



# TOWARDS A NEW BEGINNING

## Refugee Integration in Ireland





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EU funded study on factors influencing refugee integration



European Refugee  
Fund of the European  
Commission

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Ireland, May 2014

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Cover Photo: A Karen refugee in Co Mayo, Ireland. In 2008, over  
100 members of the Myanmar ethnic group were resettled in Co  
Mayo, on the West Coast of Ireland. © Phil Behan/UNHCR

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This research was coordinated by UNHCR's Bureau for Europe (Policy and Legal Support Unit, Emilie Wiinblad) and Project Coordinator (consultant) Gail Hopkins.

Research and report writing in Ireland was conducted by Diana Gouveia under the Supervision of UNHCR Ireland's Head of Office, Sophie Magennis and with the assistance of UNHCR Ireland staff including Jody Clarke, Lorna Cronnelly and Aileen Lee.

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# Executive Summary

The rapid change in migration trends in Ireland in the past 20 years, from being a country where people traditionally emigrated from, to a country that received migrants, presented challenges and opportunities for refugee integration. In Ireland, a mainstream approach to the provision of services to refugees and other migrants has been taken. Intercultural strategies for wider migrant integration have been adopted by different government departments and specific strategies for the integration of refugees have been drawn up. However, the measurement and evaluation of those strategies remain unclear.

This research draws on a process of consultation with refugees and stakeholders, and on existing literature, and identifies policy areas which have been suggested by refugees and stakeholders as relevant and sometimes critical for the integration of refugees in Ireland. The study highlights Active Citizenship, Housing, Employment, Access to Information, and Social Inclusion as significant policy areas in the Irish context. English language was addressed as an overarching topic as it was reported to impact on all spheres of refugees' lives. The recommendations proposed aim to aid policy-makers when drawing up refugee-specific integration strategies, their measurement and their evaluation. The following areas were identified as relevant for the measurement of integration.

**Active citizenship** was identified by refugees and stakeholders, and in existing literature as important for integration, and was addressed in this study through three different domains: media, volunteering, and political participation. Refugees highlighted that public perceptions influence their prospects of meaningful integration, and suggested that their representation in media outlets is indicative of levels of integration. Refugees' previous experiences of flight, and initial reception conditions in Ireland were reported as impacting on their involvement with and in the media. Volunteering was identified in the literature and by refugees and stakeholders as a platform for creating and sustaining social and ethnic-community bridges, and as a tool to improve English language competency. Voluntary work was also highlighted as a space for skills' learning, skills which could then be transferable to other spheres of life. Political participation was identified as an important integration area. The literature identifies knowledge of soft skills and English language competency as central to political involvement. Meetings with refugees and stakeholders corroborated those findings.

**Housing.** When seeking private accommodation, refugees identified the initial stages after leaving Direct Provision (the Irish reception system for asylum seekers) as particularly relevant. During this time, access to credit, the formalities of accessing welfare payments and of accessing private rental accommodation were identified as critical for refugees' immediate and subsequent integration into Irish society. Additionally, English language competency, reliance on network support and support from Irish friends or contacts - the 'Irish contact' - were suggested by refugees as instrumental when seeking housing.

Refugees and stakeholders suggest that one of the main facilitators to integration is **Employment**. As employment is a source of financial income it is seen as a way to fulfill family obligations, including in respect of family members in third countries. Additionally, employment was also emphasized as a source of professional satisfaction, especially in relation to the achievement of the same kind of professional attainment that refugees would have had in their country of origin. The factors influencing the process of accessing a job appropriate to the refugee's level of qualifications were: English language competency, refugees' expectations, and challenges in supplying documentation when requesting recognition of qualifications. Refugees, stakeholders and literature highlighted the significance and the benefits of internships and of volunteering as a way of gaining knowledge of the job market, and the job culture in Ireland. Refugees and stakeholders also identified the importance of timely access to further education, and of needs and age appropriate training courses as critical tools for future integration into the labour market. The flight experience and reception conditions upon arrival in Ireland were emphasized as impacting upon the future employability of refugees and on their mental health.

**Access to Information** was identified by refugees and stakeholders as important for integration. Refugees and stakeholders highlighted that there are a substantial number of information sources available but these sources can sometimes offer conflicting information and routes to access information can be difficult to navigate. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of accurate recording of information which should also be culturally sensitive. They noted that training and information about different forms of protection and immigration status and the rights and entitlements attached to them should be regularly made available to frontline staff dealing with refugees. Additionally, the importance of induction and English courses were also highlighted as enabling refugees to advocate for themselves and safeguard their privacy. Peer-to-peer information and support was discussed by refugees and stakeholders as offering a sense of empathy and security. However, overreliance on informal sources was also identified as being contra-productive to refugees' integration. Refugees and stakeholders noted that the specific circumstances which led refugees to Ireland, their migratory experience and possible trauma may act as impediments to the engagement of refugees with State agencies. Refugees and stakeholders suggested that integration in its formal state begins too late. They identified the limited support available bridging time spent in Direct Provision and time upon recognition of status as impacting on the quality of integration of refugees.

**Social Inclusion.** Religious congregations and sporting organisations were identified in the existing literature, and by refugees and stakeholders as important platforms for social inclusion. Socialisation and information dissemination is often through informal networks, for example school-gate conversations, and the importance of these was highlighted. It was also emphasized by refugees and stakeholders that whereas children interact with the wider society through schools, parents and in particular women's experiences of inclusion are often mediated by their children's. They also noted that in the case of women who suffered gender-based trauma, their previous experiences may prevent them from engaging socially, and may contribute to social isolation. Refugees and stakeholders also suggested that cultural, religious and financial reasons can be an impediment for refugees to socialize in the pub which is considered an important site for socialising in Irish society. Refugees identified the stress associated with delays in achieving family reunification and the financial pressure of raising sufficient funds for family members to travel to Ireland as impacting on their ability and willingness to become involved in Irish society and also impacting on their mental health. Discrimination and racism were identified by refugees and stakeholders and are discussed in the existing literature as a significant element affecting social inclusion and integration. Additionally, previous refugees' experiences of persecution in their country of origin may create a level of distrust and fear of State authorities and refugees may prefer to deal with racist incidents themselves rather than reporting it. It was also noted by refugees and stakeholders that the social stigma associated with time spent in the Direct Provision system can be difficult to repair and may hinder prospects of integration.

# Introduction

## 1.1 Rationale for undertaking the study

UNHCR has been entrusted by the United Nations General Assembly with the mandate to provide international protection to refugees and, together with Governments and partners, to seek permanent solutions to the problems of refugees. For the majority of refugees in Europe, local integration is the most relevant durable solution. UNHCR's interest and involvement in integration thus stems from its mandate to seek solutions; the 1951 Refugee Convention's Article 34, which encourages States to facilitate the integration and naturalisation of refugees; as well as policy documents related to integration, such as UNHCR's ExCom Conclusion No. 104 on Local Integration and the 2009 note on strategic approaches for combating discrimination.

The logic of the Convention framework is that, with the passing of time, refugees should be able to enjoy a wider range of rights as their association and ties with the hosting State grow stronger. In this sense, the 1951 Convention gives refugees a solid basis on which they can progressively restore the social and economic independence needed to get on with their lives. In this regard, ExCom Conclusion No. 104 calls on States to facilitate, as appropriate, the integration of refugees and recalls that special efforts may be necessary to facilitate their integration.

While refugees within Ireland have rights commensurate with those set out in the 1951 Convention, support, information and advice is however often required before refugees can integrate successfully as fully included members of society.

Many countries in Europe have in recent years been working to improve integration of other third-country nationals generally. Efforts have also been made to measure both the social and economic impact of integration policies and support. Refugees, as part of this group, however have specific needs due, among other factors, to: particular hardships sustained in the country of origin, or during flight; their experiences of persecution or armed conflict; and the separation and/or loss of family members which often follows as a consequence of flight. Obtaining documentation while in the country of asylum may also prove a challenge. Measuring the impact of integration policies on refugees without an understanding of their particular needs, may lead to misguided policy development and to a lack of crucial support needed to avoid long-term dependency, marginalization and isolation of refugees, which in turn can lead to an increase in irregular movements or challenge social cohesion in the host State.



## 1.2 National context – Ireland

In May 2012, the Taoiseach<sup>1</sup> Enda Kenny delivered a speech about the Great Irish Famine. The Taoiseach remembered those Irishmen and Irishwomen who, in the 1840s, with their children ‘in their arms, ... turned their backs on all they had known’, and who through their long journeys had experienced ‘the best [and] the worst of humanity’. The Taoiseach remembered them as “refugees”, people who ‘gathered the remnants of their dignity, their sanity and boarded ships ... with the hope, at least, of a future’. Those who were lucky enough made it to a different land, bringing ‘their genius, hard work and talent not just to those countries but to future generations’. And, perhaps the relevance of it for us today is that as the Taoiseach said ‘our shared humanity means we live in a continuous present. What was endured by one generation becomes vital knowledge ... experience for another ... at the level of memory, heart or soul’.

This study is not about Irish refugees, but it is about refugees in Ireland, and their stories of integration, of struggle and of opportunity. In 2009, UNHCR published the report Mapping Integration: UNHCR’s Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Project on Refugee Integration in Ireland - 2008/2009 (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2009) which explored how refugees experienced integration in Ireland.

This research builds on those efforts and further illustrates how integration is understood, measured and evaluated, and how it is supported in law, in policy, and in the everyday lives of those refugees in Ireland who took time to share their views with us. It is also the result of a concerted dialogue with stakeholders and policy makers. In the midst of an economic recession, and at a time when economic considerations take centre stage in national policies, it remains important to keep a focus on integration. As pointed out by the Taoiseach, challenges endured by one generation become vital knowledge and experience for other generations to come.

## 1.3 Aims of the study

The aim of this study was to review trends in the development of integration indicators and consider the methods of integration evaluation and the inclusion of refugee specific data, as well as to explore barriers or facilitators to integration specific to refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister of Ireland

Based on a review of literature relating to refugee integration and through dialogue with integration stakeholders and refugees, this study tests assumptions reflected in integration policy and literature about what are thought of as relevant integration indicator policy areas in the case of refugees, what is known about refugee integration based on existing literature and what are the main factors which are influential in refugees' levels of 'success' in those areas. Four national teams, one each in Austria, France, Ireland and Sweden, sought to explore differences relating to integration which set refugees apart from other sectors of the migrant population. This may include identifying additional integration indicator policy areas for refugee integration or may include identifying influences which are specific to refugees or more critical for refugees when compared with wider migrant integration.

The study did not aim to evaluate refugee integration, nor did it aim to evaluate policies or programming relating to integration at either national or EU level. This report is therefore not an evaluation report. Within the literature review and consultations, the study considered what approaches to integration appeared to have positive or successful outcomes, and sought to identify examples of good or interesting practice which can be considered by others. However, good practices identified in this report are not the outcome of any evaluation nor are the cited examples of good practice exhaustive.

UNHCR's involvement in the integration of refugees stems mainly from its mandate in relation to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Statute. Article 34 (1951 Convention) specifically states that States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalisation of refugees, in particular States shall make every effort to expedite naturalisation proceedings<sup>2</sup>. While the reference is to assimilation and naturalisation, there is a consensus that assimilation should not be understood to mean a requirement on the part of the refugees to forgo their own culture and the term is used by UNHCR interchangeably with integration<sup>3</sup> or local integration.

UNHCR is mandated to seek permanent solutions for the problem of refugees by inter alia assisting Governments to facilitate the assimilation or integration of refugees within new national communities. The logic of the Convention framework is that, with the passing of time, refugees should be able to enjoy a wider range of rights as their association and ties with the hosting State grow stronger<sup>4</sup>. As such, Executive Conclusion No. 104 calls on States to facilitate, as appropriate, the integration of refugees, including, as far as possible, through facilitating their naturalisation<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.4 Definition of integration

For the purposes of this study, we have taken the UNHCR definition of integration which itself is not succinct but does offer an understanding of what is expected when integration is called for at national and EU level. The UNHCR definition of integration also forms the understanding of 'integration' which has been commonly adopted in wider discussions of migrant integration.

UNHCR generally refers to integration as local integration, identifying it as one of the three durable solutions for refugees – local integration, resettlement and voluntary repatriation. The term integration is 'used broadly to describe the process and the result of the process, the results of the adaptation of persons of foreign origin into their new home society and the acceptance by that society of the foreigner' (UNHCR, 2009:17) and calls on States to facilitate the integration of refugees, including through facilitating their naturalisation (UNHCR, 2009:23). However, UNHCR goes on to more closely define integration as 'the end product of an ... ongoing process' (UNHCR, 2009:24).

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<sup>2</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Local Integration, Global Consultation on International Protection, EC/GC/02/6, 25 April 2002. Available online at UNHCR Refworld <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3d6266e17.html>

<sup>3</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Local Integration and Self-Reliance, EC/55/SC/CRP.1, 2 June 2005. Available online at UNHCR Refworld <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/478b3ce12.html>

<sup>4</sup> See UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (Excom), Conclusion on Local Integration, (No. 104 (LVI) – 2005) 7 October 2005. Available online at UNHCR Refworld <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4357a91b2.html>

<sup>5</sup> For further information please see <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Asylum%20Policy%20Division>

At the core of UNHCR's definition is the concept of integration as a two-way process and this is premised on 'adaptation' of one party and 'acceptance' by the other as in the extract above. It does not however require the refugee to relinquish their cultural identity (UNHCR, 2009:24) and integration therefore differs from assimilation.

The two-way process underlies the three specific dimensions UNHCR emphasises as being part of the process of refugee integration:

- **LEGAL PROCESS** – relating to the rights and entitlements comparable to those of citizens. These include access to work, education, health and welfare assistance, freedom of movement, the right to own property and to family unity;
- **ECONOMIC PROCESS** – relating to self-reliance and contributing to the economic life of the receiving country;
- **SOCIO-CULTURAL PROCESS** – relating to adaptation and acceptance in order that the refugee may live among the existing society without discrimination or exploitation and contribute to the social life of the receiving society.

As an economic process, refugees attain a growing degree of self-reliance and become able to pursue sustainable livelihoods, thus contributing to the economic life of the host country.

As a social and cultural process, refugees acclimatize and local communities accommodate the refugee to enable refugees to live amongst or alongside the receiving population without discrimination or exploitation, and contribute actively to the social life of their country of asylum.

It is, in this sense, an interactive process involving both refugees and nationals of the receiving State, as well as its institutions. The result should be a society that is both diverse and open, where people can form a community, regardless of differences (UNHCR Global Consultations, 2002).

It is, in this sense, an interactive process involving both refugees and nationals of the receiving State, as well as its institutions. The result should be a society that is both diverse and open, where people can form a community, regardless of differences (UNHCR Global Consultations, 2002).

Integration is defined in Irish policy as a two-way process and as the 'ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity' (Ireland, Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999:9). In Ireland, a mainstream approach is taken to integration and while there are some tools for the general measurement of wider migrant integration, specific evaluation and monitoring tools for the integration of refugees are unclear.

## 1.5 Report structure

For the purpose of this research and following consultation with several stakeholders and a review of existing integration literature, five areas were proposed as important policy areas where integration takes place. The areas proposed by consulted stakeholders which were considered as being indicative of refugee integration are: Active Citizenship and in particular the role of the media; Access to Information; Social Inclusion with a specific focus on racism and discrimination and Housing and Employment.

This report contains 5 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study and Chapter 2 outlines the methodology followed. Chapter 3 sets out the literature review undertaken on a thematic basis and provides background information on the refugee population in Ireland. Chapter 4, the empirical section, presents the findings from the consultations and dialogue with refugees and stakeholders, and provides thematic analysis on the topics proposed through the research. Chapter 5 outlines conclusions and proposes recommendations for future action.

# Methodology

This report forms part of an overall project which consisted of two components. One was implemented in four Western European countries (Austria, France, Ireland and Sweden) and the other in four Central European countries (Bulgaria, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). The Western European study began on 1 September 2012 with consultations taking place in each country until March 2013. The overall duration of the project is from 1 August 2012 to 31 December 2013.

## 2.1 Participating Countries

UNHCR has identified challenges to the integration of refugees in all EU Member States. Understanding the particular barriers and opportunities for refugee integration in each of the national contexts is therefore relevant. As such, UNHCR would ideally have provided a comprehensive review of refugee integration in all EU Member States. However, time and resource constraints dictated that a selection of Member States was made to participate in this project. Furthermore, experiences from working with refugees in most EU Member States showed there are sufficient similarities in the barriers and facilitators impacting refugee integration to allow for a more selective approach. The four project countries were selected in order to include countries with different experiences of refugee flows but where commonalities can nevertheless be observed, and where some integration support is already in place and some evaluation has taken place. All four countries have substantial experience receiving asylum-seekers and with integration of refugees recognised in the national systems. Nevertheless differences among the four countries in relation to refugee flows, language, integration strategies and integration support allow for a broader perspective to be presented.

## 2.2 Gathering Data

Information was gathered through two approaches: desk research and consultation. In the consultation phase, the focus was on seeking adult refugee respondents (over eighteen years) who had come through the asylum system. Those with subsidiary protection status were not actively sought, but were included in some interviews. Those who were resettled refugees were not actively sought as participants because of the often very different experience of this group, both in the reception and integration phases compared with those entering through the asylum system. In the desk research phase, literature rarely discerned between resettled refugees and those who came through the asylum system, or between refugees and the wider migrant population. However statistical data in Ireland does usually differentiate between programme and convention refugees. Therefore the report specifies this only where it is known. The language of the primary and secondary data was primarily English.

## 2.3 Desk Research

The desk research drew on relevant available literature on the integration of refugees. Where relevant, and where no refugee specific literature was available, literature on the integration of migrants/persons with a migration background was reviewed. Materials on the ways in which integration generally is being evaluated and measured were reviewed. These included material produced by academics and civil society, such as reports, studies and articles and policy documents as well as existing data and statistics. Desk research included searches on-line as well as library searches.

The desk research provided an overview of existing information, aimed at identifying trends, policy and presence (or not) of refugee specific material. It formed the basis for the subsequent steps of the research. The review gathered the information available, identified gaps in knowledge, and looked at policy, research and integration trends in the Irish context.

It should be noted that access to research material on refugee integration can be challenging. A number of studies are unpublished and are thus difficult to access by researchers as well as the wider public.

Meetings with Refugees		
<b>Group Meetings</b>	Convention	32
	Programme	16
<b>Individual Meetings</b>	Convention	20
	Programme	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>71</b>

## 2.4 Consultations

At the heart of this report the core commitment of UNHCR ‘to ensure that all persons of concern enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their family members and communities’<sup>6</sup> and a reaffirmation of the importance of working in partnership with stakeholders. Accordingly, this report is based on three types of consultations conducted between October 2012 and February 2013: national reference group consultations, stakeholder meetings, and meetings with refugees and members of the receiving society.

<sup>6</sup> For further information on UNHCR’s Age, Gender and Diversity Policy see <http://www.unhcr.org/4e7757449.html>

At the beginning of the research a National Reference Group<sup>7</sup> was formed to guide and provide feedback on the project. The group advised on many of the integration domains considered of relevance in the national context which were identified as Active Citizenship with a particular focus on the role of the media; Access to Information; Social Inclusion with a particular focus on racism and discrimination; and finally Housing and Employment which were identified as common topics between the four countries involved in the Western Europe research.

Individual meetings were held across the country with government departments, NGOs and community groups<sup>8</sup>. This offered an opportunity to hear accounts of the main challenges and opportunities that government departments, NGOs, and community groups encounter in their daily work, and to gather their opinions and advice on the integration domains proposed to be researched.

In addition to individual stakeholder meetings, five stakeholder group meetings<sup>9</sup> were held in Dublin to discuss the five topics proposed. Ahead of the meeting, each participant received a letter of invitation and the agenda for the meeting which included indicative questions for discussion. The meetings were held in Dublin, and ran from 9am until 2pm. Subsequent to the meeting, the summary notes from the discussion were circulated to the participants and to those who had been invited but who could not attend on the day, and an opportunity was offered to provide further input.

