, many migrants experience language barriers. These barriers undermine the success of integration policies, particularly if the Government makes English competency a requirement of long-term residency and citizenship. It is recommended that the Government invest in a national programme of English language and introductory courses for migrants.

Several women interviewed in this study spoke about the difficulties they faced because they did not speak English. Examples of this were signing contracts of employment in English without any knowledge of what they were signing, poor access to information about rights and entitlements to housing, social welfare or healthcare, and feeling socially excluded. These women had found it difficult to integrate into their local communities. A group of Latvian and Lithuanian women working in mushroom picking only socialised with other Latvian and Lithuanian people. The women shared accommodation, pooled resources and cooked communally in order to save money. Language and culture became major barriers and they had few links with Irish people and their local communities. For this group of women, their isolation was exacerbated because they did not speak English and their employer discouraged English speaking. However, they found Irish people to be friendly and helpful in the shops and they had never experienced any hostility.

A large number of women migrants interviewed for this study had taken education courses or aspired to do so. Some women had taken English classes and realised these were important to their integration. Others had gained professional or other qualifications to enable them to get a better paid job. A significant number of women had attained second- and third-level education in their own countries and viewed education as their most important route to gaining a better position in Ireland. However, several women stated that they did not know anything about education and training courses and what entitlements they had to study part-time. Others felt penalised by high fees for university courses because they were not from EU member states; this situation also applied to part-time third-level education.

Access to social welfare

Women migrant workers, including those from the EU, experience fewer entitlements and rights than Irish citizens to welfare and family services for two years because of the Habitual Residency Condition (HRC). The HRC was introduced to coincide with the accession of the ten new EU member states in May 2004. It requires a person to be deemed 'habitually resident' for a continuous period of two years before making an application for social welfare. In 2006, following amendments to the HRC, it became possible for EEA workers with a work history in the State to be able to access Supplementary Welfare Allowance. However, this did not apply to non-EEA nationals who must still satisfy the HRC. This situation also applies to Irish citizens who have lived outside of the EEA area for more than two years.

In interviews for this study, those women that had accessed social welfare benefits had had a very difficult time. Several felt that the discretion of the Community Welfare Officers worked against them and that there was no systematic approach to decisions about benefits. Non-entitlement to benefits for work permit holders was seen as leading to difficulty and hardship, particularly for pregnant women. This is backed up by evidence from the MRCI (2006b) and the ICI (2006c), which shows that migrant workers were adversely affected by the HRC and that particular issues were faced by women experiencing domestic violence, people who became homeless, and people who were vulnerable.

Dominique is a single parent from Sierra Leone. She speaks English and French fluently and has a degree and Masters in politics from the UK. She has two Irish-born children. Her oldest child is living with her grandparents, one of whom is Irish-born. Dominique gained residence in March 2005 and, therefore, access to a range of social welfare benefits.

She has had her rent allowance terminated because she has taken up a place on a training programme. She had not known that this restriction was in place and had to leave the training course to maintain her rent allowance. She was frustrated by this restriction and could not understand why the State put 'so many difficulties in my way when all I want to do is work and I need to improve my qualifications and skills so that I am not a burden'.

Access to housing

To date there has been limited research addressing the housing needs and experiences of migrants in Ireland. The women interviewed for this study had mixed experiences of accessing housing and these findings were also similar to those of migrant workers in the North (Animate, 2004). In all cases, the women interviewed were in rented accommodation of varying degrees of quality. One woman, who had been recruited into a contract cleaning company, arrived from Moldova and had accommodation arranged for her, which she described as

overcrowded and of poor quality. She stated that the recruitment agent, the hotel owner and the accommodation provider were all the same company. The accommodation was not provided out of generosity but was viewed by the employer as a property investment. She has since moved out of the job and this accommodation and is sharing good quality rented accommodation with a work colleague.

