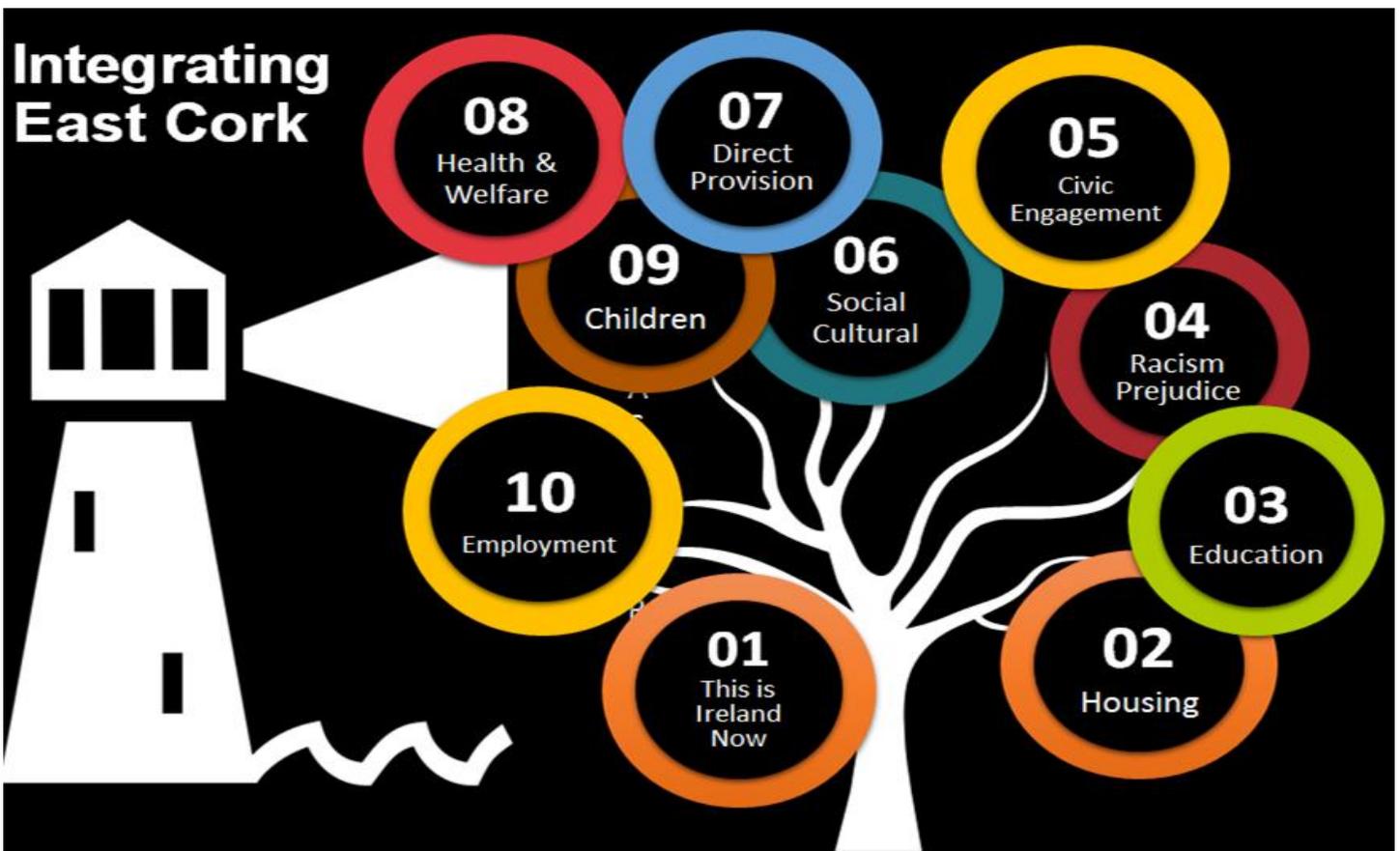


“INTEGRATING EAST CORK”

Research Report on Integration in East Cork through the voices of Migrant and Irish women

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Commissioned by the Department of Adult Continuing Education (ACE),
UCC, in Collaboration with Carrigtwohill Family Resource Centre

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An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
agus Comhionannais
Department of Justice
and Equality