In parallel to consultations with stakeholders, individual and group interviews were also conducted with 71 refugees<sup>10</sup>, from 26 different nationalities, living across 9 Irish counties. The majority of the interviews were conducted through English.

Both the group meetings and individual interviews with refugees followed a semi-structured format. The main purpose of the interviews was to discuss integration in very informal terms, and most importantly to allow time for refugees to speak about the topics that they found important to their integration process. Group meetings lasted on average 2 hours, and individual interviews took between 1 and 3 hours each.

To ensure that the research reflected a variety of opinions and experiences, refugees were contacted through different means. Group meetings were organised with refugee service users of NGOs and community groups. Refugees were also sought via personal contacts, the County Dublin Vocational Educational Committees, and snowballing<sup>11</sup>. Media coverage inviting refugees to participate in the research was secured through the circulation of a press note to local newspapers and community radio stations across the country and a poster was produced and distributed to religious organisations and NGOs. Some refugees who had previously contacted UNHCR Ireland were also contacted.

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<sup>7</sup> For the list of the members of the National Reference Group please see annex 1

<sup>8</sup> For the list of stakeholders consulted please see annex 2

<sup>9</sup> For the list of stakeholders who attended stakeholder group meetings please see annex 3

<sup>10</sup> For a general profile of refugees interviewed please see annex 4

<sup>11</sup> Chain-referral sampling

## 2.5 Analysis

Qualitative research and analysis methods were employed. These consisted of a review of the relevant literature, secondary data analysis, and interpretation of the outcomes of consultations with refugees and stakeholder groups. The empirical thematic analysis of the refugee consultations and stakeholder meetings was conducted in line with the research questions shared with the participants at the consultations and stakeholder meetings and provided the basis for the report's recommendations. This means that relevant themes or emerging patterns within the material have been identified, examined and reviewed in relation to the research questions.

Following consultation with the National Reference Group, refugees and stakeholders, the notes from the meetings and interviews were transcribed and subsequently analyzed. Each paragraph of each transcript was allocated a code which best represented the domain of integration being studied. As patterns started to emerge, views and opinions were aggregated under the specific topics. The illustration of these topics was completed with verbatim examples from interviews with refugees. Interviews with refugees were not recorded by mechanical or digital means in accordance with the requests of the vast majority of the refugee participants.

## 2.6 Bias

The focus on dialogue and qualitative research with refugees, stakeholders, NGOs, and community groups enabled us to gather an in-depth understanding of experiences of integration, and to gain knowledge on how those experiences affect the everyday lives of refugees in Ireland. The limitations of applying qualitative methodology when conducting research with a relatively small number of refugees means that the information is not statistically representative although it identifies aspects of social life which are topical for certain populations. In this regard, a qualitative approach provides a platform to explore the meaning that integration has for refugees' lives, to observe and record the process of integration, and to help identify which policies and practices are important for integration.

Due to the relatively low number of refugees in Ireland and the small size of the refugee population interviewed, it is difficult to highlight differences between age groups, gender, nationality and county of residence without compromising anonymity of the participants. Therefore, differences will only be highlighted when the identity of refugees can be protected. To further protect anonymity, we have also aggregated persons with refugee status and those with Subsidiary Protection status.

Ideally we would have liked to hold interviews with refugees in all Irish counties but time constraints dictated that interviews were conducted in 9 out of the 26 counties in the Republic of Ireland. Most interviews were conducted through English, and 2 were conducted in Portuguese. During group meetings, refugees tended to help each other when difficulties with language arose.

Children were not included in the remit of the research undertaken in the 4 States in which this research was conducted. The measures required to undertake high quality research and participation activities with children were unfortunately beyond the scope of this study. Separately UNHCR has undertaken research with asylum seeking and refugee children in Western Europe which can be consulted at [www.refworld.org](http://www.refworld.org).

## 2.7 Ethics

In research involving the interviewing of refugees ethical considerations are significant. Not only may experiences of trauma and insecurity have characterized an individual refugee's flight and journey, but such experiences often continue into the settlement context and may influence the individual's ability and desire to integrate. These experiences may also affect refugees' willingness and ability to participate in research.

UNHCR's guidance on ethics in relation to refugee engagement does not relate specifically to research of this kind; however a set of project ethical guidelines were followed by each team in the Western Europe component. The project's ethical guidelines reflected the role of the researcher as one of respect for persons, beneficence, and equity, and followed principles of transparency, confidentiality, voluntariness and avoidance of undue influence. Regarding refugee respondents, original names have not been used and some contexts were changed in order to ensure anonymity.

Finally, it should be noted that this study was not intended to be representative of all EU Member States. Nor was it intended to be a quantitative study providing extensive statistical data. Instead, this is a qualitative study incorporating consultations across a wide spectrum of those involved in determining policy and support for the integration of refugees, those delivering programmes and initiatives, and refugees themselves. The value of this approach lies in bringing together each of these elements in a way that allows each to speak to the other, enabling the conceptualisation of a way forward for future research on integration of refugees in the EU. This approach also allows for a crystallisation of some of the barriers and facilitators to refugee integration commonly experienced in the EU and to highlight good practices which have worked well to overcome barriers.





# Literature Review

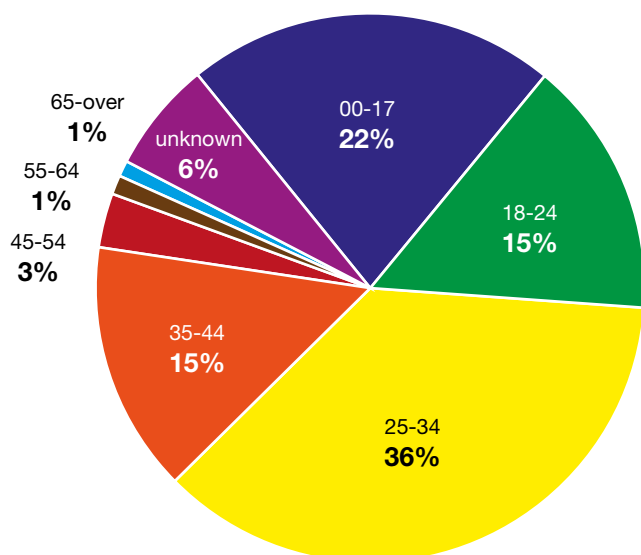
## 3.1 Statistical background on the refugee population

Ireland has undergone a rapid and unprecedented change in migratory flows over the past 20 years, when the share of immigrants increased from 3% in 1993 (Byrne et al. 2010: 272) to 12% in 2011 (Ireland. Central Statistics Office 2012:7). The increase in the migrant population was also seen in the number of persons seeking asylum in the State. Since 1996, more than 84,000 persons have sought asylum in Ireland.

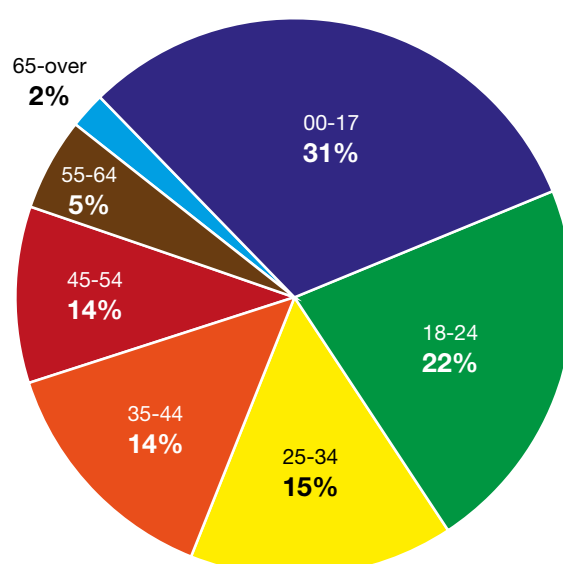
While there is no accurate statistical information on the number of refugees in Ireland, according to the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS 2013a), of those seeking asylum in Ireland in the past 20 years, just over 10,000 persons from 116 countries have been granted refugee status. Of this number, estimates based on data combined from a number of sources relating to refugees indicates that approximately 6,100 may now be naturalized Irish citizens.

In terms of gender profile over the past 20 years, the majority of refugees in Ireland were male, on average by a percentage of 60% male to 40% female (INIS 2013a). As regards the age profile of the refugee population, the age group 25 to 34 years-old was the largest group (INIS 2013a).

**Conventional Refugees by Age Group 2000-2012**



**Programme Refugees by Age Group 2000-2012**



Regarding family reunification approvals, 4,732 family members or civil partners were approved to travel to Ireland and be reunited with their families as part of a Family Reunification application (INIS 2013b).

In respect of refugees who have been admitted into Ireland on resettlement, a total of 1,043 programme refugees<sup>12</sup>, 533 male and 510 female, from 31 different countries have been invited to Ireland since 2000(OPMI 2013). The majority of persons admitted into Ireland on a resettlement programme were under 24 years-old when they arrived in the State.

## 3.2 Background on Integration Policy

The sharp increase in migration to Ireland in the past two decades has made a significant contribution to economic, social and cultural developments in the country, and the contribution of migrants has been acknowledged in policy documents as positive (NESC 2006: xi; Ireland 2007; Smyth et al. 2009). However, this rapid increase in migrant population and an increasing number of persons seeking protection in Ireland also presented challenges for integration.

Until 2008, the most comprehensive approach to integration was specifically directed at refugees and articulated in *Integration: A Two Way Process* (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999), with other reports proposing models for the resettlement of programme refugees (O'Reagan 1998; Magennis et al 2005; Kinlen 2008; Robinson et al 2010).

In *Integration: A Two Way Process*, the Interdepartmental Working Group defines integration as 'the ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity' (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999: 9) and identifies the process of integration to be a complex one, understood as a two way process which places responsibilities and duties on both the indigenous society and refugees. The report recognises the need for the provision of targeted measures to address the potential disadvantage of refugees, and determines that such measures be delivered through mainstream services. The report concludes by stressing the need to develop a comprehensive strategy for integration in Ireland and the need to create an organisational structure prepared to coordinate and implement integration policy. The working group also recommends that mainstream services are enhanced to cope with the challenges posed by the delivery of services

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<sup>12</sup> "Programme refugee" means a person to whom leave to enter and remain in the State for temporary protection or resettlement as part of a group of persons has been given by the Irish Government. For further information see <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1996/en/act/pub/0017/sec0024.html>

to a diverse population. The paucity of information on refugees and refugee communities has important implications in the formulation of integration policies, and *Integration: A Two Way Process* emphasises the need for a public awareness strategy and further research on the needs of refugees. Further, the report states that '[i]n the absence of a coordinated national policy on integration for all refugees, the measures taken by the State to facilitate integration have been fragmented and lacking in co-ordination and have had limited impact.' (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999:20) and therefore recommends that 'there must be cohesion in delivery of services and the Government's commitment to integration must be clearly grounded in government policy and driven by central Government.' (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999:20)

In 2006, the National Economic and Social Council recognised in the report *Migration Policy* (NESC 2006) that 'integration of migrants is one of the main factors determining the overall success or failure of migration' (NESC 2006:xiii) and called for clarification in Ireland's approach to migration, focusing on three broad goals (1) economic and social development; (2) the rule of law and (3) integration of migrants into economic, social, cultural and civic life (NESC 2006:119). In the same report, the authors also identify three dimensions along which integration progress can be measured: (1) measures relating to socio-economic performance and civic behavior; (2) measures of structural integration; (3) measures of values, attitudes and behaviors (2006: 184).

In 2008, the newly established Office of the Minister for Integration (now the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration) published the first Ministerial statement on integration strategy. In *Migration Nation* (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008) integration is understood as a process, and as a key challenge for both the Government and Irish society to integrate a diversity of peoples 'so that they become the new Irish citizens of the 21st century' (2008:8), and in effect linking integration to citizenship. Integration is identified and defined as a 'two-way street involving rights and duties for those migrants who reside, work and in particular those who aspire to be Irish citizens' (2008:10). *Migration Nation* positions integration within the framework of Government's social planning, supporting the delivery of an overarching mainstream policy, and points out that integration should not be understood as a 'migrants only' discussion. Whilst the report highlights the Government commitment to develop a comprehensive strategy on migrant integration, it also recognises that '[t]here are serious gaps in our information about the new communities ... The quality of the research on integration has been sporadic and uneven, often linked to the difficulty of getting appropriate data' (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 23). Furthermore, the report acknowledges that, in these circumstances, the measurement of 'integration outcomes is particularly difficult' (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 24).

Notwithstanding the challenges in defining a detailed and inclusive integration strategy, and the fact that a comprehensive strategy has effectively been on hold since the publication of *Migration Nation*, in the report the Government commits to important principles of integration: (1) partnership approach between state bodies and non-governmental organisations as well as civil society bodies; (2) strong links between integration policy and wider state social inclusion measures, strategies and initiatives; (3) clear public focus that avoids the creation of parallel societies; and (4) commitment to effective local delivery mechanisms (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008:72). Moreover, integration policy places focus on local integration and 'on the role of local authorities, sporting bodies, faith-based groups and political parties in building integrated communities and [on] the plans to target funding in these areas' (Ireland. Office for the Promotion of Migrant integration 2012). The report also stresses the importance of provision of information, citizenship, protection measures against exploitation and discrimination of migrants, interpretation and translation services, public service recruitment, the role of NGOs, measurement of public opinion, health services, and evaluation of education and language teaching (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008: 51-61). The key principles of integration have been recently highlighted in a speech by Mr. Alan Shatter, Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence (Shatter 2013) whose department, 'through the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, has a cross-Departmental mandate to develop, lead and co-ordinate integration policy across other government departments, agencies and services' (Shatter 2013).

The literature suggests limited structured policy on refugee integration in Ireland. Boucher argues that a laissez-faire integration strategy largely devolved integration processes to individuals, families, local communities, public bodies, NGOs, and businesses that employed refugees (2008; 2010). And currently there is no information on the development and implementation of a framework for a

common understanding of refugee integration and for the design of measuring tools and indicators that can serve as a platform for 'dialogue around issues of integration policy and practice' (Ager and Strang 2004: 2).

To date, no indicators of refugee integration have been written into policy in Ireland, however the *Annual Monitoring Report on Integration 2011* (McGinnity et al 2012a) highlights indicator areas of migrant integration identified within EU integration policy. The report uses a framework of assessment based on the set of integration indicators proposed at the fourth EU Ministerial Conference on Integration held in 2010, known as the 'Zaragoza Indicators'. The report focuses its analysis on Employment, Education, Social Inclusion and Active Citizenship which are key indicator areas followed at EU level and by other EU Member States. However, the report points out that the analysis of such indicators is limited to quantitative elements and therefore does not account for the experiences of migrants', or refugees', integration in Ireland.

The *Annual Monitoring Report on Integration 2011* emphasises that in order to be eligible for long-term residence under the proposed 'Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill', applicants must fulfill various conditions including to be of a good character; to speak English or Irish; and to satisfy the Minister for Justice and Equality that they are making efforts to integrate. Though review of material has identified no guidelines as to determine how language skills or levels of integration should be measured, or how 'good character' is to be defined.

The following sections describe integration policy areas identified in the literature review and draw on policy documents, intercultural strategies for wider migrant integration which have been adopted by different government departments, NGO reports, and other academic material. Whenever possible, they offer a review and an account of Convention refugee-specific data and knowledge; when such information is not available, the review builds on other migrant integration documents. The literature review informs the empirical section discussed in chapter 5 and provides context for the findings from interviews with refugees and stakeholders.

The sections include not only the five policy areas covered in this research and detailed in Chapter 4 of this report, but also include sections on Health, Family Reunification and Education to provide a more complete picture of other policy areas affecting the integration of refugees in Ireland and to reflect a broader understanding of integration supported by current literature and the experience of refugees and views of stakeholders. It should be noted that the following policy areas of integration represent small pieces of a more complex pattern of relationships, and therefore should not be understood as a 'hierarchy' or that 'integration should happen in a particular order (i.e. that you achieve employment first, then greater social bonds)' (Ager and Strang 2004: 4-5 [original parenthesis]), and some are addressed specifically and others are discussed as overarching issues.

### 3.3 Health

In the *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-2012* '[i]t is acknowledged that people from minority ethnic groups are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion' (Ireland. Department of Health 2008:7). The document also highlights a number of concerns specific to refugees, and places particular emphasis on mental health. In the strategy it is pointed out that mental health is 'adversely affected by social isolation, pre and post-arrival trauma, culture shock, language barriers and [in the case of asylum seekers] fear of deportation coupled with a lack of understanding about services, poverty and poor housing' (Ireland. Department of Health 2008:42). The report also identifies the asylum process as a stressor. The length of stay in, and the lack of entitlement during this period is seen as further contributing to mental and physical health issues. Other consequences mentioned are boredom, depression, and loss of self-esteem. According to Lakeman and Matthews (2010), experiences of uncertainty and insecurity during the Direct Provision system also 'taxes and challenges people's capacities to cope'.

Lakeman and Matthews point out that 'the relationship between migration, mental health, mental disorder and aspects of social integration is complex', and found there is a 'very low level of awareness of, and access to, formal mental health services of any kind and indeed a suspiciousness of services generally' (2010). They also highlight the need for access routes to specialist trauma

counseling and preventative services. In a survey conducted in the city of Limerick with Refugees and persons with Leave to Remain status, 30% of those interviewed indicated that they suffered from depression, anxiety or stress (Phelan and Kuol 2005: 25). This, despite the fact that an overwhelming majority (98%) of respondents indicated they had no difficulty registering with a general practitioner (GP) (Phelan and Kuol 2005: 26).

In the key priorities identified in the *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-2012*, the Health Service Executive (HSE) places particular importance on the delivery of information, advice, advocacy and cultural mediation, as well as professional interpretation and translation services. To this effect, the HSE published *Lost in Translation?* which provides good practice guidelines on translation and interpretation for its staff. The report proposes a number of recommendations to tackle barriers to accessing, and to the delivery of health services, and makes recommendations for the development of vehicles to promote access. Some of these recommendations have been enacted and according to a recent publication by The Integration Centre there has been positive progress in the area of information provision for migrant groups (The Integration Centre 2012: 14).

While both Phelan and Kuol (2005), and the Integration Centre (2012) have registered some progress in the provision of specialized, short-term, intensive training for community interpreters, the poor state of mental health recorded in direct provision centres remain a concern (The Integration Centre 2012: 14). Healy et al. (2010) call for further education programmes to facilitate speech and language therapists 'to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to work with bilingual clients', and Martín and Phelan (2010) propose that the roles of medical interpreters and cultural mediators should be seen and treated as separate roles, boundaries for each role should be clarified. But Pieper (2010) finds there is a 'low uptake of private interpretation services in general and a heavy reliance on informal strategies for communication. While GPs felt that initial problems had been overcome, refugees and asylum seekers were not happy 'getting by' in consultation with ad hoc, informal strategies'.

Many of the recommendations proposed in the *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-2012* (Ireland. Department of Health 2008) place a strong (emphasizes) emphasis on cultural training and on the premise that in order to achieve optimal and cost effective results, the design and development of Primary Care Teams should be a joint effort between the HSE and patients. An example of an area that requires specific cultural and gender training is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), where health care professions need to be particularly sensitive and informed about female circumcision to be able to build trust with their patients. AkiDwA, a network for migrant women in Ireland, stresses that '[a] purely physiological and clinical understanding of FGM will not necessarily be sufficient to address psychological, psycho-sexual and child protection concerns that need to be considered in relation to a patient who has undergone FGM' (Green 2010).

Tonya Myles points out, 'the fact that health inequalities exist in Ireland is undisputed' (2010). According to Cairdre, a community development organisation working to tackle health inequalities among ethnic minority communities, 'addressing health inequalities has to include addressing the social and economic inequalities' (Myles 2010). The lack of empirical data goes beyond refugees and how they perceive medical care, and the relationship they foster with the GPs. Lakeman and Matthews (2010) suggest that the voices of refugees and their human stories have been largely absent from the literature of psychology, as are the experiences in the country of origin, of the migration journey and of flight. In the same measure, there is very little data about how healthcare professionals perceive their interactions with patients from a culturally diverse background (Pieper 2010), and how these experiences impact on their engagement with refugees.