For the women that had access to higher incomes from work in the IT sector and nursing, it was envisaged that they would enter owner-occupation. However, one woman found her bank reluctant to arrange a mortgage as she only held a two-year working visa. She was required to demonstrate permanent employment and residence for this purpose.

Several women cited incidents where they had had difficulties with landlords. Some landlords had not repaid deposits when they moved, others simply refused to let properties to them when they realised they were from minority ethnic communities and had children. This led to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability in housing that were particularly strong for women with children. This insecurity is made worse by the difficulties women experienced in getting onto the local authority housing list. One woman, who had two young children, lived in the north inner city and experienced a lot of racism from her neighbours. She felt very vulnerable and insecure and was subsequently rehoused by Dublin City Council into more secure accommodation in Blanchardstown. This had enormously improved her stress levels and her and her children's quality of life. She found her new neighbours to be very friendly. Incidents of increased racism in the North have also been identified in Animate's (2004) study, which found a number of examples of ethnic minority families being put out of their houses by local people. Research being undertaken by the ICI and Focus Ireland should provide a better understanding of migrants' housing experiences.

Gender-based violence and domestic violence

Women migrants are particularly exposed to acts of violence from organised forms of trafficking for sex work to violence experienced in the home. Specific guidelines have been developed in Ireland on gender persecution in their asylum determination process, based on those used in Australia, Canada, and the USA. However, the numbers seeking asylum have been gradually declining since 2002. This makes it particularly important to ensure that staff working on the front line of immigration services are aware of the particular vulnerability of women that have experienced gender-based forms of violence. Similarly, services providers need to be aware of the requirement for specialised and targeted support services arising from the experience of gender-based violence as part of the longer-term integration of women.

One of the difficulties facing women migrant workers is that their sexuality is often perceived as a major factor provoking violence. For this reason, women

who migrate alone can be particularly vulnerable. One woman interviewed had experienced domestic violence but had no knowledge of where to go.

'I was very scared. I had no one to turn to and I didn't know that there were any services...but I did get out of the situation and today I am doing very well. It's just that at the time it was really difficult and I had a young son as well. It's very scary to be in this situation when you don't know where to go.'

Fagan's (2006) study of the experience of domestic violence service providers highlights specific barriers for women migrants, including restrictions relating to immigration status and social welfare entitlements. The study highlighted the need for specific services for women migrants who are at risk of or in situations of domestic violence, and new challenges for service providers, particularly in providing financial support and safe accommodation. A number of Irish migrant groups and women's organisations have been campaigning for the removal of social welfare restrictions for women in situations of domestic violence. (ICI 2005, NWCI 2005, Women's Aid 2005). They highlight the need for more understanding and awareness of different family and cultural norms, and the impact of the fear of racism and discrimination, or rejection from their own community on minority ethnic women's decisions to leave a violent partner. In the consultations for the HSE's Intercultural Strategy in Health, Women's Aid argued:

'Domestic violence has a significant impact on women's physical, sexual and mental health. The dynamic of domestic abuse involves the perpetrator deliberately controlling many aspects of the victim's life, including who she sees, where she goes, access to money and to relevant supports. Accessing health services can therefore be difficult for women who experience domestic violence as their partner may prevent them from attending GP, A&E etc, in order to prevent disclosure. It is also the case that the manner in which services are delivered can impede a woman's help seeking. For black and minority ethnic women who experience domestic violence, there are additional barriers which they must negotiate in attempting to access health and other services.'

Undocumented women, female dependent spouses, and women who have been victims of trafficking face unique vulnerabilities. They often have little choice but to remain in abusive and dangerous relationships. This problem is further exacerbated by the lack of clarity regarding the rights of women migrants (ICI 2005, NWCI 2005, Women's Aid, 2005). There are no specific recommendations to improve support and services to women migrants, (including rights to temporary leave to remain or a regularised status, shelter and benefits) in the forthcoming legislation on immigration and residence (Women's Aid 2005, ICI 2005).