1. Abstract

This paper is based on research carried out amongst women living in the village of Carrigtwohill and surrounding areas in East Cork (Ireland). Participants in the research comprised Asylum Seekers, refugees, migrants, new-Irish and Irish women, with a particular focus on women with children. The aim of the research was to explore experiences of social inclusion in Irish society from both the migrant/refugee perspective and from the perspective of Irish women. It begins with a discussion on how women themselves define or describe 'social inclusion' and 'integration'. It focuses on the positive aspects and successes of the Irish experience, as well as the challenges. The paper outlines policies and practice of social inclusion, as it relates to migrant and Irish women, in the context of life in Ireland. Various aspects of life in Ireland are explored including faith, culture and belief systems; access and participation in institutions of the State (Education, Health, Political, Legal and Civic Life); access to housing and employment opportunities. For those who have children, there is a focus too on 'being a parent' in Ireland. The research pays particular attention to the women's aspirations, expectations and concerns for their children (language, cultural and religious identity, education, etc).

The core question asks if Ireland is a place where migrant/refugee women can live a dignified life and where their expectations and aspirations are being met? It also presents the views of women in the wider community in relation to migrant inclusion in Irish life. The paper is based on field research carried out in cooperation with Carrigtwohill Family Resource Centre and other local stakeholders who provide services for immigrant communities and Asylum seekers living in or near East Cork. It includes not just the issues, but also the questions which migrant/refugee women have about life in Ireland. The research is presented through the voices of the women who took part in the six focus groups which were held in May 2019. In total fifty women participated in the research. It concludes with a set of recommendations for the future integration of migrant women in Ireland.

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Key words: Gender; Social Inclusion; Irish Society; Diversity; Migrants.

2. Researchers' Biographies

Rola (Hamed) Abu Zeid - O'Neill is an academic in the field of women, conflict, and memory. Rola is programme coordinator of Diploma in Women's Studies, and Diploma in Development Studies in ACE (Adult Continuing Education, UCC), and a final year PhD Candidate at the Department of Sociology at University College Cork. She lives in Carrigtwohill, East Cork for 8 years. Rola has more than 20 years of experience of capacity building in women's and political empowerment organizations in Israel and Palestine, community development, advocacy and political and civic lobbying, intercultural dialogues and cooperation experience.

Rola has 10 years of successful experience of teaching adults at Master's and undergraduate level. She is an experienced researcher, trainer and evaluator, in range of fields especially aiming to mitigate exclusion poverty and conflicts, targeting refugees, displaced and disadvantage groups applying both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. She led and project managed a successful local multicultural food project in 2018, and she has proven experience of empowering a diverse range of populations, including parents of children with disability, women, minority groups, women in minority groups, refugees, asylum seekers, Irish women in disadvantaged areas.

Rola is an active member of the Carrigtwohill Community Sponsorship Group; Cork City of Sanctuary; Carrigtwohill Strategic Plan Town Committee (2018-2022); Steering Committee of 'Refugee Family Reunification Research' at NASC: the Migrant and Refugee Rights Centre; Conflict Resolution Unit; Oversight Group for Ireland's Third National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 - Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Centre for Global Development (UCC); Board of Karti - Project for Women, Peace and Development; and UCC ISS21 (Institute for Social Science in the 21st Century) research clusters: New Poverties, Social Justice and Human Rights; Children and Young People; Memory; Violence, Gender, and Conflict.

Gertrude Cotter is an academic in the field of Development Education at University College Cork who lives in East Cork. She is the academic Coordinator of the Praxis Project: Development and Global Citizenship Education, UCC, which works to enhance greater integration of DGCE across the University. She is also coordinator of UCC's Id Est Project: Integrating Development Education in Student Teacher Training. She is the Director of her own consultancy firm "Global Citizenship Contact Point". She has lectured at UCC and the Tralee Institute of Technology in the following fields: Development and Global Citizenship Education, Development Studies, Social Care Management, Community and Youth Work, Latin American History and International Relations.

She is the former Chief Executive Officer of Nasc, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre, where she worked for almost a decade. She has also managed two family centres and worked in community and partnership organisations, including in East Cork. She previously worked as a development worker in Bolivia and in Thailand. She has carried out research and written extensively about the rights and needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland and has a number of publications in that area. She has six post graduate degrees, including three masters and she will submit her PhD to the School of Education, UCC in June 2019. In her earlier career she worked as a secondary school teacher, she was UCC's Schools Liaison Officer and she worked in a number of countries in Europe in a variety of capacities. She has been the founder of several organisations in the field of migrant/ refugee support in Ireland and has been a board member of the Irish Refugee Council, Integrating Ireland and Comhlámh.