In a climate of economic downturn and cutbacks to health services, alternative models of engagement with asylum seekers and refugees are being developed. One such model is the Peer Health Worker project, developed in 2009 by the Galway Refugee Support Group, piloted to deliver intercultural health information and on-going cross-cultural resources for liaison with refugees and asylum seekers, and to provide 'a model for effective liaison and information between service providers and service users on emerging health issues' (Bartlett 2010:13).

## ➤ Identified gaps in research:

- Lack of data available in Ireland on equity of access to health services for refugees.
- Absence of information about women's health problems such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Currently, data collection from GPs and maternity hospitals on FGM cases is not being consistently recorded.
- Lack of research on migratory experiences of refugees, their causes, consequences and health implications.
- Lack of knowledge on the experiences of healthcare professionals when engaging with refugees.

## 3.4 Family Reunification

Irish constitutional and human rights law recognises the central role of the family unit.<sup>13</sup> Refugees have a statutory right to family reunification provided for in Article 18 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended). Section 18(3)(a) provides that refugees are entitled to family reunification and members of the family 'shall be entitled to the rights and privileges specified in section 3 for such period as the refugee is entitled to remain in the State' (Refugee Act 1996 (as amended)). The literature is unclear as to whether refugees retain their entitlement to family reunification provided for under the Refugee Act 1996 after they have naturalised as Irish citizens.

The importance of family reunification on refugee integration was acknowledged in 1999 in *Integration: A Two Way Process*, the official statement of integration of refugees in Ireland (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999). Here, the reunification of the family unit is regarded as playing a role in 'easing the sense of isolation which refugees can experience' (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999: 32). Family is also mentioned as a 'natural and fundamental unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State', echoing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999: 32).

The *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-2012* highlights the implications for the mental and physical health of refugees during the process of family reunification, as overlying it are feelings of loneliness and fear for the safety and well-being of family members. (Ireland. Department of Health 2008: 44). Furthermore, research suggests that for migrants, separation not only affects immediate family but also relationships with extended family (Feldman et al. 2008: 150), as extended family, such as grandparents, is seen as instrumental in the family support system.

The literature suggests that these issues pose substantial difficulties for refugees as '[d]elays lead to long intervals of separation from families leaving them in a limbo in which lives are put on hold ... [and] it deprives families of a sense of normalcy' (Becker et al. 2013:56). Furthermore, maintaining relationships at a distance, in many cases relationships underlined by the fear of safety for family members, can have a detrimental effect on the ability of the refugee to fully participate in Irish society and cause considerable strain on already scarce financial resources, and add to a sense of guilt (Becker et al. 2013:62-63).

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<sup>13</sup> Article 41.1.1° 'The State recognizes the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law' and Article 41.1.2° 'The State, therefore, guarantees to protect the Family in its constitution and authority, as the necessary basis of social order and as indispensable to the welfare of the Nation and the State.' For further information please see [http://socialpolicy.ucc.ie/Irish\\_Constitution\\_english.pdf](http://socialpolicy.ucc.ie/Irish_Constitution_english.pdf)

Improvement in the application process for reunification of family members has been reported in Ireland (Becker et al. 2013). The report *Family Reunification: a barrier or facilitator of integration?* identifies improvements in the areas of information provision, reduction in processing times of family reunification applications, and introduction of de facto partners (Becker et al. 2013: 55). The same report also identifies challenges such as lack of information and customer service, as well as an overreliance on informal information networks and State funded organisations (Becker et al. 2013). It also identifies high levels of processing times and bureaucracy as a barrier, which has a special impact on refugees and their ability to provide documents that they may not be in a position to obtain due to circumstances in the country of origin (Becker et al. 2013:56).

Research also highlights the 'limitations of the current statutory provisions, whereby there is no provision for unmarried partners of refugees and the concept of "dependence" is narrowly construed and fails to take into account the needs of the refugee themselves' (Cosgrave 2006:82). Previous research also emphasises the emotional burden of lone parenting in cases when the partner is not entitled to be reunited with the migrant in Ireland (Feldman et al 2008:150).

Research highlights that extended periods of separation can impact on the ability of families to readjust and rebuild relationships once family reunification has been approved and family has been reunited in Ireland. Although there is some research carried out on family reunification (Cosgrave 2006; Feldman et al. 2008), the literature suggests that the dearth of data on the levels of integration of refugees and their families poses considerable difficulties in the formulation of integration policies and their evaluation. Becker et al. highlight that 'the lack of disaggregated data available across all categories or information regarding numbers of applications made [for family reunification] and those granted and refused' (Becker et al. 2013:70) causes difficulties when assessing the numbers of family members being reunited in Ireland, and the impact that has on social and economic integration.

## ➤ Identified gaps in research

- Family reunification for family members of third-country nationals is governed by separate pieces of legislative and administrative procedures. But research tends to aggregate refugees, persons granted subsidiary protection, persons granted 'leave-to-remain', long-term residents, victims of trafficking, and other non-EEA migrant workers. Since these cohorts have different needs and restrictions, and their applications are governed by different legislative procedures, research specific to these groups would be merited.
- Lack of research on the impact that family reunification has on other spheres of refugees' lives.



## 3.5 Housing

The Roadmap to Integration 2012 identifies the complexity of social protection as one of the main challenges for migrants when accessing social housing and rent supplement (The Integration Centre 2012: 24). Research (Crosscare, Doras Luimní and NASC 2012) flags the issue of misinformation as a problem when accessing the State social protection system, as well as poor standards in the provision of information and in processing delays. The literature suggests that navigating the provision of housing and rent supplement can be challenging because despite the links between rent supplements and eligibility to social housing, these fall under different government departments. A 'Refugee, Programme Refugee, or (a person with) Subsidiary Protection status is eligible to be considered for social housing support, from the date of the granting of such status, on the [same] basis as an Irish citizen' (Ireland. Department of Environment, Community and Local Government 2011a: 4) and a decision (regardless of nationality) is made to determine if the applicant complies with the five Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) guidelines<sup>14</sup>. The Department of Social Protection also states on its website '[t]hose granted refugee status in Ireland can only be regarded as habitually resident from the date of grant of that status, provided they have lived continuously in the State since then, and cannot be treated as habitually resident for any time before that' (Ireland. Department of Social Protection 2012b). Time spent in the asylum process is not counted. The document further states that if 'there is evidence that they [refugees] have not lived continuously in the State since refugee status was granted, their applications will require detailed consideration having regard to the five factors' (Ireland. Department of Social Protection 2012b). Research suggests that the determination of HRC is a complex and discretionary condition and the applicant's status 'must still be examined by reference to the five factors to determine whether the person has actually transferred their habitual residence to this State' (Crosscare Migrant Project Submission cited in Crosscare, Doras Luimní and NASC 2012: 43).

In a recent housing needs assessment conducted by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, 848 Refugee and Subsidiary Protection households were in need of support, mainly located in the cities of Cork, Limerick and Dublin (Ireland. Department of Environment, Community and Local Government 2012: 2). It is worth mentioning that housing services for refugees in Ireland are mainstreamed, and access to social housing is a widespread challenge, not affecting refugees or migrant communities exclusively. However, research identified cultural and language problems; a lack of understanding of the Irish banking system; low rates of home ownership (immigrants are much less likely to own their homes); and discrimination as often more common to migrant communities (see Keenan 2009; Silke et al 2008; Phelan and Kuol: 2005).

In the report *Building Integrated Neighbourhoods*, the authors identify the housing system as a key element for integration. It highlights the fact that the experiences of ethnic minority groups in accessing housing tend to be worse than for the indigenous population. The same report identifies income differences, difficulties in accessing housing information, discrimination in the housing market, cultural differences, and high renting prices in urban areas as the main factors influencing the experience of minority ethnic groups (Silke et al 2008: 125).

At a seminar organised by Dublin City Council and the Vincentian Refugee Centre (currently Crosscare Refugee Service) entitled 'One City One People - Unlocking the closed door: The experience of migrant communities in the private rented housing sector' a particular challenge for refugees was identified - '[t]o many people [refugees] it will be their first time [after Direct Provision] to live independently in Ireland and deal with the private rented market' (Mc Laughlin 2011). Additional challenges identified include the payment of a security deposit and a month's rent in advance, which is later reimbursed by the Community Welfare Officer once the person has keys to the property (Mc Laughlin 2011). Literature suggests that these challenges impact on the ability of

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<sup>14</sup> Section 246 (4) of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, incorporates into Irish law 5 factors that have been set down in judgments given by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) as relevant to determining whether a person is habitually resident. The following are the five factors: (1) Length and continuity of residence in Ireland or in any other particular country; (2) Length and purpose of any absence from Ireland; (3) Nature and pattern of employment; (4) Applicant's main centre of interest; (5) Future intention of applicant concerned as they appear from all the circumstances. For further details see <http://goo.gl/jY238K>

the refugee to access private housing and, at stages, pushes them into situations where they require access to emergency accommodation, that is, temporary access to overnight shelter. A study with migrants conducted by Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland, found that limited eligibility for services, lack of English language, and a lack of familiarity with the social welfare system, in many cases determined the level of exclusion experienced by migrants and shaped their experiences of homelessness and their ability to move on from situations of homelessness. (Focus Ireland and ICI 2012)

'On 1 February the Standards for Rented Housing Regulations 2008 and 2009 came into effect in their entirety' (Devane 2013) which means that every bedsit must comply with certain heating and sanitary requirements. Although the measure is largely welcomed, it also poses considerable strain on the most affordable accommodation for single people, where '[o]ne third of people living in bedsits are unemployed ... [and] just under half of the tenants are Irish with over 20 per cent coming from Africa and Asia' (Devane 2013). The unemployment figure is particularly relevant as, according to Crosscare Refugee Service, one of the most difficult challenges for refugees when looking for accommodation is finding a place where rent allowance is accepted (Mc Laughlin 2011). Ní Shé et al. further highlight that the challenges of finding affordable housing accommodation compels refugees to live in poorer neighborhoods which put them at a risk of isolation (2007:46).

Mc Laughlin states that the private rented market is particularly harsh 'for people from African descent and people with refugee status' (2011). Discriminatory remarks and actions not only affect refugees but also affect the capacity of NGOs to help them to accessing private accommodation. Discrimination has an adverse effect on the ability of people to integrate into Irish society and can have a substantial impact on people's quality of life (Mc Laughlin 2011; Feldman et al. 2008; McGinnity et al. 2006).

## ➤ Identified gaps in research

- Although some research has been conducted on access to housing for refugees (McLaughlin 2011; Feldman et al. 2008; McGinnity et al. 2006; Ní Shé et al. 2007) there is a need to develop research on the experiences of refugees when accessing private rented accommodation; this has been previously recommended by Crosscare Refugee Service. This is particularly relevant in the current housing provision system and the over-reliance on private rented accommodation where adequate living standards are not always reinforced.
- There is a lack of empirical data in relation to the boundaries of private rental discretion; moreover, there is some evidence from the literature that the difficulties and prejudices that refugees face when accessing private rented housing may hinder their rights to adequate housing standards.

## 3.6 Education

Similar to other provision of services, education for refugees is also mainstreamed. In 2010 the Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration published the *Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015 (2010)* where the departments define 5 goals: (1) Enable the adoption of a whole institution approach to creating and intercultural learning environment; (2) Build the capacity of education providers to develop an intercultural learning environment; (3) Support students to become proficient in the language of instruction; (4) Encourage and promote active partnership, engagement and effective communication between education providers, students, parents and communities; (5) Promote and evaluate data gathering and monitoring so that policy and decision making is evidence based (2010). The strategy further specifies that strategic goals are designed to encompass all participants in education, and are to be monitored through the Department of Education and Skills Migrant Steering Committee, the Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI)<sup>15</sup>, the OMI Ministerial Council, and an annual stakeholder forum.

The *Roadmap to Integration 2012* identifies positive progress done at the level of training in respect of cultural barriers and racism and discrimination, but highlights that Irish language remains a requirement for primary school teachers and represents a barrier for entry to the profession (The Integration Centre 2012: 17). Research also suggests that where schools are oversubscribed enrollment criteria is likely to favour students whose siblings are already attending that school and so favor settled communities (Smyth 2009: xiv). Admission policies of Irish schools have also been reported as posing difficulties, particularly as '[s]chools may also prioritise the applications of children with the same religious background as the school's patron' (McGinnity et al 2012a: 26), and questions remain as to determining if the current largely denominational system is equipped to deal with an increasingly diverse population (see Maguire and Murphy 2012: 92-121). A recently published survey conducted by the Department of Education and Skills (Ireland. Department of Education and Skills 2012) highlights the fact that there is parental demand for a greater choice on primary school patronage, and the Minister for Education called for the main patron, the Catholic Bishop or Archbishop, in each of the areas surveyed to consider options to include a choice of alternative patron (Ireland. Department of Education and Skills 2012:8).

A study conducted with migrant students in primary and secondary schools found that the distribution of immigrant students between the two level schools is considerably different. While at secondary level the vast majority of schools have migrant students albeit in small proportions, this is considerably different from primary schools where over 40% have no migrant students but those schools who have, tend to have a greater proportion (Byrne 2010: 284). The same study found that 'schools with a more socio-economically disadvantaged intake tend to have a higher proportion of immigrant students than other schools, and this is true for both (urban) primary and secondary schools' (Byrne 2010: 285). As the study further highlights, this poses important questions as to 'whether choice is available for immigrant families given that these schools tend to be undersubscribed' (Byrne 2010:285; see Dramody et al. 2012).

Refugees are entitled to access education and educational support under the same formal conditions as Irish citizens. Children of asylum-seekers have access to primary and secondary education, while adult asylum-seekers have access to English language and computer classes only. These are often delivered on a voluntary basis, and some English classes are made available by local Vocational Education Committees<sup>16</sup>.

In a survey on integration and service provision in Limerick conducted with refugees and persons with leave-to-remain status, Phelan and Kuol remark that although 71% of all respondents reported having education qualifications from their country of origin, only 13% reported having those qualifications recognised in Ireland; the reasons for this discrepancy are not given. 83%

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<sup>15</sup> Currently the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration

<sup>16</sup> The Adult Refugee Programme has been recently discontinued due to cutbacks. When it operated it was open to all those with refugee status, although this was, in effect, interpreted as being in possession of a valid Green Card with a stamp 4. The Programme offers assistance in 3 ways: up-skilling English language ability, assistance in accessing the work/study place and, through social activities, an increase in the understanding of both the culture and the general characteristics of Ireland. <http://goo.gl/WvmaL8>

of respondents indicated that pursuing education in Ireland was highly desirable (Phelan and Kuol 2005: 12), but identified challenges in accessing education. The main issues related to an inadequate level of English language, lack of understanding of the application process for programmes, and insufficient financial resources.

One of the main challenges to achieving academic performance is deficiency in the English language. It is also recognised that language plays an important role in the levels of engagement that children and parents have with schools (McGinnity et al 2012a: 27). Teachers have indicated that language difficulties impact, not only on the academic progress of students, but also on their ability to socialise with other students (Smyth 2009: xv). Additionally, research shows that language support teachers can smooth the initial transition period of the newcomer student (Smyth 2009: xvi). The lack of English language proficiency is not only an obstacle to pursuing education but, as suggested by Lorna Carson it is also a 'serious obstacle to refugees' involvement in social and cultural activities as well as an obstacle to access to services and institutions' (2008: 89). In light of this, the English language classroom should not be considered only as a platform for English learning but rather it is a space which can potentially provide the tools to assist refugees in pursuing further education, training and employment (Carson 2008: 101). As Ruth McAreavey suggests 'language classes often become a gateway for other things. When provided in the informal setting of the local charity, classes were instrumental to accessing other support' (2010: 15). Furthermore, 'English language learning and interactions in the classroom provide 'social context ... which can encourage autonomous behavior' (Carson 2008:101). Carson further points out that refugees are an extremely diverse population and for this reason calls for a learner-centered approach to learning English as a second language. According to her research, refugee students did not have much contact with the Irish community beyond the school setting and English learning tends to be goal-oriented.

### ➤ Identified gaps in research

- Rachel Fionda suggests that migrant children are at a disadvantage when they enter post-primary education and that their 'cultural and linguistic capital is often not valued by teachers, schools or the curriculum' (2011: 11). There is a lack of research addressing the specific challenges that refugee children face in the education system.
- There is a lack of empirical information that enables us to understand the demands that language support poses on teachers and the education system.
- There is a lack of information about refugee parents and their everyday involvement with schools and their children's education. Refugees face when accessing private rented housing may hinder their rights to adequate housing standards.

## 3.7 Social Inclusion

Policy on Social Inclusion in Ireland is driven by two main documents, The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (2007a) and the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (2007b). The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (2007) which is directed at the general population, sets out a policy objective for developing and implementing policy with the goal of combating social exclusion and poverty and adopts the definition that '[p]eople are living in poverty if their income (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society' (Ireland. 2007: 20). This policy document highlights the importance of building and supporting sustainable communities, and at this level it identifies integration of migrants as a key policy goal. The National Development Plan 2007-2013, which is also a document directed at the wider society, commits to English language support for children from a non-English language background, including refugee children, and to the

development of a national integration policy. The subsequent national integration policy, *Migration Nation* (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008), places a focus on social inclusion and on the role of local authorities, sporting bodies and faith-based groups in building integrated communities, with funding being allocated to various bodies<sup>17</sup>.

The role of faith communities is placed at centre stage in the integration process and in policy, and is recognized as having important roles in the planning and implementation of integration strategies, together with local authorities. The report *Integration and Interfaith: Faith/City Engagement in a Multicultural Context* highlights that faith communities are not only spaces for worshipping but also provide a space for socializing, with religion occupying 'a central place in the culture of many minority ethnic and refugee communities' (Cristea 2011: 2). Religious practice and organisation mediate social connections and constitute a space which, as Ager and Strang (2008: 178) suggest, enables refugees to share cultural practices and are important sites where familiar patterns of relationships can be articulated. But as Ugba (2008) points out, while sites of ethnic religious practice can provide links between migrants and the wider society, these can also constitute boundaries that set people apart.

Although sporting and religious involvement mediate social processes through which migrants choose to get involved in society, participation in different social and cultural activities is not homogenous, and there are significant differences of ethnicity. According to the *Annual Monitoring Report on Integration 2011*, minority groups have a higher rate of volunteering for religious than for sport organisations, with social and active participation in sport lower than their Irish counterparts (McGinnity et al 2012a: 39-40). Although the reasons behind this lower level of participation of migrants is not fully known, the level of lower participation in sports may be significant when considered in light of the role that sports play in Irish life, and lower participation could potentially reveal a fragmented relationship between migrants and the host community. These social bridges, usually connected to 'issues of social harmony' (Ager and Strang 2008: 179) can be indicative of deeper barriers in the relationships that migrants and host community hold.

A radio documentary broadcast suggests that one of such barriers to sport participation could be racism and discrimination ('Athy is the hood man' 2013). The *National Action Plan Against Racism* (Ireland. Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2005) was launched in 2005 and aimed to provide and outline a framework to combat racism and to develop a more inclusive society. In addition, equality legislation prohibits direct and/or indirect discrimination on the following grounds: gender, marital, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. Within the framework of *Migration Nation* (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008), and through the *National Action Plan Against Racism* (Ireland. Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2005), the various sporting associations in Ireland have, at different levels, been taking action and implementing plans to encourage integration through sport. Although programmes are not tailored specifically for refugees, the different associations and clubs have been taking action to stimulate and stress inclusion through a number of regional programmes, and through an articulation of national inclusion and integration strategies<sup>20</sup>. Through these, sport is used as an engagement tool with wider social networks, and a vehicle for sustainable integration through local structures. At grass-root levels, efforts have been placed on the delivery of training on anti-racism and anti-discrimination practices (SPIN 2012: 24; also see Kelleher and Kelleher 2004).