Childcare and children's services

Childcare was identified as a major problem for women migrant workers, particularly because the costs of childcare are so high. The absence of family support systems was identified as a major problem, particularly for women who came from cultures where family support systems are central to childrearing. Several women had organised their shifts with their partners to ensure that their children were cared for. One woman had brought her mother over to live with her, whilst another woman rotated childcare support from temporary visits from family members.

A large number of women used local women and informal arrangements with other women migrants in their own communities for childminding. 'I use a friend'; 'My sister helps out'; 'There is a local Ukrainian woman who is undocumented and needs the money, it works very well for me too'; 'My children go to a Latvian woman who looks after a group of local Latvian children'. Ina said:

'Many Nigerian women face difficulties in organising childcare, particularly because... many women have good family support systems...but you see many Nigerian women have been separated from their families and they often face isolation and difficulty.'

The majority of women with school-age children were happy with how their children were integrating into school. One woman stated that it helped to have a few children from overseas in the classroom. Another woman spoke about the distress she faced when she found out that her son was experiencing racism in school. Another spoke about the difficulties her child had integrating into school and, although he had learnt English, life was very difficult. Coupled with problems in caring for her child while she was working shifts, she had to send her child home to Moldova to live with her mother. 'I miss my child all the time and find it so hard to be without him...but he is in the best place.'

For other women, settling in Ireland has been a good experience. For Nusha, living in Ireland was easy and her child settled into school well. She was also able to attend an English class, which helped her to integrate into Ireland.

'My daughter was the first foreign child in her school. She made friends very easily and very quickly picked up the language. I was trying to study the language on my own as I had some free time. There were no classes at the time in English. Later at the school there was an English class organised for asylum seeking women, but they let me attend. After that I went to the adult education centre and followed a course for adults to attend the Leaving Certificate. As it turned out, I was able to sit the Leaving Cert in literature because of my experience of literature from Bulgaria. This was a great experience for me in learning about Irish poetry and literature.'

Social networks and social isolation

Many women migrants spoke about difficulties integrating into life in Ireland. Particularly in their early days of living in Ireland, many experienced social isolation, lack of knowledge of how the country works, information about rights and entitlements and of services. Language and culture were major barriers, as were limited links with Irish people. Only a small number of women had built friendships with Irish women and most tended to socialise in their own national or ethnic communities. For many women, their social networks revolved around attendance at their churches or in migrant-led community groups and organisations. Important sources of social contact and information were to be found in the different Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Nigerian, Chinese and other shops that have sprung up in most towns across the country.

A large number of women stated that they felt lonely and socially isolated. In some cases, this was because they were working away from their extended families, partners, and children. In other cases, they found it difficult to integrate into Irish life because of cultural differences. One woman said: 'I was so lonely when I first arrived; I used to cry every night.' However, once she made some friends and social contacts she began to enjoy life in Ireland. One Muslim woman found it difficult to socialise with colleagues at work because most social activities took place in the pub. As a Muslim and a woman, she felt unable to participate in these kinds of social events. She felt this worked against her opportunities to network with colleagues and gain access to promotion.

Similar experiences of social isolation have been found in the North. For example, the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) has found that access to information and the English language is crucial for the integration of migrants, particularly those that are isolated in rural areas. STEP is a rural community development organisation based in Dungannon. More than 10 per cent of the population in the Dungannon area are non-nationals. Many work in the agriculture and horticulture sector and were employed by recruitment agencies, which in some cases also provide accommodation. Workers are tied to employers because their employment is tied to their accommodation. Key problems have been raised for parents, particularly for women with young children, in finding childcare, accessing tax credits for children and in finding suitable accommodation. STEP provides help to migrant workers in language training and one local employer gives migrant employees paid time off to attend language classes. A sister project, Animate, provides specific support to migrant workers, which includes issues concerning women, childcare, maternity benefits, access to child benefit and other social benefits.