3. Purpose and extent of the Research

This research was commissioned by The Department of Adult Continuing Education (ACE), UCC in Collaboration with Carrigtwohill Family Resource Centre and funded by the Communities Integration Fund 2018, from the Office for Promotion Migrant Integration – Department of Justice and Equality. The purpose of the research was to hear the voices of migrant women in Carrigtwohill and surrounding areas, with a view to understanding their experiences of integration in East Cork. It also aimed to garner some understanding of how Irish women perceive ‘integration’ and how together we can create a society which responds to the needs of our collective needs and ambitions for East Cork. The research focuses on the challenges but also on the positive aspects of integration

The research was aimed at women from all parts of the world currently living in East Cork, but with a particular interest in understanding the challenges faced by migrant and Irish women in living a dignified and happy life in East Cork. The research targeted as many nationalities as possible and did not discriminate in terms of employment, legal, age or any other status other than gender (although there was one male participant). We wanted to include as many diverse voices as possible from a range of countries, backgrounds and experiences. We do not in general distinguish between ‘migrant’, ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’, but we do draw attention to some specific issues which impact women living in Direct Provision Centres¹ in a manner which may not impact women in the broader community. Our aim is to gather together a wide range of voices and experiences of life in East Cork for migrant communities and to bring Irish and migrant women together to discuss our collective ambitions for an inclusive, equal society.

The research also aimed to focus more specifically on both older migrant women and on the needs and aspirations of women who have children. While the latter category was easy to target, it was difficult to find ‘older migrant women’ over the age of 63. Only one participant was over the age of 56. However, the majority of the research participants were between the age range of 35 to 55 years old.

The study sought to raise issues and questions but also to begin a dialogue between women in East Cork. The objective was to listen to the voices of women, record their experiences but also to ask them to make recommendations about how we might create a more inclusive East Cork.

This is a qualitative, not a quantitative study. It does not set out to provide “proof” or “numbers” of migrant experiences. Instead it aims to look deeper and talk longer in order to delve into the life of integration in East Cork. This provides more depth but also some limitations. The stories below can represent only the stories of the people who participated. It is not meant to be the “only story” of migrant women in East Cork. A wider research project might give a different picture. However, our discussions with 52 women does provide a strong flavour of opinions on the theme of “integration” of migrant women in East Cork.

1. Definition of the term ‘Integration’

We used definitions of integration that used by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

IOM: Integration is “the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals

¹ The system of accommodation in Ireland which provides ‘directly’ to the basic needs of food and shelter for asylum seekers while their claims for refugee status are being processed rather than through full cash payments.

and as groups. The particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country; and the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors: immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions and communities”. (Source: IOM Handbook on Migration Terminology, 2011).

UNHCR: Integration is “understood as a dynamic and multifaceted two-way process with three interrelated dimensions: a legal, an economic and a social-cultural dimension. Integration requires efforts by all parties concerned, including preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the needs of a diverse population. 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 “welcome” by the other. It does not, however, require the refugee to relinquish their cultural identity and integration therefore differs from assimilation”.

(Source: UNHCR’s Executive Committee Conclusion on Local Integration, 2005).

2. Background of Participants

A total of 52 women (and one man) from different regions of the world, including Irish people participated in this research. All participants were living in East Cork and were from Ireland, China, England, Russia, Nigeria, Benin, Italy, Malawi, Palestine, Poland, Algeria, Tunisia, Pakistan, D. R. Congo, Albania, Kosovo, Zimbabwe, India, and Brazil. Most were employed in a number of sectors as nurses, care assistants, community development, academia, office assistants, childcare, hotel and restaurant industry, cleaning, and IT. Some depended on their husbands and were dependant on them for their visas. Some were caring at home for their children, some of whom were born in Ireland and some who were not. The majority were settled in Ireland and saw their future in Ireland.