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<sup>17</sup> Between 2008 and 2012 the Office of the Minister for Integration, now Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration gave grant funding of €12,607,210 for integration purposes. These include National Sporting Organizations, City/County Council, Faith Based Organizations, and others which include NGOs. For detailed information on funding allocation see <http://goo.gl/wELuv0>

<sup>18</sup> The report is the outcome of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum where the following faith groups were represented: Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh.

<sup>19</sup> See The Employment Equality Act 2004 and The Equal Status Act

<sup>20</sup> Both the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) have produced inclusion and integration Strategies. For further information see <http://goo.gl/JmVOxu> for GAA and SPIN (2012) for FAI.

In 2000, the Garda Commissioner established the Garda Racial, Intercultural & Diversity Office<sup>21</sup> which is responsible for the coordination, monitoring and advising on all aspects of policing in the area of diversity. And, in 2009 An Garda Síochána<sup>22</sup> developed a *Diversity Strategy and Implementation Plan 2009-2012 - Beyond Legal Compliance* with the aim of ensuring that Irish Police Force is a reflection of society. The strategy identifies five key priority areas (1) Deriving strategic benefit from diversity; (2) Building Partnerships with Diverse Populations; (3) Reflecting a diverse society; (4) Developing diversity competence for staff and (5) Enabling and managing diversity. The strategy states specific commitments in relation to the nine discriminatory grounds recognized in the Equal Status Act 2000<sup>23</sup>.

Although the reporting of racist incidents tends to be low<sup>24</sup>, the literature indicates that minority ethnicity populations have experienced serious work-related and service-related discrimination (McGinnity et al 2012b: 81). This is particularly relevant in the experience of people of black ethnicity with research showing that this segment of the population is 6.6 times more likely to experience work-related discrimination; they were also the only group to report a significant increase discrimination between 2004 and 2010 (McGinnity et al 2012b: 81). According to the same research, respondents report that religion is also a cause of discrimination when looking for work, and there is a higher risk of discrimination in access to education. The report indicates that only 10% of individuals took official or legal action when subject to discrimination. Welcome news included in the same report is that knowledge of rights seems to be increasing, and discrimination in housing and financial services seems to be decreasing.

## ➤ Identified gaps in research

- Although as noted above, there has been some research to date on participation in religious practices, and membership of sports organisations, there is a lack of empirical data that helps to understand the role that such organisations play in the integration of refugees, and how refugees access and participate in such activities.
- The reporting of racist incidents tends to be low but there is information that only a minority of victims take official action. It would be important to understand the reasons behind this discrepancy and the implications that such incidents have for the integration of refugees.

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<sup>21</sup> For further information see <http://goo.gl/EtKzYi>

<sup>22</sup> Irish Police Force

<sup>23</sup> The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 outlaws discrimination on nine grounds: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, membership of the Traveller community, race and disability. For further information see <http://goo.gl/EHmGJ7>

<sup>24</sup> <http://goo.gl/Glnhmo>

## 3.8 Political and Civic Participation

In Ireland, once refugee status is accorded, refugees are entitled to similar rights as Irish nationals: ‘s/he has a right to reside in Ireland, the right to work, the right to claim social assistance, the right to enter further education and the right to bring certain family members to Ireland’<sup>25</sup>. Additionally, refugees are entitled to vote and stand for local elections, although voting rights in referenda, and in national, presidential and European elections remain deeply tied to citizenship.

The *Roadmap to Integration 2012* identifies Political Participation as an important ‘main block to immigrant integration in Ireland’ (The Integration Centre 2012), and it highlights that immigrants are not proportionately represented in political parties, especially their executives, which excludes them from the political decision making process (The Integration Centre 2012:12). Further, Erica Dobbs suggests that migrants face key barriers to political participation in the political process and identifies gaps in the delivery of information, gaps in social and political networks, inadequacy in political socialisation, and voter motivation (Dobbs 2009:6). She argues that if non-Irish nationals cannot offer political support in national elections they may be viewed as less politically attractive to political parties. Similarly, Mutwarasibo suggests that the ‘centralised nature of Irish politics and the restricted power of the local government place clear limitations on what can be achieved through migrants’ participation in local elections in Ireland’ (2012:51).

Fanning, Mutwarasibo, and Chadamoyo (2003; 2004) address some of the key issues surrounding Irish politics and the inability of political parties to tackle institutional barriers to party membership and to foster political participation by migrants and ethnic minorities, and suggest that ‘the lack of diversity amongst members of Irish political parties is a matter of grave concern’ (Fanning et al 2003: 7). In this regard, the authors argue that there is a pressing need to review the lack of inclusionary specific policies amongst political parties directed at migrants and ethnic minority communities in order to prevent a future situation of political institutional racism in Irish politics. An initiative which has recently been introduced with the aim to improve levels of political representation and participation is the ‘Opening Power to Diversity’ scheme<sup>26</sup>. The scheme matches volunteer migrants with a number of TDs (member of parliament) and offers experience and insight into how politics work in Ireland by observing and assisting the TD in daily work.

In its Mapping of Integration Project of 2009, UNHCR interviewed 59 refugees on a range of topics including democratic processes/interaction with Irish society and integration. Of those interviewed ‘The vast majority of both men and women feel that participation in democratic processes is an integral part of their integration...The majority of people were aware of their right to vote...Despite being aware of their right to vote, very few people had actually utilised the right. The participants were also asked whether they had participated in any groups or organisations which had helped in their integration into Irish society. While the majority, 61%, had participated in some form of group, 39% have never been part of a social group during their time in Ireland. The most popular type of group was a sports team, 26%, and significant number, 23%, were involved with immigration and refugee specific groups. Among men, sports remained the most common social grouping, accounting for 37% followed by immigration groups at 16%. 42% of the men interviewed did not participate in any type of social group. Among women, refugee groups were the most popular, with 31% of respondents taking part in these, and 13% taking part in both sports groups and women’s groups. Again a significant number of women do not partake in any form of group, 37% in fact’.

Ager and Strang (2008) emphasise that to develop effective policy on integration, Governments need to identify the ‘foundation of integration policy’ and rights that refugees are entitled to. These rights concern a broad spectrum of fields, not only the right to work or vote, but also a broader understanding of rights such as the right to freedom of cultural choice, the right to human dignity, the right to security and independence (Ager and Strang 2008).

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<sup>25</sup> For further information see <http://www.ihrc.ie/cspe/cspstudentreso/whatareasylumse.html>

<sup>26</sup> The Opening Power to Diversity (OPD) scheme will match volunteer migrants with a number of members of parliament over a six months period. The initiative is aimed at non-EEA nationals or non-EEA national who have recently become Irish citizens, and is run by Crosscare Migrant Project.

Farris cited in Mutwarasibo states that 'integration and civic participation are symbiotic, mutually reinforcing, and a necessary condition and by-product of the other' (2012: 50). The *Roadmap to Integration 2012* identifies three fields where the progress of civic participation is measured: ❶ Provision of Information on Cultural, Political, and Civic Life in Ireland as well as Public Services; ❷ Public Service Broadcasting; ❸ Representation of migrants in the media profession. In recent years several immigrant communities have published periodicals in their native language and in 2000, the launch of Metro Éireann provided a space in the media for ethnic minorities to voice their concerns and engage in public debate. Galiana (1999) suggests that community radio has been particularly active in promoting the participation of refugees and asylum seekers in programming and radio production, providing a space for network development between broadcasters and different ethnic groups. However, the motivations behind the different levels of immigrant or migrant communities' civic engagement are unknown.

Research suggests that mainstream Irish media has played a very limited role in explaining the complexities of inward migration to Ireland, and identifies mass media as playing a paramount role in disseminating information about immigration to the general public (Haynes et al. 2009). Moreover, the role of the media has been highlighted as a factor affecting integration, and news media as being largely responsible for creating widespread stereotypical images of migrants (Lakeman and Matthews 2010).

The *Handbook on Integration* (European Commission 2009) examines the role of media as a reflection of society. The document calls for an understanding of media actors and the need to develop effective media strategies which reflect a diverse population. An effort in this direction was the promotion of two funded internships of six months in two different local or regional newspapers. The Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration stresses that '[t]he purpose of this scheme is to give non-Irish nationals an opportunity to get involved in this area of the media and to increase content in the paper giving the perspective of immigrants. In this way, the wider readership would be exposed to the experience of this new group in Irish society and integration would be enhanced' (Ireland. Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration 2010).

The *Roadmap for Integration 2012* reflects on the challenges in civic participation, and highlights that media programme content does not reflect demographics, but it also points out that some improvement has been seen in this area. However, the difficulty in 'ad hoc provision of information on cultural, political, and civic life in Ireland as well as public services ... [and the] lack of representation of migrants in the media profession' remains a case for concern (The Integration Centre 2012:28). The complexities of reflecting a rapidly changing population in the media is widely acknowledged, which calls for attention in the development of targets for media representation in programming, employment, and organisational development (Titley et al 2010:48).

Civic and political participation is not only a matter of personal choice and interest, but it is also linked to issues of immigration and employment status, citizenship and long-term residency. In relation to acquisition of Irish citizenship, a language and civics test for naturalisation applicants may be introduced in the future<sup>27</sup>. Cosgrave argues that, there is currently no mechanism to challenge a negative decision for citizenship, and migrant's experiences when applying for naturalisation reveal difficulties in the operational processing of applications (2011: 4). Some of these issues have been addressed, waiting times have been greatly reduced, citizenship ceremonies have been introduced, and positive effects are reported subsequent to funding being allocated to assist migrants to fill out their application for citizenship. But research suggests that inconsistent procedural requirements and discretionary decision-making remains a difficulty for some migrants (Cosgrave 2011). The *Annual Monitoring Report on Integration 2011* identifies the extent of ministerial discretion, length of processing times and the fact that access to social welfare can have adverse effects on a claim for citizenship as obstacles (McGinnity et al 2012a:45). The same report stresses that there is no naturalisation data available prior to 2005, and it is not known how many of those who have naturalised remain in the state.

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<sup>27</sup> For further details on the proposed Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2010 see <http://goo.gl/aOPA3u>



## ➤ Identified gaps in research:

- To date, the motivations behind the different levels of refugees' engagement with the media is unknown.
- There is a lack of data that enables us to understand how refugees engage in political debates, and take up membership of a political party.

## 3.9 Employment

In the *Annual Monitoring Report on Integration 2011*, the authors identify key employment indicators, and highlight that contraction in employment has been greater amongst non-Irish nationals, with employment falling by 40% for this cohort, and the employment gap between Irish and non-Irish nationals widening. Similarly, the rate of activity for non-EU nationals was recorded at its lowest. The authors identify a number of structural barriers to self-employment, many of which are also barriers to recruitment. These included English language skills, access to local business networks, difficulties in accessing finance, and lack of previous financial history in Ireland (McGinnity et al 2012a:15-18). These concerns are also echoed in a report by the New Communities Partnership where barriers to literacy and spoken English, as well as a lack of clear and accurate information about cultural norms and informal mechanisms when searching for employment, were identified by employers as being serious obstacles to future recruitment (New Communities Partnership 2009).

The *Roadmap to Integration 2012* (The Integration Centre 2012) stressed that a lack of familiarity by migrants with recruitment processes can also form a barrier to integration. Service providers, on the other hand suggest that the main issues lie with inadequate support from Government, lack of knowledge about local networks, discrimination and exploitation, and the lack of recognition of foreign qualifications (New Communities Partnership 2009). The latter falls under the remit of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) which has an advisory role in determining how foreign qualifications compare to Irish qualifications. While the QQI provides information on the level of qualifications for general purposes (general qualification recognition), professional bodies regulate specific professions (professional qualification recognition).

Employment leads to financial independence and for many the possibility of entering the labour market in Ireland is the quickest way to regain a sense of familiarity with social and cultural roles; a survey with refugees and persons with leave to remain status indicated that 80% of males and 50% of females had prior professional experience before fleeing or leaving their country (Phelan and Kuol 2009:17). With unemployment follows a great deal of stigmatisation around welfare payments but it is worth noting that the amount of public debate around the amount of welfare payments made to immigrants is not corroborated by research (Barrett and McCarthy 2008: 543).

In January 2012 the Department of Justice and Equality announced the implementation of an Immigrant Investor Programme and a start-up Entrepreneur Programme for Immigrants as key priorities for 2012 (McGinnity et al 2012a:20). Furthermore the Department of Social Protection has launched INTREO, an integrated employment (former FÁS) and income support service. INTREO, which is a mainstream initiative, requires that both the case officer and the applicant discuss training, education and support options and agree on a 'Person Progression Plan' (Ireland. Department of Social Protection 2012). Additionally to this programme, the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration has allocated funding to the programme Employment of People from Immigrant Communities (EPIC) which provides assistance to migrants living in Dublin and who do not require a work permit to find employment and/or training/education. Integrated Workplaces (see Equality Authority) is another initiative directed at a range of actors dealing with cultural diversity in the workplace; the document places a particular focus on the accommodation of different cultures and on equality in the workplace, and calls for a system of support to be put in place for employers

to help manage cultural diversity. The action strategy recognises the role of employers, trade unions, and employees in business effectiveness, and points out that training on integration should be readily available. Moreover, the document calls for policies that address discrimination, and acknowledge cultural diversity.

Policies which specifically address discrimination are particularly pertinent as research indicates that 'non-Irish are three times more likely to report having experienced discrimination while looking for work than Irish nationals' (O'Connell and McGinnity 2008: X). Research conducted by UNHCR with refugees in Ireland also found that one of the main difficulties when refugees look for a job is the feeling that they are being discriminated against (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2009: 102). Labour market participation reveals a much higher risk of unemployment for black respondents (O'Connell and McGinnity 2008: IX), which would suggest the need for the development of a targeted and effective active labour market programme to assist refugees and other regular residents to access employment on the same basis as Irish nationals. In the same report, O'Connell and McGinnity find a significant gender wage gap amongst migrants from non-English speaking countries, with women earning about 15% less than their male counterparts<sup>28</sup>. The authors also stress that English language skills are positively related to earnings and suggest that English language provision may represent an important policy lever to avoid or reduce labour market disadvantage (O'Connell and McGinnity 2008). As well as English language, O'Connell and McGinnity find that lack of familiarity with local employment conditions and networks, transferability of qualifications and skills represent serious obstacles to labour market participation.

The literature indicates that volunteering can potentially have a positive effect in bridging the cultural and network gap when looking for employment. According to a survey conducted in Limerick city with refugees and persons with leave to remain status, 38% of respondents indicated that they had been involved in voluntary work as a way to acquire work experience in Ireland (Phelan and Kuol 2009). But it is unclear if refugees require Garda Clearance when applying for voluntary work which could be problematic for them if it involved the provision of information relating to their country of origin. This is significant considering that asylum-seekers are not entitled to take up employment and volunteering can potentially be a bridging mechanism between the asylum seeking phase - where access to labour market is prohibited - and the future employability of asylum seekers who later gain refugee status. Furthermore, research suggests that time spent in the asylum seeking process can lead to high rates of unemployment and negative impact on future employment prospects when individuals are granted refugee status (McGinnity et al 2012b: 84).

## ➤ Identified gaps in research

- There is no relevant data that enables us to determine the impact that the economic recession and structural changes to the Irish economy has had on refugees' access to employment.
- There is also a lack of empirical data providing information on the connection between refugee informal networks and the labour market.
- Although volunteering is largely acknowledged by NGOs and employers as an entry point into the Irish labour market, there is a need to determine the impact that voluntary activities have on economic and on social integration.
- Research indicates that long stays in direct provision system have adverse effects on the future integration of refugees, and further research is suggested to understand the long-term impact that such long stays have on the future employability of refugees.

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<sup>28</sup> The research indicates that the data used does not allow for comparisons to be made between the research sample and Irish nationals nor non-Irish nationals from English speaking countries. The report *The Gender Wage Gap in Ireland* indicates that in 2003 the adjusted wage gap between men and women was just under 8% (McGuinness et al 2009).



# Empirical Sections

This chapter presents the findings of the consultations and dialogue with refugees and stakeholders. The findings are presented through a thematic analysis of the topics proposed by the National Reference Group as topics of key relevance for refugee integration. Five topics or policy areas were proposed as being important for refugee integration: Active Citizenship, Housing, Employment, Access to Information, and Social Inclusion. This chapter discusses these topics in turn.

This research set out to test assumptions about integration policy areas which are thought of as relevant when considering the integration of refugees. Through a process of consultation with refugees and stakeholders, these assumptions have been reviewed. The following sections reflect that process of consultation and gather the thoughts and opinions of refugees and stakeholders which have been articulated during meetings and interviews.

Irish integration strategy builds on the principle that '[t]he process of integration begins when refugee status is accorded' (Ireland. Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2005: 54). As this research is focused on refugee integration, it did not seek to enquire into or to provide an analysis of the asylum system or the Direct Provision system.<sup>29</sup> However, during the course of this research, the literature review and refugees and stakeholders consulted have identified the length of time spent in the asylum system and in the Direct Provision system as a barrier to the future integration of refugees. Those views are reflected here to the extent that the asylum process impacts on the integration of refugees.

It must be noted that the views expressed here do not represent the views of all refugees or all stakeholders consulted. The opinions and experiences included here are not reported as fact, and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNHCR.

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<sup>29</sup> Since April 2000, the Irish Government operates a policy of dispersal and direct provision for asylum seekers. This means that asylum seekers coming to Ireland are generally accommodated for a short period (a week or two) in Dublin and then dispersed to centers outside of the Dublin area. Under the Direct Provision system, asylum seekers are given full-board (i.e. accommodation and meals) and an allowance of 19.10 euro per week (with an additional 9.60 euro per child). Asylum seekers that refuse to be accommodated in full-board centers are not entitled to a rent supplement. There are a number of exceptions to the dispersal / direct provision regulations such as: reunification with an immediate family member (i.e. a newly arrived asylum-seeker may be reunited with a spouse or partner already in rented accommodation) and those with an serious medical conditions. Since the 1 April 2003 asylum seekers can no longer apply for a rent supplement. For further details see <http://www.nccri.ie/cdsu-refugees.html>

## 4.1 Active Citizenship

In *Migration Nation* (Ireland. Office of the Minister for Integration 2008) integration is understood as a process and as a key challenge for both the Government and Irish society to integrate a diversity of peoples ‘so that they become the new Irish citizens of the 21st century’ (2008:8). This understanding of integration places a particular emphasis on citizenship. Discussions with refugees and stakeholders show active citizenship to be a more ambiguous concept, oscillating between a direct link to citizenship acquisition and in other cases associated with a broader understanding of the citizen as one who actively partakes in civic and political life. Stakeholders agreed that active citizenship should not be, and is not in principle, dependent on immigration status. However, refugees explained that participation in civic and political life does not happen in a state of isolation from their previous experiences in their country of origin, their experiences during the asylum process, or their experiences upon granting of protection status.

For many refugees, their interactions with Irish society and therefore their prospects of meaningfully integrating and interacting with it are framed by media reports not only in relation to their place in society but also how their countries of origin are represented in Ireland. This section starts with the views of stakeholders and refugees on media representation and its impact on integration before it goes on to discuss civic participation through volunteering, and later to discuss political engagement.

One of the main difficulties in media representation highlighted by stakeholders is a general lack of clarity and specificity by media sources when reporting on different types of immigration status, on different migratory journeys and on migrants’ rights and entitlements in Ireland,

“ It would be important to study public perceptions since there is ignorance regarding asylum-seekers and refugees and although migrants and refugees are not very prevalent in media reports nowadays, the bias perspectives have not changed.”

(Individual meeting with stakeholder)

Other stakeholders highlighted part of the effort must be placed on changing perceived wider societal views that African nations are not able to show progress regardless of how much funding is made available in foreign aid and through charity organisations working abroad. In their views, these perceptions come to frame how refugees are perceived in Ireland and influence their integration prospects.

“ This affects refugees in Ireland because we are led to believe that the refugee is that child we saw in a NGO poster 15 years ago ... if you see a black person walking around, you never think that they can be a doctor.”