Women migrants and trade unions, NGOs and community-based organisations

Women's political and community activism is very evident in migrant communities. It is an example of how women have become empowered to make changes in their communities and in Ireland. This form of mobilisation has been critical to giving women migrants a voice, a platform for lobbying on new legislation, and in reaching the most marginalised women in their communities.

According to Piper (2005), the role of political participation and the political organising of, and by, migrant workers, is crucial to achieving equal treatment for all workers regardless of citizenship or legal status. In particular, she argues that trade unions, NGOs and migrant-led organisations have an important role to play in collaborating to highlight and represent women migrant workers' interests. There are already signs of these partnerships and activities taking place in Ireland and the creation of a community-based movement, based on human rights principles, working to support the rights and integration of women migrants in Ireland.

The role of migrant support organisations

Global action by women, international human rights developments around women's human rights and new social movements have been important catalysts to mobilising women and raising the importance of women migrants' rights (Piper 2005). Women's political and community activism is very evident in migrant communities today and is an example of how women have become empowered to make changes in their communities. This form of mobilisation has been critical to giving women migrants a voice, a platform for lobbying on new legislation, and in reaching the most marginalised women in their communities.

Despite the growth of migrant and community-based organisations, more than three-quarters of the women interviewed in this study did not know of any migrant support organisations, or where to access help and support. The women that were the most excluded were least likely to be in touch with migrant support organisations. Several women spoke about the importance of their local churches. Ina was involved in her local church and has since left her hairdressing job to be a full-time worker in her church. She had been involved with a group of churches in writing a booklet on how to welcome people to Ireland. She sees her role as important to help women integrate into Ireland. One woman interviewed for the study had been in touch with AkiDwA, an African women's support group. It provides networking, advocacy, information, and training, with an emphasis on women's human rights. For example, Bayo became very involved with her local church and, through the church, she found out about the support group for Africans, which helped her through a difficult time finding accommodation.

'I had a lot of support from Spirasi [the Spiritan Asylum Services Initiative] Women's Group over a problem with rented accommodation and bills. The Spirasi Women's Group was also very helpful in giving advice about education and training. They are very important to African women.'

Given that a large number of interviewees gained information from newspapers such as Chinese papers, Russian papers, and so on, these could be important vehicles for publicising sources of information such as Citizens Information Centres, trade unions, and other migrant support organisations. One woman thought that Citizens Information Centres were only for people who were Irish citizens and did not think that she was entitled to use them. This particular woman had been seeking information about maternity benefits and did not know where to go for information.

Profiles of women in migrant organisations

In this section three women working specifically with migrant women in community-based organisations are profiled to show the positive contribution that they are making to their organisations and communities. The first is a profile of Salome who works for AkiDWa, an organisation set up to empower African women. AkiDWa has been working with African women to develop education, racial and cultural understanding, human rights and particularly to influence policy from a gender perspective. The second is Tonya, a Russian woman working with women through Cáirde, a community based organisation working to address inequalities in health and which has created the Ethnic Minority Health Forum. The third is a profile of Nusha who works for the Immigrant Council of Ireland in their information section. The Immigrant Council is an NGO working to promote the rights of migrants. It has played an important and strategic role in lobbying for new legislation in the area of immigration, Irish citizen born children, and trafficking.

Salome is the Director of AkiDwA, a human rights and feminist organisation working to challenge inequalities between women and men. She has brought to Ireland her experience, skills and energy from working with women in Kenya and Uganda. Salome says: 'In Nairobi I worked as a social worker. I worked with women, prioritising women's needs and facilitating women to talk about the issues that were affecting them and how they could get out of difficult situations. After that I worked with women in Uganda as a development officer working for the human rights for women. Through this work I learnt my organising skills and this contributed to where I am today...I have used my energy, skills and experience for my work in Ireland...when I first came to Ireland in 1994 the environment was very different. I worked with women in the Inchicore Family Resource Centre. Later, with a group of seven women from different African countries, we formed a network to look at how women could survive and operate in Ireland. We wanted to look at the differences and similarities of

women in Ireland. I was very isolated and there was a very negative image of African women.'