Countries of Origin:

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|----|---------|---|----------|---|----------|---|
| Ireland: | 11 | China: | 2 | England: | 1 | Russia: | 3 |
| Nigeria: | 6 | Benin: | 3 | Italy: | 4 | Malawi: | 2 |
| Palestine: | 1 | Poland: | 4 | Algeria: | 1 | Tunisia: | 1 |
| Pakistan: | 3 | Congo: | 3 | Albania: | 3 | Kosovo: | 1 |
| Zimbabwe: | 2 | India: | 1 | Brazil: | 1 | | |

Age Profile:

26-35 years old: 24 research participants

36-55 years old: 28 research participants

56-65 years old: 1 research participant

Legal Status in Ireland:

Asylum Seekers: 21 research participants

Refugees: 2 research participants

Moved to Ireland for work: 11 research participants

Moved to Ireland for marriage: 5 research participants

Born in Ireland: 11 research participants

Other: 3 research participants

They are:

Employed: 26 research participants

Unemployed: 18 research participants

Under-employed: 1 research participants

Working at home caring for children: 7 research participants

Working at home caring for other children: 1 research participants

Methodology

This study was undertaken primarily through the use of six focus groups. In total 52 women and one man (husband of one of the women) participated on a voluntary basis. Each participant filled out a short questionnaire which enabled us to collate a profile of the participants in terms of age, nationality, legal status and level of education. The focus groups took place in Carrigtwohill, Midleton, and Cloyne. There were also two focus group discussions with the women in a direct provision centre in East Cork. The findings of these discussions section 5 below. A broad set of questions on various aspects of 'living in Ireland' and 'feeling included' guided each session, but the discussions were open ended and very much led by the interests of participants.

Findings and Analysis

1. Education:

Education is a very high priority for the women in this study, both for themselves and for their children. A number of key themes emerged regarding their experiences of education in Ireland. The first was the experience of ‘reinventing’ themselves. Many of the women in this study already had a degree or equivalent in their country of origin. Finding themselves in Ireland they often had to reinvent themselves, even after quite successful initial careers in their own countries. One woman with a master’s degree in computer science from a Nigerian university said that she is finding it very difficult to find even very basic work. She could not point to any specific evidence of discrimination but she felt an ongoing “knowing” of her qualifications being of lesser value in Ireland. Therefore, now an asylum-seeker living in Direct Provision, she had to start again on a FETAC Level 4 course and like many of the women in Direct Provision, was taking any opportunity she could to attend what courses were available to her. Another woman with a similar background said that she was “very very angry” when a FETAC 3 course was advertised where she was living. “Most of us here have a higher degree than that. It is an insult”.

“I’m 27 years old and I have to reinvent myself all over again. I have a degree in computer science but here I have to start again at FETAC 4 level”.

Some fields of study are difficult to transfer to an Irish context for instance degrees in law, teacher qualifications and degrees in the humanities. Several women said that recognition of prior work or educational attainment “did not happen”, either within the education system or as they apply for jobs. One woman from a Middle Eastern country, said that she had worked as a language teacher in her own country, but when she married an Irish man and moved here, she ended up working in a call centre because it was “the only work I could find”. She too was very frustrated and felt under-employed.

Those who are married to Irish people, find their husbands are continuing with their careers and bringing in higher salaries, while they find themselves caring in the home or in jobs where they feel underemployed. Some feel that their education systems are not valued as much as those who studied in Ireland. The level of frustration about recognition of educational backgrounds was palpable in all six groups. One woman said “they just think we are stupid”. Another blamed the size of Ireland as a country. “There are just not enough jobs to go around”, she said and “we are always at the bottom of the pile”. Another said “it’s my skin colour, it’s as simple as that”.

Another very strong theme was the separation of Church and State in the Education system (and in other state institutions such as Health). There were very strong feelings about this in the focus groups with people from most countries saying they could not understand why the Catholic Church is not completely separate from the school system. This report cannot emphasise enough the strength of feeling about this aspect of Irish education. Almost all participants said that this is something which did not happen in their country of origin. There were some heated discussions. One woman said she could not understand why the Catholic Church “gave this to the schools”. “Surely”, she said, “the Church would be stronger if it was taken out of schools? Now they just have all these people who do not have faith”. It should be noted that this was not because some of the participants were from a different religion. In fact those who did practice a religion were more tolerant of the idea of faith based schools. For many participants they simply could not understand the concept of a church operating through the education system. They were aware too of the power this gave to the Church, even if that power is declining in Ireland.

“Please explain to me why the Church and State are not separate. I cannot, I simply cannot understand it. In my country they are completely different things. Isn’t that better for the Church? Isn’t that a stronger church, where they have people who want to be there?”

Finally, there was a strong feeling that there was a need for more political and civic education in Ireland, particularly amongst those living in Direct Provision. The feeling was that the general population do not understand why people come to live here and that “knowledge about the outside world” is “very basic” in Ireland.

“Ireland needs more political education. People need to know why asylum seekers and refugees have to move”.