(Individual stakeholder interview)

Some refugees reported similar understanding of social perceptions and were particularly critical of media representation of Africa as directly associated with poverty which they believed to be very unhelpful and to create misconceptions about people. Some refugees interviewed for this study highlighted precisely the fact that economically they are worse off in Ireland than they were in their country of origin,

“ They see us as poor people, I suppose that's what makes people think that that's why we're here, to take their money.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

But, refugee respondents did not want the 'victim's stamp' that has been cast upon them.

“ I don't want to play the victim but that's what the media is looking for ... I'm a survivor, I'm not a victim.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Stakeholders generally agreed that moving away from the image of being a victim is paramount. One stakeholder pointed out that people from different backgrounds need to be seen talking about mainstream subjects to normalise perceptions and get away from ghettoisation.

Stakeholders also suggested that the level of inclusion of refugees into mainstream TV and Radio programmes addressing non-migrants' issues could be indicative of their level of integration; this in turn requires reorientation around the direction of production and it requires that refugees are media literate. The issue of equal representation in the media is not limited to refugees and extends to other societal groups as several stakeholders acknowledged by making the comparison to refugees and their representation in media programming and staffing as similar to women's representation. They suggest that when resources are limited, producers and presenters tend to rely on regular guests in media programmes rather than on new voices which require time to prepare. Additionally, as the refugee population in Ireland represents only a small proportion of the overall migrant population, and is in itself not homogenous, some stakeholders have highlighted that in terms of ratings refugees become a minority within a minority and possibly of lesser priority to programme makers.

As noted above there are general constraints that affect different groups in society, for migrants the issue of accents is specific. Some stakeholders acknowledge that accents may be seen as difficult because they bring down the ratings, and if accents are perceived as difficult to understand this will have an impact on viewers. This in turn can be problematic when one understands that mainstream TV and Radio are commercial enterprises, so subtitling becomes financially unviable, and as one stakeholder put it 'there isn't time to hold anyone by the hand'.

When explored further, the representation of refugees in the media reveals a further problem. Several stakeholders identified the issue of visibility in the media as a barrier to refugees' participation in 'multicultural programming'. One stakeholder noted that some asylum-seekers were willing to speak off camera but not in front of the camera during the asylum process. Fears that speaking to the media might impact negatively on asylum-seekers' application for refugee status meant that speaking openly about their status became a 'no go' area and asylum-seekers were, in practice, excluded from media processes; upon recognition of refugee status, fears of that status being revoked were identified by stakeholders as causing mistrust and anxiety.

“ Many refugees would be fearful that their status could be revoked if they speak openly about their experience ... they don't want to put a foot out of line ... people are afraid of saying something which might be perceived as negative ... there is a suspicion of officialdom.”

(Individual stakeholder interview)

Another stakeholder suggested that the issue of anonymity in media reports lessens the impact of a person's story as lack of quotes and the repeated use of fake names is seen as problematic.

While much of the discussion identified difficulties, community radio was identified by many stakeholders as being helpful as it remains a place for the marginal in the mediascape. It is a space where refugees can voice ideas and experiences; it is a 'go to' location. One stakeholder highlighted that radio is a popular medium in Ireland where 87% of the Irish population listen to the radio every day, in particular in rural areas. This was one reason why radio was seen as an important communication tool and a conduit for local integration.

Furthermore, some stakeholders suggested that involvement with community radio builds self-confidence and knowledge, and although the vast majority of roles would be on a voluntary basis, volunteering in community radio gives confidence in public speaking and is a platform for networking and to learn skills which will be transferable to other spheres of life. Also, community radio offers an opportunity for refugees to overcome potential mistrust in the community and to engage with Irish people.

Refugees and stakeholders identified volunteering as both a facilitator of integration in civic life and a vehicle for future employability. It provides an important platform to learn and improve English language and to invest in personal development. Yet challenges exist to engagement in voluntary activities. From a practical point of view, the matter is one of resources and who can and cannot afford to volunteer. As one stakeholder pointed out:

“ [Before] direct provision came in we had a body of volunteers working ... now they have just €19.10 a week and cannot afford to spend some of that on getting [to the place where they are volunteering]. People find it more difficult to volunteer and collect social welfare once they're out of the asylum process ... volunteering is very good for networking and building skills but social welfare is asking why they aren't working but are volunteering 20 hours a week. ... So it's more difficult now for unemployed people to work as volunteers.

(Stakeholder meeting)

Engagement in formal voluntary work is not just of benefit to the 'volunteer' and has been of help to NGOs and community groups whose resources can be limited. Stakeholders suggest that should the current recession result in reduced funding for organisations, impediments to volunteering could negatively affect maintaining and sustaining communities in Ireland.

For refugees (and others) volunteering also happens through informal contributions and is understood as 'helping out' rather than formal voluntary activities. This is particularly visible amongst programme refugees<sup>30</sup> and the networks of support that are formed and which allow refugees to attend school, to support with translating and accompanying extended family members to hospital appointments, or to support child-minding.

For others, volunteering and political involvement is conditioned by two main areas: child-minding and English proficiency. For those with small children, the issue of childcare limits their participation. For women in particular, and quite often in the absence of family networks, participation in voluntary activities is limited to those activities where childcare is provided. It must be noted however that the lack of state provision of childcare is not refugee-specific but a widespread difficulty in Ireland.

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<sup>30</sup> “Programme refugee” means a person to whom leave to enter and remain in the State for temporary protection or resettlement as part of a group of persons has been given by the Irish Government. For further information see <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1996/en/act/pub/0017/sec0024.html>

English proficiency competency was identified by refugees and stakeholders as a pre-requisite to civic and political involvement. Stakeholders emphasised that political parties are making an effort to engage with potential new members and are addressing some of the institutional barriers discussed above in the literature review. But stakeholders and political parties also point out the difficulties in approaching migrants who do not speak English and noted that if leaflets are produced in different languages it gives the impression that political parties work in those languages and this creates false expectations for migrants. The challenges with language in relation to political participation are a matter of concern for both political parties and refugees.

Since coming to Ireland I tried to be involved in politics but ... I am not politically active because of language. (Individual interview with refugee)

The *Roadmap to Integration 2012* indicates that immigrants are not proportionately represented in political parties, especially their executives, which excludes them from the political decision making process (The Integration Centre 2012:12). This is of particular relevance since refugees, much similar to their involvement in the media, represent only a small proportion of the overall migrant population, and may be seen as less politically attractive to political parties As a stakeholder put it,

“ A political party needs to have intercultural members but also needs to get votes.”

(Stakeholder meeting)

Nevertheless Ireland, as emphasised by refugees and stakeholders, is quite unusual in having local constituency offices and a very easy route of access to politicians, Irish representatives and institutions in general. The initiative ‘Opening Power to Diversity’ scheme<sup>31</sup> seems to have been well received although none of the refugee respondents had taken part in it. Stakeholders suggest that the lack of political and cultural knowledge as well as English competency prevents refugees from understanding political parties’ policies but also prevents them from understanding the subtleties of engagement in the public and political domain. As one stakeholder pointed out, to win elections one needs to know how to play the game and

“ People need to join parties to learn politics first ... [political parties] won’t train people who aren’t in the party. You must join the party to learn from the party.”

(Stakeholder meeting)

Joining a political party is already a political act in itself, and, as one stakeholder noted the question remains as to how refugees acquire the soft skills which will enable them to be considered for office not only by ethnic minorities but by the general public. Of course, similar to wider society, not all refugees would be interested in politics or even in being politically active. As one refugee put it,

“ I wasn’t interested in politics and that has continued here ... but I watch the News.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

For others refugees, especially those who were politically active in their country of origin, challenges to political participation in Ireland can be a matter, as someone put it, of ‘self-censorship’. For some, their experience of the Direct Provision system disappointed them politically. Some refugees interviewed have voted in local elections but the shadow of uncertainty makes them reconsider their involvement and its potential implications,

“ I was advised that if I apply for citizenship I should stay away from any kind of political activities ... I’m staying away from a lot of things. ... involvement in politics could cause problems.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

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<sup>31</sup> The Opening Power to Diversity (OPD) scheme will match volunteer migrants with a number of members of parliament over a six months period. The initiative is aimed at non-EEA nationals or non-EEA national who have recently become Irish citizens, and is run by Crosscare Migrant Project.



In this regard, the articulation of political rights comes to define political and broader understanding of integration, and frames refugees' further involvement with political parties. As Ager and Strang suggest, 'these rights do not in themselves define integration, but they underpin important assumptions about integration' (2008: 175). Civic and political participation is not only a matter of personal choice and interest, but it is also linked to issues of immigration and employment status, citizenship and long-term residency, and Irish citizenship is, for many refugees, a means to an end. Some stakeholders have pointed out that citizenship enables refugees to 'keep their options open' and to remove the stigma of being branded as 'refugee'.

“ *My passport is like I won a million, I recognise the great value of my passport. Before I felt ashamed.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

As noted by stakeholders, citizenship affords a degree of anonymity. It was also suggested by stakeholders that if refugees have the option to use a different identifier they would do so as the term refugee 'is tainted' especially by what some stakeholders identified as negative reports in the media.

However, for some refugees, citizenship is only a superficial acceptance. A former refugee, now an Irish citizen, recounts a very brief doorstep encounter with a member of a political party canvassing for national elections and who assumed that the person could not vote because they didn't look 'Irish'.

“ *When they saw me, they said sorry and went away.*”

(Group meeting)

In practical terms, citizenship and having an Irish passport is instrumental to determine how refugees position themselves in Irish society, although the hurdle of belonging is difficult to overcome,

“ *If you grow up in the country then it's easier, but if you come when you're an adult I feel like ... I see children of [country of origin] parents and I think Ireland is their country, not mine. The way they're attached to the country but they believe that this is their country.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

“ *[Ireland] is my home ... [I] was given bread, water, clothes, a place to stay ... well, my home is a figure of speech ... here I'm protected, I was given an education, food, drink ... it's not my home, I don't feel at home like I feel in [country of origin] ... Ireland will never be my home ... Ireland is a place where I was well received but it's not my home. I don't know if this will ever change, but I don't think so.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

For others, it is difficult to imagine life anywhere else and Ireland, in that respect, offers them a safe port to anchor their lives,

“ *I love my country [Ireland], they gave us paper, I'm very happy this is our second home ... this country gave education, confidence to face difficulties, listened to us, and gave us the thing humans need, gave us freedom, so we're happy ... [during a visit abroad] we were feeling 'when are we going to go back to our country [Ireland] ... we feel we can't live in any other country ... when we arrived in our house we just became relaxed.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

As a final comment to this section, it is worth noting that references to the possibility of revocation of citizenship were not uncommon during interviews. The anxiety expressed appeared based on rumour and no specific incidents were mentioned.

## 4.2 Housing

During conversations with stakeholders and refugees, the role of housing in integration arose mainly in the context of the challenges in accessing welfare services. Generally, stakeholders indicated that, when looking for a house, refugees' main concern is that the house is safe, comfortable and close to family or ethnic community networks.

Similar to other services, the provision of social housing, which is in place to address long-term needs, is mainstreamed. Although housing is a priority, especially in the early days when the refugee leaves Direct Provision accommodation, some stakeholders believe that the process for accessing housing support is disjointed, fragmented and suffers from a lack of unity. Housing support is split between different Government Departments; the Department of Social Protection and the Department for Environment, Community and Local Government. The Department of Social Protection is responsible for income support and provides rental assistance through the payment of rent supplement which was set up originally to fulfill a short-term housing need. The Department for Environment, Community and Local Government is responsible for housing policy, and local authorities have the statutory power and discretion in the provision of social housing, and are, in effect, the first port of call.

Some stakeholders find that social housing accommodation in Ireland is a grey area and depends on the services available at county level. They highlight that decisions on housing are very subjective and standards of who qualifies for what are not clear. Therefore, access to social housing and housing benefits such as rent supplement, depends on local authorities and refugees report that outcomes can be influenced by who is dealing with whom; it is also affected by resource inequality amongst areas and counties.

It was also acknowledged by some stakeholders that historically, there has been a deficit of local authority housing, especially for single people. According to some stakeholders, the provision of housing had an organic development, in large part because state agencies were not prepared for the increasing demand and numbers of migrants and refugees coming into Ireland.

According to some stakeholders, the shortage of local authority housing, in practice means that the State is more dependent on the private market and on the private landlord to provide social housing. They also highlight that the reliance on the private rental market means that families could potentially be moving numerous times, as rent determination is fully in the hands of the landlord; this on the other hand has an impact on sustainable communities and social integration. Additionally, the Department of Social Protection currently imposes a rental cap of 475 Euros per month for single person tenants in receipt of rent supplement. The current maximum rental cap for family suitable accommodation is 950 Euros per month. This means that a person cannot rent accommodation exceeding this amount, which is felt by refugees as being a very low amount for renting in Dublin.

According to one stakeholder, migrants and refugees face specific challenges since they are disproportionately affected by poor housing standards, as some landlords perceive migrants as people who will put up with any conditions, and will complain less about the state of the accommodation. One participant in the group interviews described how, after being homeless for three months and feeling discriminated against due to their country of origin, all they could find was a room under a stairs with no facilities and mice.

Stakeholders highlighted that accommodation must meet the minimum standards as set in housing regulations; however combating poor housing is, in practice, time consuming and costly. Stakeholders point out that the refugee is involved in two separate processes, one with the Department of Social Protection regarding rent supplement, and a second with their landlord. If difficulties arise between the tenant and the landlord, the Department of Social Protection is not involved. The complainant has the option to either move out of the accommodation or to contact

the Dispute Resolution Service with the Private Residential Tenancy Board (PRTB); the fee<sup>32</sup> payment, paid by the complainant, involved in a dispute resolution could however be an impediment to complaining as could be the waiting time involved in the complaint process.

Stakeholders point out that new communities are at a higher risk of becoming homeless, especially since rent support for housing and social welfare blend into each other. Difficulties may arise in keeping accommodation such as in cases when the landlord increases the rent, but for most refugees interviewed, the main problem was actual access to housing, especially in the initial stages after their protection status has been granted. Refugees, upon being granted refugee status, have in general three to six weeks to leave the accommodation centre where they had been living, in many cases, for years. Both refugees and stakeholders stated that the limited support of moving on assistance after leaving Direct Provision system is of concern and requires urgent attention.

“ I didn’t have information, I didn’t have a network of friends, no family ... 2 weeks later [after leaving Direct Provision and initially securing accommodation] I became homeless, and I was denied help because I wasn’t Irish. ... The Government needs to recognise that a refugee is not in the same position of an Irish person... [who has] a support network ... I once was so hungry, I had €2 and I had to choose buy bread or take the bus to see a social worker. This is not about integration, but if services are more flexible ... a week of delay [in rent supplement] literally [means] hunger or homelessness. ... When I got refugee status, I was happy and I got a house. I was cold, I went to buy a hat, I chose the one that said Dublin on the front, I wanted to say thank you, I wanted to belong. But bad experience after bad experience, this passion of being here just disappeared and turned into disappointment after disappointment. Not everything is bad, so many things happened that are good. But I am now less likely to buy a hat that says Dublin. When you realise that we are not just that welcome, you can’t integrate.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

One stakeholder pointed out that the first step in the post-Direct Provision process should take place while the refugee is still in accommodation center, and services should be brought to people who are at a higher risk of becoming marginalised. The fragmentation of response and cooperation between State agencies increases the risk of refugees falling into situations of indebtedness and homelessness, and in most cases results in refugees relying on ‘Irish friends’ and their ethnic community to be able to afford housing.

“ I got money from my friend and I paid for the deposit [for rental accommodation] ... When I went to the Community Welfare Officer [person] told me I wasn’t a refugee ... I was well dressed and [the person] think I have job somewhere. I asked [the person] to put that down in writing, and [the person] said it’s confidential ... that was the end. I was sleeping illegally in another accommodation centre [after status being granted and after losing deposit for the house] where I had a friend. I would go to visit and I wouldn’t leave. ... later on, I got help from [a person] from my country.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Stakeholders also highlighted that not having a permanent address is an impediment to accessing rent supplement, but for refugees securing accommodation without first having the rent supplement is a major challenge. In the absence of personal funding or savings, the need to pay a deposit and one month’s rent in advance, as rent supplement is paid in arrears, creates a prohibitive scenario.

“ They want you to move out of Direct Provision, after living there for years, without being allowed to work so how you supposed to get money for deposit and month rent? If it weren’t for friends I would be on the street.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

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<sup>32</sup> € 25 to refer a dispute to the PRTB where it is dealt with by mediation or adjudication. €100 to appeal an Adjudicator’s or Mediator’s decision and refer a dispute to a tenancy tribunal. For further details see <http://public.prtb.ie/disputesFees.htm>

One stakeholder noted, people who are reliant on social welfare support are also in competition in the housing market with people who are working and time is of the essence to secure accommodation. Even if refugees manage to save the deposit and the first month's rent, administrative delays in processing social protection payments and in particular rent supplement claims, means that some, in particular men, find themselves in situations of temporary homelessness. In some cases, they are evicted from accommodation and lose their deposit.

“ I became homeless and I just walked around in the night because I didn't want to sleep in the ground as I would get dirty and no one would let me in or talk to me the following day. I went to charity and I got a room for 1 day. I was homeless after that again ... It was a depressing time. ... I thought about complaining but ... when you're in a vulnerable position you have other priorities than complaining. ... [then] When you get shelter and something to eat, then you have new priorities and you don't want to complain and go back to trouble, especially if that can damage citizenship application.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

A difficulty when looking for rental accommodation that affects refugees in particular is the fact that most landlords require bank statements and references which many refugees might find difficult to obtain.

“ Housing at the beginning was very difficult because landlord ask for references and other kinds of things ... [I had] no English and didn't know where to go to find a house ... [I] didn't know property agency.”

(Individual Interview with refugee)

Knowing that refugees are in a vulnerable position, some landlords would overcharge in rent and in some cases would ask the tenant to pay an extra €90 for their PRTB registration, and it was not unusual for refugees interviewed for this research to note that their rent is above the rent allowance cap. Furthermore, some stated that they have entered in a private arrangement with their landlord to top up their rent outside what was declared for rent supplement. This situation is presumably not exclusive to refugees but could be aggravated by an already vulnerable financial situation.

“ Some things cannot be said out loud because the amount of things we have to do. ... what we do, we close our eyes to the amount we get. ... I'll have to top up the rent allowance and the landlord tells you 'take it or leave it'. This is what I've been doing ... we don't have a choice ... people spent years in a difficult life and then these are the kinds of things you have to do.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

As one stakeholder pointed out, many refugees are faced with the dilemma of living near their relatives and pay higher rent, move outside of the community and avail of social housing, if they manage to be awarded a house, or move to places where rent is more affordable. This creates isolation and depression as people are removed from social networks. This is particularly important in the case of single people who are faced with a rental cap of 475euros per month. In addition to topping up their rent informally, under the rent allowance scheme the tenant will also have to make a minimum rental contribution of 30 euros per week even if they are unemployed. The current maximum rental cap for family suitable accommodation is 950euros per month.

“ It's very difficult to find a house for [amount] which is the rent allowance cap ... this is the biggest problem, finding a house for the amount that Social Welfare want.”

(Individual Interview with refugee)

On the subject of discrimination, stakeholders pointed out that landlords, in many cases, do not accept tenants in receipt of rent supplement. Although stakeholders highlight the positive role of equality legislation in Ireland, they also add that ‘it’s not going to get anyone a house immediately’. Refugees reported feeling discriminated in their interactions with landlords especially when looking for a house, and some stakeholders highlight that discrimination and explicit racism has been recorded. Even though refugees could take a case to the Equality Authority, they quite often do not want to be caught up on what could be a long complaint procedure. This was corroborated by refugees who might feel that they are being discriminated against but who prefer not to complain. One refugee with good references said,

“ Landlords asking where are you from? When was last time you visit [your country]? ... I felt it was a question of being suspicious rather than making small conversation.”