Through this work, Salome and her colleagues developed a network of African women. It was through this network that AkiDwA was formed. 'We realised that we had to work with Irish women and we saw the importance of networking.'

The organisation now has four paid workers and seven volunteers. They have organised groups of women across the country and there are now five active groups in Waterford, Balbriggan, Athlone and Dublin. They work with other groups and organisations on anti-racism. In Waterford, the African Women's Forum has been very active and AkiDwA hopes to set up a centre in Waterford as part of its new three-year strategic plan.

Salome believes that AkiDwA has contributed positively to life in Ireland by working with women from all over the world, including women from different minority communities, women from the Islamic Centre and with Traveller women. They strive to create a positive identity for migrant women and empower women to speak up for themselves and make changes. They are involved in training for service providers and in addressing key issues such as domestic violence. Through their annual conferences they have addressed issues ranging from networking of minority ethnic women, health issues, the invisibility of black and minority ethnic women, and embracing the diversity of women. Recently they have been funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs to link Irish women to global issues in order to show the positive role that women in Africa are making to the economic and social development of African countries. In 2006 they published a book *Herstory: migration stories of African women in Ireland* to ensure that the personal and emotional struggles women experience when they leave their countries and families because of fear of persecution are recorded as part of Ireland's history.

Salome says that, through AkiDwA, African women have made a positive contribution to Ireland. 'African women bring such humour and they bring their hearts. They have travelled far and they are survivors. They are determined and strong, and don't give up. What is interesting is that the majority of women are migrating here alone and they are coping well with their lives and managing their families often in the most difficult of situations. This has been really important as I've seen the changes since the 1990s. I have seen people's attitudes hardening and there have been deportations of women. But we are contributing to changing attitudes and now we have a second generation of migrants who will make their own changes. We are building the foundations for the future of Irish society and Irish society will benefit from our work.'

Tonya is from Russia and has been living in Ireland for more than ten years. She works for Cáirde, a voluntary organisation providing support to minority ethnic women in Ireland who experience inequality. Tonya says that 'this inequality is reflected in difficulty accessing suitable accommodation, poverty,

unemployment, often due to not having the right to work, poor access to education and training, immigration insecurity, racism, and discrimination; as well as poor access to, and negative experiences of health services’.

Tonya stated in interview that many minority ethnic women experience double discrimination with poor conditions of employment, insecurity, low pay, and social isolation. Tonya describes her work as follows: ‘Cáirde is a community development and health organisation, working to address health inequalities among ethnic minority communities. There is a specific programme within Cáirde, Women’s Health Action, which provides support and development to minority ethnic women. All the work that Cáirde is doing with minority ethnic groups is aimed at reducing health inequalities; capacity-building and development work with community groups is a key aspect which leads to ability of these groups to participate in health (services design and delivery, policy development, implementation of health strategies, and so on). I suppose support to individual ethnic minority community members is more of a tool for us to engage people, to build trust, to link them with other groups, rather than solitary focus of providing certain service.’

Tonya believes that the Women’s Health Action programme has been important for addressing multiple types of inequality. ‘There are inequalities in health status/health outcomes between indigenous and migrant populations and between men and women. There is also inequality in access to health services. This means that inequalities in health are being reinforced by gender inequalities. So specific responses are needed to address these...In my opinion, ethnic minority women have been excluded from many decision-making arenas (more so than migrant men). Women face greater barriers to participation than men due to cultural, political, and other factors (for example, when we talk about women’s right to participate in decisions around reproductive and sexual health). This is not only a question of capacity – it is also about addressing barriers and obstacles to participation, such as childcare, financial difficulties and poverty trap, and isolation due to lack of family and social supports in the host country etc.’