In terms of the experience of their children in the education system, some challenges were identified. Mostly these related to incidents within schools where an issue was not, in their opinion, handled well by the school. The incidents mentioned related to a sense of being what one woman terms “an outsider all the time” and “having to be the one to fit in”. Some asked why teachers do not receive adequate training or even find out about the cultures of the students in their classrooms. One example involved a child being told by another child that her mother said she couldn’t play with her. When the child asked why, the other child said “my mother told me not to play with you”. This conversation was repeated verbatim several times in the presence of their teacher. The participant in the study was angry because the teacher did nothing to address the issue, which the participant felt was because she was the “only child who was different” in the class. Another incident related to a mother believing that the teacher did not believe her child whenever there was a conflict with other children. She said her child “may not always be right, but surely he is not always wrong either”? This, the participants acknowledged, could be just bad teaching, but when combined with colour or nationality that is ‘different’ from the majority, the mother said, “it’s hard not to think it’s because he is different”.

However, overall, experiences of the education system in relation to their children were positive. Generally, while mothers had concerns for the future of their children, they were hopeful and considered education to be a very important means of progressing and having good jobs in the future. The general opinion was that the education system is good but not as good as Ireland thinks it is for migrants. The main concern was lack of awareness amongst teachers and particularly school principals about the nuances of intercultural incidents.

Those in Educate Together Schools were decidedly more positive about the experience of their children in the school system. Like most participants in this study they were in favour of church/state separation and found the system incomprehensible. They praised their school for all of the efforts made to promote integration not just in terms of culture, but also in terms of disability and social inclusion in general. There was not any sense of ‘migrant children’ having to ‘integrate in to’ the majority, but rather they were all there together, all children and their backgrounds, including their religions, or those of no faith, were celebrated. Some Irish women in this system also valued this very highly since they did not have to justify “having no faith”, whereas in other parts of society they “still felt” they had to defend themselves. One woman said “integration for me is also about me feeling free to just not have a faith”.

2. Health and Social Welfare:

Overall participants were positive about the health and social welfare systems. Issues they had were generally similar to those of the overall population, rather than their migrant status. However, there appears to be a lack of knowledge (about 50% of participants) about services which are available in Ireland relating to women's health, such as smear tests and breast checks. Those who had given birth were better informed because they had found such information in maternity hospitals. Many of the women who had never been pregnant had not had a smear test or a breast check in their time in Ireland.

“Smear test? What is that?”

Generally women were happy with the maternity services although there were two instances where women felt they were not being listened to during labour. Most women felt that the staff at the maternity hospitals were very professional and friendly although language barriers did cause some difficulty at times.

The issue that was of greatest concern in relation to giving birth and childcare was the lack of extended family supports and for some, loneliness in that experience. While no participants used the term ‘post-natal depression’ the descriptions of “feeling alone”, “on my own” or “lonely” after child birth, indicated that PND may be exacerbated by lack of social supports. For those living in smaller villages or rural areas, this isolation was exacerbated. As one woman said “you might have people from my country in Dublin or even Cork, but not in the country in East Cork. I am the only one from my country around here”.

Within the health and social welfare systems one of the most difficult aspects was form filling, some of which are long and difficult to understand. Partly this is a language issue but there are also references to words, acronyms, systems or state bodies which people who are new to Ireland, or even in Ireland for a few years, are not familiar with. For those married to Irish people they found their husbands had to help translate or explain what these terms mean. In general information which is available can be hard to follow if such a translator/interpreter is not available. While the people in this study had not had a medical emergency, some said they worried that if they had to call an ambulance or if they were in a serious situation in hospital, that they may not be able to communicate. One individual found this prospect very stressful and thought about it frequently. Medical words are difficult, she said. On the other hand a minority found some attitudes a little patronising. While recognising that the staff member at a social welfare office was trying to be helpful, this participant found it difficult when the staff person asked her if she needed help to read the form. The woman said “I didn't want to tell her I have almost completed a PhD at UCC”.

“I know she was trying to be helpful when she asked if I could read the form. I didn't tell her I have almost completed a PhD at UCC. I understand that she was being friendly. The problem is that when you are a migrant woman, you do feel that someone is being patronising even if they don't mean to be. Maybe if I were Irish I wouldn't feel like that”.

An advantage of including Irish born participants in the study was that some of nuances of the experiences of migrant women could be explored in the context of how an Irish person might experience such an incident. There were several detailed stories of experiences with the social welfare system, where migrant women had found ‘the system’ difficult and Irish people in the room said “this is how it is done”. This is difficult to articulate in a report of this nature but there is a cultural ‘knowing’ in a

society, there are hidden meanings or ‘ways of doing things’ that are not always apparent to someone relatively new to this society.