(Group interview)

Another stakeholder commented that it is not uncommon to hear landlords asking “where are you from?” Additionally, one stakeholder noted that there also seems to be a “*hierarchy of racism*” with African communities at the top of the list. But for some refugees, the matter is not discrimination or racism, but it is rather a systemic problem with the housing system,

“ If you pay cash landlord is ok.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

“ In Ireland, racism is not a problem. Housing, apply to county council for years that is a problem.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

In conversations with stakeholders, it was acknowledged that sustainable communities require social mix between private, social, rental, ownership to avoid the creation of ghettos, and it was highlighted that where people live is symptomatic of their support networks, such as closeness to worship places, as well as their rent supplement levels. Some refugees mentioned feeling safer when living in neighbours with a high migrant population, and closeness to the same ethnic group offers opportunities for marrying within the community.

For refugees with mental health issues, keeping rental accommodation may be a difficulty and they may need supported living which could be difficult to access. Another stakeholder highlighted, there are barriers for seeking help for refugees with mental health problems which can vary from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder to mild or severe schizophrenia.

Another recommendation made by one stakeholder is that rent deposits should be held by an independent third party where tenants’ money can be held in trust. This would respond to situations where some people find it difficult, if not impossible, to get their deposits back when they leave the accommodation.

### ↳ Limited Resources, High Impact Suggestion

A limited number of NGO-operated initiatives are in place to assist with the housing needs of refugees recognised in Ireland through the asylum system. Some refugees and stakeholders suggest that increased cooperation between State agencies would have an immediate positive impact. Communication between the Department of Justice and the Department of Social Protection could expedite the process of making rent supplement available in advance to enable refugees to secure independent accommodation before leaving Direct Provision. Stakeholders indicated that although this would not solve the issue of references and discrimination, it could nevertheless avoid situations of homelessness and debt related to deposits and advance rent payments.

It was generally acknowledged by stakeholders that there is a need for policy development to address refugee integration in the context of housing needs. The initial difficulties around access to housing experienced by refugees who had been recognised through the in-country asylum procedure do not tend to affect those who have been resettled to Ireland as Programme refugees. This does not mean that Programme refugees have not reported frustrations in the past with their housing situation, especially in relation to expectations they may have with regards to their housing needs and the expectations that the local authority will deal with them. The difficulties navigating the housing situation are only aggravated by the lack of proficiency in English. It was also suggested by stakeholders that dissemination of information is extremely important, especially in relation to rights to standard accommodation, to the different housing schemes available and to a complaint procedure where discriminatory and poor housing conditions can be addressed promptly and effectively.

### Practice example

Some companies have implemented local strategies, for example by facilitating English classes for their migrant employees.

## 4.3 Employment

Similar to housing, employment is a vehicle for integration. As one stakeholder suggests, the key challenge is to find ways to manage diversity and tensions which affect refugees, employers, trade unions, and society at large, and avail of the opportunities that diversity itself presents. It was suggested by one stakeholder that, raising diversity awareness and highlighting the benefits of embracing diversity involves capturing the imagination of employers and facilitating discussions about the challenges and opportunities that come with a diverse workforce. This is particularly relevant at time when Ireland is going through economic upheaval. In the past, some companies have implemented local strategies, for example by facilitating English classes for their migrant employees, but in the current economic climate the resources may not be available.

Employment was highlighted by a stakeholder as the biggest concern for refugees and migrants, but while migrants have been, like many Irish people, affected by the recession, for refugees and former refugees (now citizens), employment has always been a problem.

One stakeholder noted that the area of employment is of importance for integration because looking for employment involves the management of expectations that refugees have for themselves, their families and their own contribution and integration into Irish society. For example, while some refugees are overqualified for the job they are doing, some stakeholders agreed that refugees are sometimes not realistic about their expectations. This may indeed be true, but for some, especially professionals, their job is part of who they are,

“ If you’re a professional and you have to do something else, it’s heavy on your soul ... your profession is half of who you are.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Other times, the lack of job offers is attributed to racist attitudes on the part of employers. While difficulties in securing paid employment may attributed to discriminatory practices in some cases, stakeholders suggest that in sometimes the issue may lie with a lack of understanding of the job culture in Ireland and with a lack of knowledge on how to ‘sell’ skills to employers. The Employment for People from Immigrant Communities (EPIC) programme in Dublin aims to address and tackle some culturally sensitive questions that arise when migrants are looking for employment, and during the interview process. As suggested by a stakeholder, migrants and refugees have many challenges in common but these problems tend to be exacerbated for refugees. As the quote below suggests, one of the barriers to employment is understanding the Irish system and finding strategies to

overcome it. During a group interview and in response to someone talking about being overqualified for a job, one refugee suggests the following strategy,

“ Tell them to only put FETAC on the CV. Remove all the other qualifications and only focus on what [the person] has done in Ireland. Otherwise the answer you get is ‘too many qualifications’.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

As pointed out during a stakeholder group meeting, understanding the Irish employment system involves not only understanding the formalities about employment but also understanding the importance of small talk, eye contact, shaking hands, and humor which can be sometimes misunderstood and misinterpreted. Familiarity with the Irish system also means understanding the benefits of signing up for internships and voluntary work.

Volunteering as discussed above touches on several spheres of social and cultural life. Voluntary work was referred to by refugees and stakeholders as a channel to social integration and as an invaluable platform to network and to acquire the soft skills that propel refugees into paid employment. However this is not without challenges. The current system requires that Garda Clearance is obtained when applying for certain voluntary and paid work, especially those jobs working with minors and people in vulnerable situations. For refugees, obtaining Garda Clearance would not generally be appropriate where it would require cooperation between An Garda Síochána<sup>33</sup> and the relevant authorities in the refugee’s country of origin. Additionally, Garda clearance needs to be obtained for each individual job and voluntary work. Under a previous system a person could start working while waiting for clearance to come through, but currently the person needs to wait until Garda clearance is produced. In the case of refugees, this could take time or be impossible and an organisation offering the voluntary or work position may not want to wait.

For those refugees who have the cultural capital and the skills to look for employment or who decide to go back to education, there are systemic challenges. Pursuing second-level or third-level education after leaving direct provision becomes a problem due to difficulties in accessing ‘back to education allowance’<sup>34</sup>. To access a second-level course the applicant must have been in receipt of a qualifying social welfare payment for at least 3 months (78 days of unemployment), and the person must be getting the qualifying payment immediately before starting the course; for third-level course the applicant must wait 9 months (234 days of unemployment). During this time, many refugees opt for volunteering or attending other training courses, in many cases unrelated to their future work aspirations, until the required time has elapsed. Although these requirements apply to Irish and non-Irish, the rationale is problematic in the case of refugees since time spent in Ireland as an asylum seeker does not qualify them for immediate ‘back to education allowance’. Additionally, depending on the date when the protection status is accorded as well as when it falls on the academic year, a refugee might have to wait up to 20 months to be able to attend the course of their choice.

“ I would have to be unemployed for ... months before I could apply for ‘back to education’ allowance. During the ...months I went volunteering ... they offered me a job but [taking the job] would break the [necessary amount of months unemployed] ... this period was very boring and I had to turn down the job offer ... all I wanted to do was work and study at the same time ... you have a lot of prestige when you work, you get social status ... work gives a lot of benefits... [but] there are a lot of problems that could arise if ... work a few hours.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Upon waiting the required time, anyone applying for a higher education grant will have to have lived legally in Ireland for 3 out of the 5 previous years. If they have not been in the State for that length of time, many refugees opt for attending other computer or training courses offered by FÁS even though these courses may not contribute to any meaningful enhancement of their academic or

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<sup>33</sup> Irish Police Force

<sup>34</sup> For details on ‘Back to Education Allowance’ see <http://goo.gl/S39F4>

employment skills. In other cases, and immediately after protection status as been accorded, the refugee may have been attending a course already, sometimes sponsored by NGOs. But, they face the choice to continue with the course after their status has been granted without having access to any form of income support, or to drop out of the course so to be able to collect jobseeker's allowance which is unavailable if continuing in full-time education.

For many stakeholders interviewed during this research, the main problem when it comes to the integration of refugees is the time spent in the asylum system in Direct Provision which, in the case of employment, creates significant gaps in the Curriculum Vitae which some say is 'a difficult situation to repair'. As a result, many organisations point clients in the direction of pursuing further education and training, because obtaining employment is a hurdle which is difficult to overcome, especially for those who have spent years in the asylum system.

“ I only started to integrate in the past ... years, so when will I get a good job? There are ... years of delay. If people could at least attend education that would be good, but blocking someone's life like that is not good ... when you get status you're happy, but in life time is very important ... you're happy for sure, but that time ... I don't like thinking about that time ... €19 per week ... [now] it's time to learn for when the economy improves. It's not time to stay at home watching TV, it's time to learn so in the future you can get a job and contribute to the country that gave you protection.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

“ To be honest, even if I get a job today I couldn't do it without the proper training ... just going around ... being busy ... is difficult to think about it as I've been away from it for so long.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Some refugees are particularly critical of the lack of opportunities or supports when they were asylum seekers, and they highlighted the consequences that experience had for them and for the future inclusion of refugees in the labour market,

“ I wouldn't allow people to sit at home without education, even get something to do ... the waiting time in the asylum process ... instead of keeping people for years without knowing ... A friend has been here for years in direct provision and ... not going to school in Ireland ... [friend] got [status] and now ... can't do anything, ... can't speak English or write and what are they doing to prepare people for life? They just stay at home and get fat ... going to end in the social for the rest of ... life. If you can't speak English or know about computers, how are you going to live? ... Those who get their papers they can't go to school [immediately after status] and you can't learn unless you're studying like a freak like myself.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

One stakeholder adds, refugees don't necessarily need separate services but refugees should have additional services because what stops refugees from getting employment may be other issues that are going on in their lives. As was pointed out by some stakeholders and some refugees, integration involves going around the smart way by volunteering, building confidence, so when people get refugee status they can get a job straight away. Perhaps one of the main issues relating to employment and integration is that refugees use mainstream channels for accessing employment but their personal circumstances and their reasons for being in Ireland are significantly different from other migrants or Irish nationals.

“ If I don't help myself I'll get older and receive social welfare. If I do well I can do well for myself and help my [family]. It depends how you're brought up, learning not to wait for others to give you anything ... when I was in the accommodation centre I was just sitting between 4 walls, not studying ... 24 hours in one room talking about [country of origin].”

(Individual interview with refugee)



One stakeholder noted, in terms of recruitment employers only use mainstream channels and if job seekers are not looking in mainstream employment agencies and websites, then they will miss out on job ads. A refugee gave an example of trying to hand in a Curriculum Vitae in person in a shop and being told to apply online which requires not only literacy in English but computer literacy. Another stakeholder noted, refugees often lack informal networks which other migrants and Irish persons may have, and for that reason are more likely to miss out on insider-information.

Wider network links with mainstream society may be mediated through churches and voluntary organisations and stakeholders emphasise the need for induction courses to be put in place where refugees receive clear, accurate and relevant information about their rights and entitlements in Ireland as well as their obligations. It was acknowledged by some stakeholders that in the current economic climate this requires creative solutions which must involve the community, as well as NGOs and State agencies.

It was highlighted by one stakeholder that not every refugee is resourceful in the same way, and may not know how to navigate the Irish employment and education system, and depending on age, command of the English language and personal experience of flight, simple tasks can seem gigantic,

“ [It] was very hard [going back to school] because I didn't even know what assignment was. I asked the teacher 'what's assignment' ... the first 3 months were very hard ... I didn't tell anyone but I was very upset ... but I worked hard, and studied, and got help from teacher ... [now] I'm qualified ... because of teachers and God ... at the time I was thinking of giving up, I had no friends, I couldn't make assignment, I blamed by mother for not sending me to English school ... [but] I didn't lose my heart, I just worked hard ... 6 months later I had confidence ... I enjoyed [school after that] because I knew everything about assignments and so on.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

It was recognised by refugees and stakeholders that language is one of the main challenges to overcome in accessing employment. Without the English language, refugees are at a higher risk of isolation and finding a job, especially in a recession, is a difficult task.

“ In Ireland, four-five years ago, didn't matter, didn't need to have English. If Ireland like before, nobody without work. [Now] need more English.”

(group meeting with refugees)

For many, the first option is to improve their language competence, since, as pointed out by one stakeholder, literacy is needed to access services and to communicate with state agencies. Furthermore, written language is of singular importance in the case of employment since work contracts are written in English. Literacy and English classes have to be age and needs appropriate and flexible alternatives are required. Stakeholders pointed out the constant filling out of forms bring up a lot of challenges for some refugees, especially if they are illiterate. Although, many organisations try to accommodate refugees with English language difficulties as an act of goodwill, many others do not have the resources to do so and it was suggested by some stakeholders that alternative forms of communication need to be developed.

One stakeholder made the point that in the midst of an economic recession, when the rate of unemployment is high and people try to access different courses, tensions can become quite divisive if teachers feel that slots in different training courses are given to people who cannot follow the course due to their level of English. This was expressed as detrimental for all attending the course and frustrating for the teacher.

It was also highlighted by refugees and stakeholders that courses are not always progressive and sometimes can be seen as a funding stream based on attendance, but not necessarily producing meaningful results.

#### Practice examples

Many organisations try to accommodate refugees with English language difficulties as an act of goodwill.

One of the difficulties experienced by refugees is what one stakeholder described as ‘getting their foot in the door’ and finding their first job. This is not only relevant because of the ‘Irish experience’ on the Curriculum Vitae but also because of the prospect of being able to provide references for future employment. Refugees themselves would see obtaining their first job as one of the main barriers to their long term participation in the labour market,

” *Experience from [own country] is irrelevant, and I don’t have experience in Ireland ... and if you can’t provide a reference they won’t hire.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

A first step when accessing the labour market is to apply for recognition of qualifications. This process can be challenging, especially in the case of refugees who lack formal qualifications documentation from their country of origin. Migrants can contact Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) which grades migrants’ qualifications against the Irish framework, and then provides a certificate of comparability which is free of charge. Depending on the level of the qualification to be recognized, in some cases the applicant might find it easier to discard their previous qualifications and start over if the qualification is not recognised at its complete level.

In some cases, refugees may have experience of a particular trade, trades such as carpentry, tailoring, plumbing to cite a few mentioned during interviews. But the skills involved in the particular trade may not have been formally acquired through a course and formally recognized with a certificate. In these cases, when previous experience is not considered and there is no skills’ assessment, the refugee is faced with the a difficult situation to overcome,

“ *Outside the EU, trades work by practice, but in EU, they work by certificate. I went to FÁS to see about six-month course, but they said it was four-year course for [trade] which is too long. Better to work on English first, then course.*”

(Group meeting with refugees)

In the case of qualifying for certain professions, the applicant needs to contact the regulatory body which governs it, and to provide proof of qualification. When applying for recognition of their professional qualifications, one particular refugee finally gave up trying,

“ *I don’t have the documents they’re looking for. These documents were never given to us. ... You can imagine how hard it is to ask people in [country] to go looking for these records for us ... these documents aren’t there, ... so I just try to get a few hours [work].*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

As emphasised by some NGOs, this has significant implications as some refugees are working below their qualification levels. In many cases, refugees prefer to go back to education to attend courses which they have already completed in their country of origin. It was highlighted at the group meeting with stakeholders that integration and access to employment should build on people’s talents and skills, and a skill audit system of verification and validation of qualifications should be put in place where the refugee would be able to prove their qualifications by sitting an exam without having to go through a lengthy process of verification.

## ➤ Suggestion Box

It was suggested that matching and adapting skills with appropriate training opportunities would maximize resources and would help refugees to make use of the skills which they already had before coming to Ireland.

During conversations with refugees, it was frequently and forcefully pointed out that employment 'gives you freedom' and the stigma of collecting social welfare was commonly referred to.

“ If you receive social welfare you feel like you don't matter ... you are run by the Government ... you feel lazy.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

One stakeholder in particular pointed out that refugees get caught up in the social welfare trap but most want to work. In fact, many would not have previous experience of the welfare state and interpret welfare benefits as charity rather than an entitlement. Another organisation comments that people don't want to be unemployed because employment is what they are used to, and depending on the State is 'morally degrading' and poses considerable strain in refugees' relationship with their children, demonstrated here in this interaction between participants in a group meeting,

“ First: I think for my children, it is not good. If I [do] not study, they won't. It's important for my children to see me working; Second: no work, stay at home, children see parents at home, not good example; Third: 100% problem. ... for refugee children, no English, how can I help? [child] asked me about money, where you get that? Do you kill someone? I don't know where [child] heard that. I need to speak English. If I look at me in the future, no job, no college fees. 100% sure children won't study.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

“ You say 'I'm young' but what I'm doing, nothing ... when I'm old, what am I going to say to my children? ... what experience am I going to tell them?”

(Individual interview with refugee)

The relationship with the welfare state can be very ambivalent. From conversations with refugees, some find themselves caught between personal struggle and frustration to achieve employment which positions them on a 'level playing pitch' with the wider society, and at the same time a sense of gratitude as seen here,

“ In terms of opportunities [in Ireland], there are opportunities to study and find a job ... If for any reason the person loses their job there is assistance from the Government. ... These are all things that don't exist in [country of origin].”

(Individual interview with refugee)

One stakeholder pointed out that work gives dignity to the person, without it people don't feel part of society. Employment is seen a vehicle for acceptance by others, and refugees articulated it as a very tangible way to take control over their own fate, and acquire a sense of stability that will enable them to build a life in Ireland without having to rely on the State which gave them protection.

Paid employment also gives refugees the means to look for, to contact and to gather the resources to be reunified with their families.

“ I just wanted to get a job. I went to social welfare office once and the officer told I was not eligible because I hadn't paid taxes before ... from one job you get information about other things ... if you want to survive you'll do anything to survive. ... I started working as a cleaner ... working 16 hours a day ... earning €500 [fortnight] ... left home at 5.30 in the morning and went back at 7.30pm ... I'm not a drinker, I didn't socialize, I don't smoke, I was just thinking of my family ... if you have a target you'll get things. With €1000 a month I could save €600 a month.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

For other refugees, employment is a very tangible way to negotiate their place in the world and to fulfill family obligations by sending remittances to their families abroad, even if this is done at the expense of an investment in their professional careers in Ireland where they plan to settle. Refugees also find their own coping strategies to make a place for themselves in Irish society,

“ When you have the language and the confidence no one asks you for your status ... These are the main focus, this is what helped me to integrate. ... people have to be brave, you have to take decisions in your own hands ... take risks ... I needed to get skills, so when I got my status I could do everything on my own ... you need to know how the system works ... I wanted a normal life, I wanted a payslip, I didn't want to work in the black market or getting €19.10. ... This helped me to integrate into society ... I knew I was doing things for myself, making friends ... sometimes you have to ignore the law for the goodness of someone's life ... if you're not independent, you can't integrate. ... If you get your status you're free ... [but if not independent] you're just like a bird in a cage, flying from one corner to the other never really having a sense of true freedom ... I have no regrets for working while I was an asylum-seeker and I'm still here ... I'm not walking on a fake bridge ... it's a concrete bridge that I've built.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

The layers of integration through employment are many and varied. As one stakeholder suggested, if we consider employment in terms of employment rates isolated from refugees' expectations and skills, we may reach the conclusion that a particular refugee is fully integrated. However, as one stakeholder put it, the question that we need to be asking ourselves is if refugees are exerting their ability to fully 'participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity' (Ireland. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 1999: 9).

## 4.4 Access to Information

Access to information was identified by refugees and stakeholders as a stepping stone to integration. As one stakeholder put it, information is power and when refugees do not have access to readily available, accurate and reliable information they lack the power and the necessary tools to become independent actors in society. Another stakeholder highlighted that the fundamental question about information provision and support is whether we want refugees to become dependent or independent citizens.

Stakeholders noted that refugees often found the mainstream nature of services a challenge when seeking to access a specific service. They reported that refugees often found it difficult to get information or advice on how to navigate the system to access the service required and the mainstream service provision system had a range of challenges in dealing with a diverse population. While various NGOs responded to gaps in information provision, difficulties remain. Stakeholders pointed out that the difficulty in obtaining information is not with the amount of information available, quite the opposite as there are a myriad of information sources. The difficulty is that information can sometimes be conflicting between sources, and access routes difficult to navigate.