Nusha is an information worker, working with the Immigrant Council of Ireland. She has had a positive experience of living and working in Ireland, although her early experiences of being a dependent spouse in Ireland were not positive. She has two children. She studied a Masters in Intercultural Studies at DCU whilst working part-time as an interpreter. ‘This opened my horizon higher...I wanted to concentrate on immigration and anti-racism work. During the course we were invited to various conferences. I attended a conference attended by Mary Robinson and Bruce Morrison. I was amazed that there was an organisation working for migrants...later, when we were about to graduate, I jumped at the chance to take up a communications internship with the ICI. At this time I was on a student visa and I had quit my work permit...we were waiting for citizenship as we had been here [in Ireland] for more than five years. I was offered a full-time job after my internship...The job is very interesting and

I get to meet a lot of people. I like it very much and it is rewarding if sometimes a bit overwhelming...now I'm doing a real job with real people with real motives and real situations. It is mainly labour migrants and their families that we meet in the information centre. Sometimes it is about renewal of work permits, and people applying for citizenship and residency. Many people are interested in permanency. The rights of spouses comes up a lot, and there are plenty of issues for children coming of age, which is a really big issue.

'I believe in a progressive approach to immigration. I don't like open doors as we can't afford it, but those who are admitted here legally should be treated right. They should be informed of their opportunities and chances, people should be informed.'

There is a wide range of other migrant-led and community-based groups emerging in Ireland, some providing specific support for women migrants. Migrant-led organisations have provided support for isolated women, access to language classes, translation and interpretation, cultural mediation, and general information about rights and entitlements and accessing services.

Role of trade unions

Union organisation and representation is the weakest in those sectors of the economy where women are the most exploited and invisible. One woman in the horticultural sector had been sacked for speaking out against the low pay women received, which averaged 50 cents per hour. She had decided to take her case through the union and was unemployed at the time of interview. She felt very strongly that women migrant workers in the horticultural sector should be supported by unions and that there should be more detailed inspection of workplaces. On the surface 'everything looks fine. It's only when you look under the surface that the exploitation and bad treatment of women is found...many women are too scared to speak out in case they lose their jobs...they have no rights.'

Several women interviewed had had positive experiences with unions and had been supported in gaining rights and information. However, the majority of women did not know that unions existed in Ireland. One woman thought they only existed in the public sector and women from the former soviet states thought that unions would not be interested in women's work issues.

Maria came in contact with the Domestic Workers Support Group through SIPTU and the MRCI. The MRCI has an information and advocacy service for economic migrants and migrant workers with a particular focus on domestic workers. It helps women migrant workers to access their rights and supports them in taking cases. It works in partnership with SIPTU and supports women when they make complaints to the Labour Relations Commission. Key issues concern exploitation of working hours, pay, holiday pay, unfair dismissals, and

poor living conditions. According to Maria, who had been exploited as a domestic worker:

'The trade union is very important. They have helped me a lot. I am very lucky that there is a trade union. It is really important that there is more information, say on the TV, so that employers know that they cannot exploit these women. The trade union is very significant for migrant workers.'

Key issues raised by unions interviewed as part of this study included problems associated with the double discrimination faced by women migrants, exploitation at work, low pay, and problems about coverage of trade unions in sectors of the economy where women are most exploited and isolated. According to full-time branch organiser in SIPTU Rhonda Donaghey, who works directly with domestic workers and supports their cases through the Labour Court:

'Most of these women that experience exploitation are from the Philippines and India, and a small number are from the new member states. But there are some good employers as well. Many women have become undocumented as their employer does not keep their work permit up to date. There is a real balance of power such as being underpaid and working excessively long hours, not being called to dinner, having to eat the leftovers, being treated like a slave in some cases. Children are often used as a tool to keep the domestic worker, often it's like another family for these women. The new portable work permit is very expensive. If you are earning low wages it will be very hard to afford this. We organise through alternative routes, for example, through the churches and informal sources and word of mouth. Trade unions have been traditionally very limited to the workplace in their organising – this is not possible for domestic workers. We have had to be more creative.'