The most prevalent opinion about the health and social welfare systems related to information. While women acknowledged that there is a lot of information, they still found it hard to find what they were looking for, that there is a lot of “very confusing language” and that it is hard to get important information about rights and entitlements in different languages. One woman said:

“There are certain kinds of things in life that are really critical. The health people and welfare, they should translate at least some of the important information into different languages. I know they can’t do everything...”

3. Housing

Housing is an area which received gasps when first mentioned. For many women in this study they had already accessed housing but not without considerable difficulties. A markedly common opinion was the following: “When I was looking for a house I had to get an Irish friend to ring around landlords. If I made the call, the house was always gone. Actually I am not sure if it was because I am a foreigner or because they assume I am on a housing payment”.

Other challenges were those similar to the wider population, with housing allowance payments being deemed ‘totally inadequate’ and rising rental costs. Many participants were struggling with paying their rent. A particularly noteworthy point relating to housing concerns people living in Direct Provision who have been granted leave to remain in Ireland but who still live in Direct Provision because (a) they cannot find affordable rental housing and (b) they are limited to the area because their children are in school in that area and they do not want to move them to a different school – some children had already been disrupted several times in their young lives.

“From where I am now (in Direct Provision), it is almost impossible for me to find housing. The rents are too high. Landlords don’t want people like me. But the hardest part is that there are no houses for rent near here and I can’t move my child out of her school and bring her to another part of Cork”.

Several women expressed similar difficulties and this was a cause of considerable concern, stress and worry for themselves and for their children.

4. Employment

In this study three key issues emerged: unemployment, underemployment and deskilling. As discussed above some women felt that while their husbands were developing their careers, they themselves were

held back because of language barriers and the need to reinvent themselves. There were very strong feelings that more was needed to support migrants with career progression. For instance, formal recognition of prior work experience or qualifications would be helpful so that migrant people would not to 'start again from scratch'. Some women had heard about programmes in other countries (e.g. programmes in Denmark or the UK which helped refugees and migrants who had degrees in areas such as law or humanities) supporting migrants to work towards meaningful progression. Most of the women in the study felt very frustrated in jobs for which they found unsatisfying and frustrating. One woman made this point:

“For men they often have degrees or trades which are more transferable. IT, carpentry, plumbing. They are more transferable than broader communications and language and humanities...which women are more drawn to. I have noticed that. It is interesting. So we end up having to go into things here like childcare or health care”.

Many noted the size of Ireland as a country, which they found “very tiny” and felt that the size of the country meant there would never be certain kinds of jobs. One woman said most of her friends were working in call centres, and the jobs there was “boring”, “slavish” and full of “bad working practices”.

“We are all going to end up in call centres”.

Another woman said “It is very hard to make a career in Ireland if you don’t have specific kind of skills which many women don’t have. Except nurses maybe but then English is a problem too”. In her country this woman worked in an archival job which required attention to language. She was finding it difficult to find a position which was of a similar level in terms of interest, prospects and salary.

Another aspect of ‘deskilling’ was time. For all women, not just those in the asylum system, they felt that their lives had been ‘on hold’, that their careers had taken a back seat and that they often had to start again as though they were just out of school.

5. Children and Young People

Generally there was hope for the future. Most women felt that their children would do better in Ireland than they had because the children were growing up in Ireland, understood ‘how things work here’ and had good English. Some had concerns about their children not doing well because of their skin colour or nationality but overall even those women felt hopeful for the future of their children. Many women had children who were born in Ireland. Some African women expressed some concern that their children might still suffer when they are looking for jobs in the future, even if they were born in Ireland. However, overall they still felt hopeful that Ireland is progressing. They also felt that it can be hard for their children if they are assumed “not to be Irish because they are black”. One woman said that this made her teenage son very angry and, she said, he wants to “raise awareness” about the fact that

“...some people born in Ireland are not white but they are still Irish”.

Having children at school was identified as the way in which they had come to know other women in their communities. There was a certain level of identity around ‘being the mother of a school going child’. One woman said:

“As the mother of teenage children, I’ve had a role which is the same as the other women. I don’t know what I will do when they leave school. I feel lonely already. If they go to college I will miss them. But it’s more that I won’t know who I am. Being a mother makes us all the same at the school gate but I have nothing else to fall back on”.