One stakeholder explained that to access mainstream services the person needs to already have an understanding of these services, how they operate, and what is reasonable to expect from them, for example in terms of response time to queries. In this context, poor competency in English language can pose considerable communication barriers, in turn making access to mainstream services more difficult.

“ There is no system to help, no needs assessment, they throw you into the system and you don't know your rights and obligations. I'm lucky I speak English, but most lack education and don't speak English ... the system is catered for those who know the system but there are no specific services. ... No help to integrate socially, economically and culturally.”

(Group interview with refugees)

Due to the differing needs of a diverse population who are accessing services, it was felt by stakeholders that frontline staff need to be given specialised training when dealing with refugees. According to some stakeholders, refugees resettled to Ireland<sup>35</sup> are seen as a cohesive group as they arrive to a location together and there is already a support system in place to receive them. Additionally, resettled refugees receive an induction course upon arrival in Ireland and gain an understanding of where to access information for specific needs. In light of this, the process of access to information is potentially less difficult for them.

Refugees and stakeholder commented that improved communication between government departments, and between government agencies and NGOs could be extremely beneficial, as procedures and requirements change frequently and it is challenging for NGOs to stay informed. There was consensus during the stakeholder meeting that for information sharing with refugees it is positive that many NGOs are present in the communities and can give relevant information. However the current decline in funding presents a particular challenge to this form of information sharing as a number of local NGOs are at real risk of closure.

For refugees, being assertive and clear when seeking information seems to be half of the solution. Stakeholders suggest that state agencies and service providers should be aware of what is reasonable to expect refugees to know. Where this understanding is lacking it can present a barrier to communication. As one stakeholder underlined, culture is not common sense and we need to constantly enquire into what is being taken for granted when communication takes place. Another stakeholder emphasised that in theory refugees have access to the same channels of information as an Irish person but, in practice, this is not necessarily the case as refugees face additional barriers which pose problems when trying to get information. The following quote highlights some of those barriers,

“ When you come and you’re a refugee you feel like a baby in the womb, you could be terminated or you could be born ... you’re afraid of everything, ... no one explains, between people you hear things ... I didn’t know my rights ... I got different [telephone] numbers and I tried to get different things clear for me ... my own research ... I had English when I came, from school, which was beneficial.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Ideally refugees should be able to access clear and reliable information on their rights and entitlements through mainstream channels. There are a number of Citizens Information Centers nationwide, but during the course of this research it was clear that refugees, before they have the confidence or the language competency to access mainstream services, tend to rely on local NGOs, community groups, informal networks, and religious organisations for information and support, and some NGOs are informally functioning as a one-stop-shop. The level of support is however dependent on the location of the support system. For example, in rural areas there might be one single organisation dealing with a variety of issues, whereas it was widely recognised that Dublin is well served by a number of NGOs supporting and advocating on behalf of migrants and refugees.

### 📩 Suggestion Box

It was suggested that in the event of changes to regulation and policy decisions, effective communication between all involved would contribute greatly to accurate delivery of information and would reduce procedural delays.

<sup>35</sup> A “programme refugee” means a person to whom leave to enter and remain in the State for temporary protection or resettlement as part of a group of persons has been given by the Irish Government. Although programme refugees were not actively sought for the purpose of this research, their views were included when the opportunity presented itself.

In the present climate of funding cuts, these organisations become of pivotal importance and, for many refugees they are the first port of call for information and support. Organisations assisting refugees in their integration are struggling for funding and, in particular those located outside Dublin, need to constantly select the events that they want to attend as they are often taking place in Dublin and participation is therefore costly. Organisations based in rural and semi-rural areas tend to rely on local support, especially on volunteer networks and other community groups in neighbouring counties but, as pointed out by one stakeholder, NGOs find themselves isolated from the bigger networks, as someone put it ‘we can’t afford the petrol’.

NGOs and community groups generally agreed that the ultimate goal is to enable their clients to be able to advocate for themselves. For refugees to become self-reliant when dealing with services the provision of initial support, especially upon leaving Direct Provision accommodation is paramount. In that regard, drop-in centers were identified as a strength of the current system and as a place where refugees can establish face-to-face contact. It was also noted that relationships often go beyond the formal contact with the NGO, the community group or the religious organization and a trust is formed between parties.

“ Here [organisation] is the only place I feel at home.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

“ Knowing someone, having that support is a massive advantage.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Another source of information and one which, as pointed out at the stakeholder meeting, should not be underestimated is the value and the role of teachers.

“ We’ve learnt about eye contact and respect. ... In [country] we don’t make eye contact as a sign of respect, here in Ireland it is the opposite and very important to make eye contact ... we should also fold our arms out of respect but here when you do that it means you don’t want people near you. We learn these things in school. The teacher at the start explained the difference to us. She used English but also actions to demonstrated to us. And [teacher] said eye contact is very important.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

## Practice example

Some Citizen Information Centers (CIC), dealing repeatedly with specific questions compiled their own locally produced pamphlets identifying the different services in the area; this makes it easier to see the gaps in the provision of services.

The teacher is a conduit for information, especially of a cultural context, and can help with everyday informal communication. An example of this is the six-week socialisation groups trialled by the Adult Refugee Programme. During the classes, students would not only learn English but would learn about Irish culture and institutions.

Teachers, NGOs and religious organisations are frequently the first port of call for refugees, and their relationships are often articulated in terms of trust and help. These groups often provide a vital link between refugees and their host communities. Where these support networks are lacking, refugees will often travel across counties to access these services.

Access to information is particularly problematic in a context where refugees have to rely on ‘the Irish contact’, and interaction with service providers are sometimes dependent on whom they speak to.

“ In Ireland, no one is following the rules, everything is based on personal emotions ... if your community officer likes you, you're fine. Otherwise they'll make your life miserable.”

(Group interview with refugee)

Some stakeholders believe that one of the difficulties in the provision of information is the fact that although there are several organisations working on the ground, in some cases their efforts are not coordinated. Some stakeholders suggested that a mapping exercise is undertaken identifying the different services provided by the different organisations in the different areas.

Stakeholders highlighted that barriers to information and support systems identified here are, in many ways, not exclusive to refugees. For this reason, if these issues could be effectively addressed it would work for the betterment of society at large.

### 📌 Suggestion Box

Some stakeholders pointed out that inaccurate information has sometimes been provided to some of their clients when accessing public services, and suggested regular audits of the different information systems.

Some stakeholders highlighted that confidence and trust in the system are the main barriers in refugee integration, and suggest that the provision of services needs to be approached carefully as it is important that refugees have space to deal with issues of mistrust and are given the space to gradually learn to trust different institutions and people. For example, as one stakeholder pointed out, refugees can sometimes be advised by their peers not to give too much information which then permeates their relationship with service providers and State agencies.

The relationship between refugees and service providers can be negatively affected when public organisations and institutions are themselves not well informed, which reminds refugees of their own status as an outsider and comes to frame important understandings of integration,

“ [Public institution] they didn't recognise my status ... I had to pay a solicitor ... €130 ... just to clarify ... they said 'we don't know what that means [what rights came with the status] ... , I was ready to integrate .... but there was a barrier ... the same Irish that gave you the status, they're the same Irish who do not recognise [it] ...not knowing that I have the same rights as an Irish person ... [but] when you're ticking boxes in a form, you have no box.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

It has also been emphasised by stakeholders that recording of information must not only be accurate but also culturally sensitive if delays and misunderstandings are to be avoided. One example given was the recording of names in the various documents. In some cultures, people can have very long family names and also traditional names. This can present difficulties when these different names are recorded differently in official documents. Some stakeholder note that although it is not reasonable to expect State agencies to deal with more than one formal name, it is however, of paramount importance that the refugee is informed of what name they are required to provide.

The point of literacy is also important, especially with regards to formal communication between the refugee and service providers, especially when the applicant does not respond to written communications as their English reading and writing skills are insufficient. A stakeholder pointed out that limited English proficiency is a barrier to accessing information especially the English used in forms which can be very formal. An example was also given of a refugee who received a written offer of housing and the offer was not taken up because the recipient did not understand the offer being made. Lack of English may prevent refugees advocating for themselves, without relying on interpreters and friends to translate their interactions and can present invasion of privacy issues as one refugee stated. For this reason, language classes are an investment that cannot be overestimated. Being able to look after one's own affairs, without having to constantly rely on

external help is a considerable boost of confidence for refugees and improves the perception of those delivering services,

“ *When you're starting a new life in a new country everything will be new. It'll take time ... when I moved in on my own I couldn't even talk to the ESB (Electricity Supply Board) person.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

“ *[For] me it's getting better and better. I pick up the phone and ask myself. I answer very well ... people are very kind. Before, they were looking at my name and colour ... my English wasn't good.*”

(Group meeting with refugees)

One stakeholder pointed out that refugees need to 'learn how to go about things' and need to 'learn to unlearn preconceived ideas'. Raising one's voice, queuing, what kind of information should be in a formal letter, were given as examples of simple actions that can have a positive or negative effect on social interactions and which could be addressed through cultural training. As one refugee puts it,

“ *There is no explanation of traditions ... I will live my own way because I don't know the Irish way.*”

(Group meeting with refugees)

While refugees emphasise the positive role of the 'Irish contact', peer-to-peer information and support can also offer a sense of empathy and security,

“ *How to ask someone about very private things? I prefer people from my country who were in the system before me ... you can't say 'sorry, can you repeat?' all the time. Sometimes it's hard to ask more questions, it's hard for me, it's a weakness, so I ask people from my country.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

The strive for security and empathy can be understood in the particular context of the refugee experience, both pre-arrival in Ireland and time spent in the asylum process. Generally, it was agreed by refugees and stakeholders that the period that refugees spend awaiting recognition of status in Ireland could be used to make preparations for the next stage, and engagement with refugees should start in Direct Provision. One stakeholder suggested regarding accommodation centres for asylum seekers,

“ *Every hostel should have a contact person who would show you [services] ... there's nothing more stressful than going from one place to another and knowing nothing about it.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Some stakeholders highlighted that during the period waiting for recognition of status, asylum-seekers should be provided, much like programme refugees, with orientation classes and cultural training so that they can integrate and have the tools to access accurate and reliable information upon granting of status.

Both refugees and stakeholders felt access to information was part of a two-way process and refugees' experiences need to be communicated to the wider society. The key is to encourage better understanding and to challenge attitudes on all sides. As a stakeholder pointed out, refugee integration is not only about the negatives but should be celebrated as a mark of resilience. As one refugee explained,



“ *What people coming here have gone through. Ireland should be proud of protecting this refugee people, it should be spoken from a higher position ... refugees trying to find physical peace...*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Stakeholders noted that refugees should be involved in the development of policy and practice in respect of information provision and service provision. As one refugee put it,

“ *We often see conferences about refugees with very few refugees in the room.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

It was also commented that reports produced by Government, academia and NGOs often stand in isolation from each other and efforts are not coordinated. In the absence of a cohesive and consistent dialogue, the result is a number of materials being delivered but which remain detached from each other.

## 4.5 Social Inclusion

The pivotal role of sporting bodies working against racism, and of faith-based groups as a source of information and assistance in settling in Ireland, is recognised in Migration Nation (2008: 43-44). Religious places of congregation can work as spaces of socialisation. As one stakeholder highlights, religion is for many people the only thread of continuity between their country of origin and the new country.,

“ *Church is the number one way to socialize and make friends. ... Church is like a home and you meet people there ... prayer keeps you going.*”

(Group meeting with refugees)

“ *When you go to the mosque everyone is you brother and sister. We all have that connection even if we're from different countries ... religion is comforting, and keep you focused ... when I feel sad, or miss my [family] I put down my mat, do my ablutions, and read the Quran, and you feel calmer.*”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Similarly, sporting associations are also spaces where inclusion and socialisation take place. As one stakeholder emphasises, in Ireland there is a big value placed on sport which is also connected to identity, and the structures that are traditionally seen as Irish can create bridges between people and create a sense of belonging. The question ‘what does it mean to be Irish?’ is one that is raised through sport in very practical terms and steers away from very polarised discussions between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

According to stakeholders, integration through social inclusion, unlike employment or housing, starts regardless of formal status being accorded. For children in particular, integration starts at school; they interact with their peers and learn new ways of asserting their own identity which can be difficult for parents to negotiate and for children to understand,

“ *Integration is complicated when you have children. Parents will direct integration ... parents must do what's right for their children. Children play together at school, but parents must direct them at home ... there must be a balance between mixing at school but still incorporating traditions in parenting. Integration is different for each family ... there must be a limit on the child's freedom, but also a limit on the control a parent has ... it's important to maintain cultural differences.*”

(Group meeting with refugees)

On the point of schooling and sport, it was highlighted by different stakeholders that there is a drop in sport participation between primary and secondary school, but the reasons for it are not known.

In the experience of some stakeholders, women's experience of inclusion is mediated by their children's experiences, and integration is always one generation away. From conversations with refugees with children, integration is something that their children can reach but not the parents. In many cases, there is a fine balance between maintaining cultural differences and having to become 'more Irish' for the sake of their children,

“ All of us make our children strong ... In my experience, I'm trying to integrate ... trying to be more Irish for my children. Like Christ was crucified for our sins to save us, I make these sacrifices to help move things forward for them.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

But maintaining cultural differences can become challenging when teenagers start socialising with their peers. Of course, many of these issues refer not only to refugee-parents but parents in general, and apart from the intergenerational gap there is also a cultural gap. For example, one stakeholder pointed out that in Ireland parents are expected to go to their children's sports games and to be cheering on the side-lines. This is also an opportunity to socialise with other parents. But English language difficulties, fear and lack of confidence can be factors influencing their low participation in such activities. Equally, there may be difficulties for sporting organisations to engage with refugee groups, as these groups have a wide cross-section of experiences, backgrounds and language skills, and outreach programmes can be difficult to organise. In that regard and as one stakeholder pointed out, it is important that knowledge and information is disseminated through mainstream outlets but also through specific channels to identify contact opportunities.

The question, as one stakeholder noted is 'what can be reasonably accommodated within integration?' That is, if language is a challenge to social interaction and social inclusion, what are the necessary tools that need to be in place for refugees to learn English and what is the reasonable length of time after which it is expected that the refugee should be able to communicate in the language?

Fear is an important consideration because it affects engagement with many broader aspects of social life. Although a lack of involvement by the refugee can be interpreted as lack of interest, it was also pointed out by one stakeholder that while there might be an expectation for refugee parents to take part in social events that involvement is not always clearly communicated by schools and organisations.

In the specific case of refugees, women may be single-parenting and a possible lack of family and informal support systems may place them in a situation of social isolation. It was highlighted by stakeholders that, in the case of women who suffered gender-specific trauma, they may need targeted supports, and that the fear of what people might think of them or the kinds of questions arising from small-talk prevents them from engaging at a social level.

Social inclusion and being aware of what kind of activities are taking place at local level is also mediated by daily experiences such as informal parents' networks, especially those that develop at the school gate,

“ The children are fine but it's hard to find people who would say hello to me in the morning when I drop them off [to school] ... it's Irish kind of mentality, they just want to know themselves and are afraid of strangers ... but children are fine ... I don't know things or news, I never know anything because the parents speak to each other.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Stakeholders listed a number of barriers to social inclusion, which range from language, to cultural or local knowledge.

“ Part of integration is to function within this culture ... I go to the pub and I understand the language but I don't understand Irish culture. I can't follow that talk because the references to so many things that they share, so I really feel excluded.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Many other misunderstandings can arise out of unawareness of cultural differences, for example meeting in the pub which is an important space for socialisation in Irish culture. The overwhelming majority of the refugees interviewed for this report do not drink, and this is irrespective of age, nationality, gender or religion, and refugees themselves have cautioned that if to be able to socialise with Irish people they have to meet in the pub, integration is going to be a long and difficult process.

“ I do feel isolated, you can't change people mentality, you can't force your personality on people. I don't drink, and I don't go to the pub ... I socialise through work but not at a private level, I feel lonely enough.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

In cases of cultural barriers, mentoring programmes and cultural awareness courses have been suggested as positive initiatives which can help refugees navigate 'Irish society'. The challenges are to identify effective modes of communication where people can engage, and informal groups can develop. As a stakeholder pointed out, it is important to develop the capacity of refugees to participate and represent themselves, and this involves engaging with the structures. It is difficult to break into Irish society if the refugee is not aware of how Irish society works, especially in rural Ireland, and people can become very isolated.

According to stakeholders, refugees must be encouraged to take responsibility for participating in different activities and likewise, the local community needs to do the same. This localised approach is important as a definition of county in Ireland is a strong regional point. It is important that, for example, sport reflects the involvement of a cross-section of the population, it advocates for grassroots participation and builds on sustainable engagement.

When we talk about social inclusion of refugees, we also need to account for obligations refugees have to their families in their country of origin because this limits the amount of disposable income that they have to socialize which in turn may create situations of isolation.

Another, more hidden and subtle challenge to direct engagement which is very specific to refugees is the fact that they may be separated from their family. As one stakeholder pointed out, in the case of victims of torture and refugees fleeing war-torn countries, their personal experiences and the time spent awaiting for family reunification are a huge burden which can impact on their ability and willingness to become involved with society as well as impact on their mental health. This involvement is compounded by emotional and by financial stress,

“ It's very difficult to see one family where all members are still alive, you don't see a proper family and everyone lives in different places. And because Ireland is the same ... we don't like to talk about it. ... your mind is back home and your body is where you are ... it's good to leave the country if it's your choice, but if it's not your choice then that's not good. We don't have that hope that one day things will be ok.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

“ I didn't know about tomorrow. I applied in ... [for Family Reunification]. In [year later] I sat on my bed and thought 'I'll hang myself' ... [because] I can't go to them and they can't come to me ... but then you think 'don't be stupid' so you sit watching ... TV with you housemates ... when things start falling into place, it flows like water in the river.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

One of the main difficulties identified by refugees and stakeholders in relation to barriers to social inclusion was racism and discrimination. During discussions with stakeholders it was pointed out that racism is a common occurrence but its intensity, physically or subtly, differs depending

on geographical areas. Some stakeholders believe that there is a very negative perception about certain groups, especially those who are 'visibly different'.

“ Here you say Hi, ... they're kind of dismissive, like you're hurting them. Ireland is not so familiar with blacks, they have a problem accepting people of colour, but it really hurts ... people who have traveled don't have problems. I once told [someone] that I was lonely, that no one called into my house ... and [the person] said 'why don't you call to your own people?' ... these things delay integration ... people don't know who I am.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

Stakeholders reported a lack of awareness among refugees that the Garda Racial Intercultural Diversity Office adopts the McPherson definition of racism which states that any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person is a racist incident (Ireland. An Garda Síochána). For example, name-calling is a public offence but refugees generally do not report these incidents and, as highlighted by one stakeholder this could happen for a number of reasons (1) people might not trust the police; (2) they may not like the police; (3) some refugees may have been a victim of torture or police abuse in their country of origin; (4) refugees may not want their name recorded in the system.

For some stakeholders, the main issue with racism is the lack of a visible system of impartiality and a lack of standard policy which can be put in place if an incident occurs. In the absence of this, the experience of a vast number of stakeholders is that refugees prefer to deal with racism themselves rather than reporting it.

“ Dad had problems with the neighbours ... dad moved house. ... At night they'd throw eggs at the windows ... it's better to avoid people and stay with those you know.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

In the specific case of some refugees, previous experiences of persecution in their country of origin, creates a level of mistrust and fear of State authorities. This poses challenges to direct engagement with the police in order to report racist incidents or discriminatory practices.

“ Do you know that when it's dark outside I run inside because I'm afraid? ... I don't go out because I know if something happens, even if I'm the victim, I'll be offended because I've been there before ... my friend asks me to go out but I always find excuse not to go out because I'm afraid ... I don't go out too much ... there are good people as well but how to know? ... you have to open yourself, but I don't do that now, I don't open myself.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

A stakeholder pointed out, many refugees come from places where a policeman is not going to be fair and if a policeman stops you 'that's not a good thing'. In this regard, community officers need to be aware of the vulnerabilities and need to understand the concept of hate crime.