Examples of specific union initiatives are the INO's work on anti-racism activities, which includes a Cultural Diversity Task Force, training, and the publication of guidelines on Embracing Cultural Diversity and an Overseas Nurses Group. SIPTU has appointed two trade union organisers to work specifically with workers from the Lithuanian and Polish communities. They have been working with a number of exploited women workers in taking cases to the Labour Court. ICTU is also providing support to women migrant workers through its Centres for Unemployment, and a number of unions have been involved in specific cases of discrimination against women migrant workers. An information booklet in English and French *Homes and Workplaces: The Rights of Domestic Workers* has been produced by ICTU to inform domestic workers of their rights.

Because women migrants tend to be under-represented in trade unions, it was a particularly important development that SIPTU created two organising posts in the head office's organising unit. Evelina is one of those appointed. She is from Lithuania and has been working with Lithuanian workers, particularly women mushroom pickers. Evelina's experience of working in the union is a positive one. However, when she first came to Ireland she worked in jobs that under-valued her skills and experience, and did not provide good conditions of employment. It is fitting to finish this report with the experience of Evelina, which shows how women migrants are making positive contributions to change in Ireland.

Evelina, a Lithuanian woman, works as an organiser in a trade union. She is involved in supporting and organising workers in the Lithuanian community. Her post was created to provide support to migrant workers and organise them into union activities, particularly in sectors where they are most potentially open to exploitation. Evelina is also co-editor and journalist with Ireland's Lithuanian newspaper. Throughout her life she has been involved in working on community-based papers.

Evelina first came to work in Ireland as a waitress in a hotel. After several temporary, low paid jobs, she eventually managed to gain recognition for her skills by securing her position as an organiser with SIPTU. She finds the job interesting and hugely challenging, particularly as many Lithuanian workers are very isolated in the workplace. She works closely with mushroom pickers, the majority of whom are women, and she produces a regular newsletter. She has visited around 100 farms where women migrant workers are working and has informed them about the role of unions.

'Mushroom pickers are all on minimum wages and it is very important to let them know what the union can do for them...it is very important that I can speak Lithuanian as many migrant workers have no English. This is an important area of work for the trade unions and will continue to be in the future.'

Evelina says that there are other areas of the labour market where women are clustered into low paid work and where unions need to have a role, especially in hotel work and contract cleaning.

As well as her work in the union, Evelina was the founder of and is currently editor of the Lithuanian newspaper *Saloje (In the Island)*, which now employs three full-time staff and ten freelance journalists. It has a readership of 20,000 and has become an important source of information for the Lithuanian community with regard to rights and entitlements, changes in legislation, social and cultural events, as well as general news from Lithuania and across the world.

Evelina believes that women migrants have helped to 'bring in a different approach, ideas and different views...many of us were brought up to be

independent...you have to show independence and show others that it is possible to be independent and successfully so...we are not just here to join husbands...we are here to be ourselves and contribute in the best way possible'.

Section seven: Conclusions

This report shows that there are specific gender-related issues affecting women migrants, particularly relating to women's different channels of entry and the gender-divided labour market. Migration has been positive and empowering for women and many women migrants are strong, independent and autonomous. New patterns of migration have a gender dimension, and migration patterns and modes of entry are both complex and diversified. Gender is very relevant to the immigration process; it shapes aspects of certain channels of entry concerning work, asylum, and family reunification. In work, women are more clustered into lower skilled and less skilled jobs, where there is little recognition for the economic and social value of their work. Men are likely to be in the higher skilled, higher paid jobs that offer more legal protection and permanency. The most vulnerable and exploited women migrants have few legal protections available to them and, if they are undocumented, they are invisible with no status. In the area of trafficking, there have been no supports put in place that provide protection and security for the women.