Virtually all the women felt that Ireland was a good place for their children to grow up, although all also wanted their children to keep a connection to their ‘other’ identity. They said they would like to see more work done ‘on this’ (preserving cultures) in schools and communities.

There was some criticism of supports for teenagers. Some were concerned that there is pressure in Ireland to drink alcohol during the teenage years, something which was not prevalent in their countries of origin. They wanted to protect their children in this but did not feel adequately prepared to do so. Some felt that while Ireland is a good place for children, they were not as sure when it came to their teenage years.

There were some mentions of the difference in their children’s upbringing as opposed to their own upbringing. Many mentioned differences in gender roles in Ireland compared to their own upbringing. This was seen as a positive thing, particularly for their daughters. One woman said she wouldn’t want her 13 year old daughter to go through what she went through when she was a teenager. Girls in her community were expected to “weight upon men and marry young”. Her daughter, she said “can be who she wants to be and achieve what she wants to be”. One woman said that her husband was struggling with this in Ireland but, she said, “he will have to deal with it”.

6. Political and Community Participation

Generally the women in this study were interested in the politics of Ireland and the world. There was some concern that Irish people were somewhat complacent about politics and particularly global politics. This point was made in all focus groups and particularly made by asylum seekers who felt Irish people did not understand why they were in Ireland. Two women said that she is always seen as “her country”. Mentioning people such as the president in their countries and stereotypes about their countries, they said “Irish people think that is us”. One woman said “they don’t realise that there are millions of people living there. We are all different. I don’t agree with [president in her country] he is stupid but people keep talking to me as though we are all as stupid as he is as if I represent him”.

The women in this study were from different rural areas in East Cork, or from small towns and villages in East Cork. They did not identify with any one community group but several were trying to actively engage within their own communities. There was some frustration about real integration into local level decision-making. There was a sense that the ‘older’ communities, the more established people who had lived in the area for generations, had a lot of power and control and that at times they did not understand what was happening. Decisions were made ‘behind closed doors’ said one woman. Here again there

was a discussion about the complacency of Irish people in relation to issues which affected the lives of all. The women couldn't fully understand why people were not taking action at a local level on issues which impact on their lives. One woman said, in frustration, if not anger:

“Why are they not getting involved in this [named local issue]? In [her country] everyone would be out fighting for their rights. It’s their lives. They are being affected. What are they afraid of? I just don’t get it”.

Many women did not feel connected to local decision making and did not know how to make an impact on for instance local authority decisions. However, the women were open to doing so and willing to engage. They all felt that voting was important.

Many too did not see the services being offered by community and family centres are very relevant and in general did not really know what their purpose was.

7. Social and Cultural

There were mixed views on whether or not Irish people were warm and welcoming. There were many anecdotes about either how friendly or how unfriendly Irish people are and many opinions. A similar idea of Irish people was expressed many times; that there is an:

“Outward friendliness initially” but Irish people “are hard to really get to know and becomes friends with”.

Within one focus group, of women in Direct Provision, there was some heated debate about this, with a division between those who thought that ‘some people here’ (in DP) had to make more of an effort at a personal level to “get involved” and those who felt that it is impossible to feel socially included or “normal” while living in these conditions. One woman felt that “before we talk about the Irish people, we need to stop conflict amongst ourselves. We don’t get along with one another, and we need to sort that first”.

Isolation was mentioned, particularly by those living in smaller or more remote areas. Again, the issues of “old” and “new” communities was mentioned in this context. There was a sense that there was some resistance and unfriendliness by some who perhaps did not “have to make an effort because they are already established”. One woman also mentioned ‘planning permission’. How, she asked, “can we get planning permission in a rural area if we have no ties to the area? It is such an unfair system”.

While many women said they were happy and had made friends, there were quite a number of women who felt a need for social networks. This was particularly evident for those who were not working or who were caring for children in the home, although having Irish partners or husbands did help. As one woman said:

“It is the wider network of friends that I miss. Only for [naming woman sitting next to her] I would be lost. She is now my family. We need one another. It is

very hard to get to know people here because people have their networks already. I find it quite lonely”.

Social networks were considered important for having outlets outside the home, but also for practical reasons such as childcare and babysitting. Again the women discussed how they missed their extended families.