Another barrier to policing institutions when dealing with racist incidents and identified by stakeholders is that the police are used to working with facts, not perceptions; also the everyday role of a police officer is based on evidence or the lack of it. But, as one stakeholder pointed out, a victim of racism must be perceived in a wider latitude. To avoid misunderstandings, capacity building and bridging between refugee communities and police authorities such as the Garda Intercultural Unit and the Education and Liaison Officers is crucial.

Refugees themselves, tend to diffuse and justify situations where there is a perception of racism or discriminatory attitudes in terms of a lack of knowledge, ignorance, geographical area, or they attribute the incident to the current economic crises,

“ You get used to it [racist remarks] ... one day I was about to use the public phone and some ladies came and wanted to use the phone and they said ‘give me the phone’ and I said ‘what?’ and they said ‘Irish first’. You just give them the phone and stay quiet. But it depends on the area as well.”

(Individual interview with refugee)

“ I was on the bus and an Irish person started spitting and using bad words, ... I was with my family ... he was talking about foreigners but this is normal. I did not mind because I could see he was sick.”

(Group meeting with refugees)

“ If you’re in the pub with friends ... after 11pm ... it’s amazing what people will say to you. Some will take offence, others will just balance it out.”

(Group meeting)

Many stakeholders have noted that in some cases there is overt racism which might impact on how refugees perceive other instances, and other spaces for socialisation. Experiences during the asylum process permeate refugees’ lives upon recognition of status and refugees’ further involvement with Irish society. Refugees and stakeholders indicate that the social stigma attached to having lived in Direct Provision accommodation centers is difficult to repair, and there is a general unawareness of the wider context surrounding refugee issues.

It was emphasised by some stakeholders that engagement with asylum-seekers should be part and parcel of the process of integration, since in many cases when formal refugee status has been recognised ‘people have lost hope’ and social inclusion becomes a very difficult target to achieve. It was suggested by some stakeholders that capacity building and engagement with asylum-seekers and refugees needs to start during the application process for recognition of refugee status. One stakeholder emphasised that Direct Provision is particularly hard for small children as they have not known any other life, and they may have little experience of independent living with their parents which puts significant strain in their relationship with their parents and world outside the family unit.

Many stakeholders clearly expressed that in its current form, integration starts too late. They also highlighted that for integration to take place, there needs to be a systematic integration of NGOs and state bodies, and it is important that there is a middle ground, a more integrated approach to services. There needs to be a healthy debate as people are nervous about raising issues because they’re worried that they’ll sound racist. As one stakeholder pointed out, we must not forget that refugees are also themselves vehicles for the integration of others. As another stakeholder clearly noted, there is a legacy issue with integration, and there is a need to look at what is coming down the road in years from now.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

This report set out to test assumptions about integration policy areas relevant for refugee integration and to identify additional integration policy areas which are critical for refugees.

Literature in Ireland highlights that a mainstream approach is taken to integration, and policy documents emphasise local integration and the role of local authorities, sporting bodies, faith-based groups and political parties in building integrated communities.

A number of government departments have developed intercultural strategies to respond to a diverse population. Integration indicators have also been used and others have been developed by different Non-Governmental Organisations to measure general migrant integration. However the literature shows that, to date, no indicators of refugee-specific integration have been established. The results of the integration measurement activities are nevertheless of value for the assessment of integration in Ireland including refugee integration. However, the information set out in this report identifies a range of barriers and facilitators to integration specific to refugees. There is currently a lack of data in relation to these barriers and facilitators which the use of more detailed and targeted indicators for evaluation and policy impact monitoring could address.

Based on literature review and on consultations with stakeholders, five policy areas were adopted for this study as being particularly important for refugee integration. Those areas were: Active Citizenship, Housing, Employment, Access to information, and Social inclusion.

Within each of these policy areas, refugees and stakeholders identified barriers and facilitators to integration. They also highlighted that the provision of information specific to refugees as well as age and gender concerns should be considered when refugee integration policy and the provision of services are being evaluated, and when goals are being measured. Refugees also explained that participation and engagement with their own ethnic community, with Irish society, and with the Irish State and its institutions does not happen in a state of isolation from their previous experiences in their country of origin, their experiences during the asylum process, nor their experiences upon the granting of protection status. In light of this, the research also identifies common ground between the policy areas discussed, and the impact they have on other spheres of the refugee's life.

As indicated, integration is a complex process which requires time and as highlighted by the exploratory research it seems to be best facilitated by the building up of formal and informal networks of social and institutional support.

Bearing the above in mind, each of the following sections summarises the outcomes of the discussions with refugees and stakeholders, informed by existing literature.

## Active citizenship

Active citizenship was identified by refugees and stakeholders, and in existing literature as important for integration, and was addressed in this study through three different domains: media, volunteering, and political participation. Refugees identified a number of areas as barriers to becoming active citizens. These included English language competency, fear of officialdom and a lack of soft skills. Additional barriers included the effects of long periods awaiting final decisions in respect of asylum applications and a low level of involvement in decision making relating to their lives.

Considerations specific to refugees which impacted on active citizenship included any previous experiences of political involvement in the country from which they fled, trauma experienced and experiences during the asylum process.

Altogether the barriers identified were reported to affect refugees' levels of inclusion, such as their level of involvement and participation in civic and political life, their independence and autonomy, and their understanding of their rights.

However, there were a number of ways in which these effects could be countered. Voluntary work was identified as a way to improve English language proficiency, acquire transferable skills and form networks. Accessing Irish political representatives, as well as voting and standing for local elections were identified as facilitating refugees' level of civic and political involvement, and as potentially increasing their participation in the political process. Attaining citizenship was also identified as providing a degree of safety and anonymity.

Measuring the degree to which refugees can do any of these things can be assessed in a number of ways. Existing literature and refugees surveyed highlighted that public perceptions of them in the media influence their prospects of meaningful integration, and suggested that their representation in media outlets, as well as the level of participation in programme decision-making, and the level of staffing in mainstream media and community media is indicative of levels of integration.

The level of refugee involvement in faith based groups, sporting organizations and voluntary activities were also pointed to as possible indicators of refugee integration. Possible indicators to evaluate the degree of political participation included the level of political involvement through party membership and party executive membership, as well as the share of elected local representatives. The proportion of refugees who have naturalized as Irish citizens was also identified as a relevant indicator of integration.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

Measures should be taken to enhance existing good practices in access to voluntary organisations, access to the political process and in raising awareness about access to citizenship.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

The length of time awaiting final decisions in respect of asylum applications should be reduced in order to limit the negative effects of such waiting periods on active citizenship.

## RECOMMENDATION 3

The participation of refugees in the media and the manner in which refugees are portrayed through the media should be considered by relevant organisations with a view to capitalizing on the potential of the media to promote active citizenship.

# Housing

Refugees indicated a number of obstacles when looking for housing. The initial stages after leaving the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision) were seen as particularly relevant. Access to credit and practical supports in transitioning from the Direct Provision system were raised as issues by refugees, as were lengthy complaint procedures in relation to discrimination when looking for accommodation. Limited access to mental health supports was also raised as an issue which could negatively impact on the capacity of persons with mental health needs to source and secure housing.

The complexity of the Social Protection and Social Housing system, as well as administrative delays in processing social protection payments were identified as barriers to finding suitable and affordable housing in support of integration. A general deficit of local authority housing was identified. As a consequence refugees are relying on private rental accommodation which was not easily accessed. Lower levels of resource allocation for housing across some areas and counties were also identified as difficulties.

Considerations specific to refugees which impacted on access to housing included long stays in the Direct Provision reception system which led to a certain level of disempowerment and dependency. These circumstances were, in some cases, aggravated by trauma experienced previously.

Refugees reported that the barriers identified affected their levels of inclusion. They resulted in limited access to social housing and situations of homelessness and indebtedness. Refugees were often left with an impoverished quality of life and reduced ability to keep rental accommodation.

Suitable and affordable accommodation, contact with the local Irish community as well as support from their own community were all identified as ways of boosting integration through housing. The closeness of housing to places of worship and their own ethnic group were also raised as factors leading to a better quality of life, supporting community bonding and network building and preventing the creation of isolated communities.

In evaluating and measuring factors that affect integration, there are several areas in relation to housing that could be looked at. These include the level of support provided to refugees as they prepare to leave the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision), the provision of information with respect to housing entitlements and obligations, and the level of satisfaction refugees have with their accommodation.



Additional areas which could be of interest in measuring factors that affect integration could include the number of households in need and/or in receipt of housing support and the readiness through which such support is provided. Discrimination incidents reported formally and informally may also be indicative of levels of inclusion and exclusion as would the share of refugees at risk of homelessness and poverty.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Measures should be taken to support refugees during the transition period from when they are granted refugee status, leave the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision) and seek to build a new life including the sourcing of accommodation.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

The accessibility of accommodation for newly recognized refugees should be reviewed with a view to identifying how current challenges in the private rental market and the social housing system might be overcome.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

The length of time refugees stay in the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision) prior to their recognition as refugees should be reduced to lessen the disempowerment and dependency the system can produce.

## **Employment**

As set out in the report, employment was identified as one of the main facilitators for integration. However a lack of English language competency, discriminatory attitudes and an inability to access the 'Back to Education Allowance' immediately after leaving the Direct Provision system were all identified as barriers to accessing employment. A lack of knowledge when it came to the job culture in Ireland and the Irish employment system were also raised as issues by refugees and stakeholders, as was the absence of a skills and audit system that verified and validated qualifications in the country of origin.

Considerations specific to refugees which impacted on employment opportunities included long stays in reception centres under which asylum-seekers are prohibited from accessing the labour market. Long periods without access to the labour market or further education create a gap in the Curriculum Vitae and lead to atrophy of skills. Additional considerations included problems accessing documentation in the country of origin for the recognition of qualifications. Trauma and/or mental health issues experienced by refugees were further relevant considerations.

These barriers identified had several effects. They resulted in limited access to the labour market and lessened access to the same level of professional attainment that they had in their country of origin.

The above, combined with very limited disposable income, leads to low self-worth and self-esteem and reduces opportunities for networking and volunteering, as well as for attaining soft skills and paid employment in the future. For those who were able to find work, they can end up working below their qualifications level, which can lead to an unwillingness to put down roots in Ireland.

Like other groups, refugees are affected by boredom and mental health problems as a result of unemployment. Many opt for attending training courses which may not be progressive, and might not contribute to meaningful enhancement of academic and employment skills.

Access to internships and voluntary work were identified as facilitators which would give refugees access to their first job in Ireland. This allowed refugees to provide references for future employment opportunities and include Irish experience on their Curriculum Vitae.

A number of initiatives in the workplace were identified as facilitating access to the labour market. These included diversity awareness in the workplace and the implementation of local strategies by employers, such as the introduction of English classes. Such initiatives led to openness about challenges and opportunities in a diverse workplace and resulted in improved English language skills, and a greater level of cooperation and exchange of cultural perceptions. It also allowed for realistic employment goals and actions, which resulted in a greater deal of professional satisfaction.

The area of employment offers several opportunities for evaluation and measurement of refugee integration. These include the matching of employment rates with skill-sets and qualifications, as well as the impact that reception conditions have on the future employability of the refugee. The length of time it takes to find a job can indicate the level of integration of the refugee into the Irish labour market. Other indicators considered are the level of English competency, levels of discrimination when looking for employment as well as the degree to which foreign qualifications can be recognized where some documentation may be missing.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7**

Existing good practices including the provision of English language classes, diversity awareness raising activities and access to voluntary work opportunities should be enhanced

## **RECOMMENDATION 8**

Measures should be taken to address barriers faced by refugees including; the recognition of qualifications, access to documentation, access to social and educational supports upon recognition as a refugee and discriminatory attitudes.

## **RECOMMENDATION 9**

The length of time refugees stay in the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision) prior to their recognition as refugees, during which access to the labour market is not permitted, should be reduced.

## **RECOMMENDATION 10**

Additional integration support measures including further education, advanced language training and access to the labour market should be extended to long stay residents in the reception system for asylum-seekers (Direct Provision). Such measures could prepare refugees for subsequent integration and lead to improved opportunities for those not recognized as refugees on return to their country of origin.

# Access to Information

Access to information was identified by refugees and stakeholders as important to integration.

There are a substantial number of information sources, however information between sources can often be conflicting which may act as a barrier to integration. This can lead to misunderstandings, as well as delays in information sharing and communication. A lack of orientation classes for refugees and cultural training for service providers constitute barriers to accurate and reliable information. Limited information provided to refugees when they were asylum-seekers can result in rumour and misinformation.

Considerations specific to refugees include persecution faced in their country of origin which may impact on the degree to which refugees might trust information providers and/or official organizations.

Induction courses, which are currently only available for resettled (programme) refugees, can help offset some of these barriers. So too can contact with NGOs, English language teachers and 'Irish contacts'. These factors can boost independence and the refugees' ability to look after their own affairs. They can also lead to a greater sense of empathy for refugees, enhancing relationships between local communities and refugees and enhancing refugees' sense of security.. There was some anecdotal information during the consultations with stakeholders that women might be more resourceful when accessing information but not sufficient evidence from interviews with refugees to corroborate this.

In light of the above, consistent and timely communication between State agencies, NGOs, and community groups should be considered.

In evaluating and measuring factors that affect integration, there are several areas in relation to access to information that could be looked at. These would include looking at the sources of information available to refugees, accounting for differences between geographical areas and counties, their accuracy and the degree to which refugees are accessing them in practice.

## RECOMMENDATION 11

The provision of consistent and timely communication between State agencies, NGOs, and community groups should be considered.

## RECOMMENDATION 12

Existing good practices in place for resettled (programme refugees) and contact with NGOs, English language teachers and 'Irish Contacts should be extended to refugees recognized by the Irish refugee determination procedure.

## RECOMMENDATION 13

Enhanced access to information should also be extended to asylum-seekers awaiting the determination of their asylum applications.

## Social Inclusion

Sporting organisations and religious congregations were both identified as important platforms for social inclusion. However racism, discrimination, and a limited complaint mechanism where racist incidents can be visibly and comprehensively challenged were indicated as barriers to socialisation. These were aggravated by refugees' previous experience of persecution which was highlighted as creating a level of mistrust and of fear of State authorities.

A number of causes also prevented refugees from socialising in pubs, including for religious, cultural and financial reasons. The stress associated with family reunification and the financial pressure put on refugees was a significant factor impacting their ability and willingness to become more involved in Irish society.

All together, these issues impacted on refugees in several ways. They led to lower participation in social activities and a lower reporting of racist incidents than should have been the case. They created boundaries that made it difficult for parents to participate in their children's school activities, as well as social activities.

Considerations specific to refugees included the personal experiences of survivors of torture and those who fled war. Such experiences negatively impacted refugees' ability and willingness to become involved in communities. Refugees' earlier experience of long stays in the reception system as asylum-seekers, the remoteness of some reception centres, limited disposable income, and a lack of privacy in reception centres where refugees may have been unable to receive guests, can impact upon social inclusion prospects upon receipt of refugee status. Refugees also reported social stigma attached to having previously been a resident in a reception or accommodation centre. Separation from family and the time spent awaiting reunification with a family member can also negatively impact upon social integration prospects and in turn the overall integration process.

To overcome these barriers, sporting organisations, faith based groups and schools could serve as platforms for local integration and offer a space for social connections and making contacts. They could offer not only sources of information and assistance but social bridges too, stimulating inclusion and engendering sustainable integration through local programmes.

Considering the above, grass-root programmes could be used as training on anti-racism practices, while the Garda Racial, Intercultural & Diversity Office was identified as a means of bridging between refugees communities and police authorities. Gender considerations were reported as relevant. It was suggested that women's experience of inclusion is mediated by their children's experiences and refugee women identified a lack of family and informal support systems as barriers to integration.

The area of social inclusion offers several areas for evaluation and measurement of refugee integration. Short and long-term participation of refugees in sporting and faith based organisations is a potential indicator of social integration. So too are reported and unreported incidents of discrimination and racism. The impact of family separation and level of engagement that parents have with schools are also possible areas for examination.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 14**

Measures should be taken to enhance access to sporting organizations, faith based groups and parents engagement with schools.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 15**

Additional measures should be taken to tackle racism and discrimination and to raise awareness about these measures among refugees.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 16**

Enhanced supports and flexibility should be extended to refugees in achieving family reunification.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 17**

The length of time refugees stay in the reception system for asylum seekers (Direct Provision) prior to their recognition as refugees should be reduced given the negative impact of such long stays on social inclusion prospects.

# ANNEX 1

## Members of the National Reference Group

- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Asylum Policy Division
- The Economic, Social and Research Institute (ESRI)
- Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Mark Maguire, National University of Ireland Maynooth
- Gavan Titley, National University of Ireland Maynooth

# ANNEX 2

## During the project we met representatives of the following organizations:

- Africa Centre
- AkiDwA
- Animo
- Athlone Community Radio
- Carlow Intercultural Forum (Rohingya Community)
- Clare Immigrant Support Centre
- Cois Tine
- County Dublin VEC
- County Dublin VEC - Separated Children Education Service
- Crosscare Refugee Service (formerly Vincentian Refugee Centre)
- Department of Education
- Department of Environment, Community and Local Government
- Department of Foreign Affairs
- Department of Social Protection
- Dil Wickremasinghe (Newstalk)
- Doras Luimní
- Economic Social and Research Institute
- EPIC
- FAI
- GAA
- Galway Migrant Service
- Garda Racial, Intercultural and Diversity Office
- Health Service Executive
- IBEC
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Irish Naturalisation Immigration Service
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Irish Examiner
- Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland
- Kairos
- KASI
- Kilkenny Integration Forum
- Mayo Intercultural Action
- Metro Éireann
- NASC
- NearFM
- New Communities Partnership
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland
- Rotimi Adebari (former Mayor of Portlaoise)
- SARI (Sport Against Racism Ireland)
- SIPTU
- SPIRASI
- The Integration Centre
- Threshold
- Vera Sheridan (Dublin City University)

## ANNEX 3

The following organizations took part in stakeholder meetings:

TOPIC DISCUSSED	ATTENDED:
<b>Active Citizenship (Focus on media)</b>	NearFM, RTE Diversity, Fine Gael, Labour Party, Immigrant Council of Ireland, United Youth of Ireland
<b>Access to Information</b>	Health Service Executive, County Dublin Vocational Education Committees, The Integration Centre, Doras Luimni, Department of Education, New Communities Partnership, Crosscare Migrant Service, Citizens Information Board, Islamic Cultural Centre Ireland
<b>Social Inclusion - Focus on Racism and discrimination</b>	AkiDwA, Department of Education (Social Inclusion Unit), Sport Against Racism Ireland, Dublin Multicultural Resource centre, SPIRASI, Doras Luimni, Football Association of Ireland, Garda Racial Intercultural Diversity Office
<b>Housing</b>	AkiDwA, Department of Social Protection, Simon Community, Crosscare Migrant Service
<b>Employment</b>	Immigrant Council of Ireland, Employment for People from Immigrant Communities (EPIC) , Quality and Qualifications Ireland, Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Kilkenny Integration Forum

## ANNEX 4

General Profile of Refugees Interviewed

Age and Gender Profile of Refugees Interviewed		
Gender	41% Female and 59% Male	
Age	18 - 24	23%
	25 - 34	21%
	35 - 44	38%
	45 - 54	15%
	55 - 64	1%
	65 and Over	1%

Year of Arrival in Ireland	
Between 1994 and 1999	4
Between 2000 and 2002	4
2003	5
2004	4
2005	5
2006	9
2007	13
2008	11
2009	7
2010	3
2011	2
2012	3
n/a	1

Geographical Region of Origin	
Southern Asia	8
South-Eastern Asia	7
Western Asia	7
Nothern Africa	1
Southern Africa	1
Eastern Africa	24
Middle Africa	10
Western Africa	8
Carribbean	3
Eastern Europe	1
Southern Europe	1

Average time spent in Direct Provision	
Less than 6 month	14
6 months to 11 months	9
1 year to 23 months	11
2 years to 35 months	6
3 years to 47 months	2
4 years to 59 months	2
5 years or over	5
Unknown duration	3

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