The report has highlighted a number of important challenges for the integration of women migrants in Ireland. As this report has shown, the concerns and challenges that are unique to the experience of women migrants are often overlooked. The report has also shown that, whilst there are many positive experiences of migration and migration can benefit the women involved by giving them access to higher incomes and possibilities to send remittances to family members, women migrants are also open to gender-specific forms of abuse and exploitation. There are different situations and conditions faced by women migrants and men in the integration process, as well as double discrimination faced by women migrants in the labour market, poor working conditions, and exploitation. In some areas of work, such as domestic service and contract cleaning, where women are isolated and have little access to trade unions, there is a greater vulnerability to exploitation.

The need for a gender-sensitive approach to migration is crucial to meeting these challenges. This requires a gender perspective to be incorporated into all areas of policy that have an impact on migration, such as data collection, labour market conditions, flexibility within the labour market, flexibility of the spousal employment permit scheme, and family reunification policies. This approach is particularly important because the feminisation of migration shapes channels of entry and access to services and benefits, work, asylum, and family reunification. For example, there are also many gendered and inappropriate assumptions underlying family reunification policies, which are often embedded in assumptions of women's dependence in the family. In practice, the majority of women migrants migrate alone and want to work and be independent and autonomous.

Integration into work

This report has shown that there are a number of gender-specific work-related issues that are experienced by women migrant workers. They raise some important gender-specific challenges to the Irish labour market and highlight difficulties for their integration resulting from restrictive migration policies. In interviews, women migrants were asked to identify priorities that would improve their situations and their integration into work that valued their skills and potential. Their main priorities were:

- Improve information about rights and entitlements, and target it to women in a variety of languages. This should include pre-departure information about working conditions and pay, culture, women's rights and childcare issues, as well as migrant support organisations that can be contacted for support and information. Included in this should be understanding the culture, and the role and expectations of women in Irish society
- Information about rights and entitlements especially in areas such as childcare issues, family friendly working hours, pregnancy, and maternity
- Improve understanding about culture, the role and expectations of women in Irish society, information about rights in the workplace, access to childcare, and so on
- Provide an information helpline for migrant workers and ensure that information providers are sensitive to and aware of women migrant workers' needs
- Ensure that there are equal working conditions, working hours and equal pay for work of an equal value between migrant and non-migrant workers. This means ensuring that there is an effective system of recourse against exploitative employers
- Improve the coverage of trade union organisations to women migrant workers, particularly those that are in the non-unionised and potentially the most exploited areas of employment
- Develop better awareness of staff and managers about how to combat racism in the workplace
- Improve women's access to affordable childcare and flexible working hours to enable women to combine work with childcare

Integrating into society

This report has shown that women migrants have a diversity of experiences of integration. It is interesting to note that some women interviewed in this study had experienced real difficulties integrating into life in Ireland when they first arrived. However, over time, they have found their own pathways into better jobs and more satisfying and rewarding work. There are important lessons for the provision of information and how women are welcomed and integrated on arrival. This raises some questions about the policies and practices that are implemented on integration. These need to focus on pre-departure and arrival information and support, including access to language training, healthcare,

information about rights and entitlements, and programmes of advocacy and cultural mediation. If these policies and practices are put in place, some of the most serious problems of social exclusion and marginalisation can be avoided.

Women migrants interviewed in this study highlighted a number of issues that they felt needed addressing to enable them to more effectively integrate into life in Ireland. These include:

- Access to information about services needs to be improved. Many women do not access services or have information about services such as healthcare, children's services, maternity services and benefits, accommodation, and services for women experiencing domestic violence
- Female dependent spouses and women working in some sectors are particularly socially isolated and lack access to information and services in their local communities. Social isolation is enhanced because many women migrant workers do not have family networks to help them with childcare and other support
- Language is a major barrier in the take up of information and services. There is a need for improved access to translation and cultural mediation, as well as to an English language course on arrival
- The need to address racism is a major barrier to integration. It was raised by a number of women who spoke about the experience of racism in accessing housing, training, and other social supports

The recommendations set out at the start of this report highlight the importance of developing gender-sensitive policies so that the potential contribution of women migrants can be fully realised. This is particularly important to the long-term integration of women migrants in work and in the community.

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