This linked to a discussion about how people socialise in Ireland. It was noted by several that the weather makes a difference to how people socialise. Life is not lived as much outdoors as it is in many countries. This has an impact on peoples’ personality and how they live their lives. One woman spoke about her daily walks near where she lived in a mountainous area in her country, when she would chat along the way to people sitting outside doorways. Another spoke of large family meals outside in the sunshine. The ‘pub culture’ was alien to many of the women who talked about the need for different kinds of social outlets, especially ones which were safe for women to go to alone. On the other hand many said that they were too exhausted to do anything after work, that they found their work difficult and if they also had children, it was very hard to find time to do anything else.

Those who practiced a religion or who had particular cultural rituals felt they could openly practice them in Ireland. “Heads do turn a bit when we wear our bright African clothes on Sundays but it doesn’t happen as often as it used to”.

8. Racism, Prejudice and Discrimination

Many of the issues relating to discrimination and prejudice have already been mentioned above, such as experiences of isolation as ‘new communities’, difficulties in accessing local political structures, lack of recognition of prior qualifications and experience, some landlord attitudes towards people paying through the housing assistance payment, etc.

Overall the women in this study did not use the term ‘racism’ and did not express concern that they had experienced racism. However, a number of incidents were mentioned which would commonly be called ‘racism’ or at the very least ‘prejudice’ or ‘stereotyping’. For instance, one woman said that her neighbours thought she was the housekeeper when she first moved the area with her husband; one woman said that people spoke to her about living in Direct Provision and ‘taking our resources’ and that ‘we have our own homeless’; another spoke about how people had ‘stereotypes’ of African people. She said she felt that a lot of people still had an image of black people “backwards”. She said she knew it was “not most people” but “still a lot of people are just not used to people with black skin around here”. One Asian woman who wears a Hijab said that she does experience “a lot of name calling in some parts of Cork city and I feel intimidated and afraid”. On one particular occasion a group of young men called out: “look at her one over there”, while another said “get out of here..”. It was the most frightening moment she had experienced in Ireland although she said again that she believes these people are in a tiny minority in Ireland. Most people, she said are “kind and friendly and helpful”.

Most of the women said that with the exception of one or two extremists they never experienced racism in Ireland.

9. Recommendations

Ireland has not yet reached a point in many aspects of life, where it has come to terms with the realities of global migration flows, interdependence between countries, economies and educational systems. We cannot continue to operate effectively as a country unless policy makers, statutory bodies, educational institutions and the population as a whole, understand that Ireland and the world have changed forever. We no longer live in a country with a primarily white Irish population. Many of our businesses, care supports and health systems rely on inward migration. As a relatively developed and safe country in a global context we also need to understand that we have a responsibility to respond to the many global crises that lead to forced migration. Refugees, asylum seekers and people who are called ‘undocumented’, are human beings to whom we have political and ethical duty, not as ‘charity’ but because they have the right to be here and they have the same human rights as any other human being living on our collective planet. We have to embrace these new realities, rise to the challenges and opportunities they pose and listen to the voices of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers who live alongside us as neighbours and friends. Many people in a society have challenges associated with their particular lives. Migrant women also have specific challenges which relate to their migration/refugee/asylum status. Clearly there are some challenges facing the women in this East Cork study. Some of the issues will require medium term to long term solutions, but some can be implemented in the short term. Ultimately if there is the political will these are issues which can be addressed by policy makers, educational institutions, statutory bodies, support services, the community and voluntary sector and the community in general making a concerted effort to work together.

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| 1. | EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT |
| 1.1 | <i>Policy makers and Educational Institutions:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop more flexible educational paths taking into account the fact that Ireland now has a workforce or potential workforce with a more complex educational needs;• Educational policy makers, colleges and universities need to work together towards ‘joined up planning’ which enable smooth educational progression routes for all and taking into account the particular needs of migrants. This includes fair and just recognition of prior learning and prior work and life experiences and providers may need to be pro-active in developing new systems and access models which respond to the reality of Irish society;• Appoint educational officers dedicated to supporting migrants at an early stage of their educational or career pathway in Ireland;• Carry out further educational research on the specific needs of migrant communities and how they can be supported specifically in relation to different educational and career backgrounds;• Develop a central resource which can be used as a benchmark to recognise qualifications and prior experience in different careers, show case models of good practice in supporting migrants and refugees in specific career paths and provide advice to service providers and migrants on how best to navigate the education and employment systems |

from where they begin in Ireland. This resource could also present ‘case studies’ or ‘profiles’ of how a migrants have to ‘reinvent’ themselves, showing for instance that it is not fair or just that person with a degree in computer science finds themselves now at a level 4 FETAC;

- Consider providing strong and meaningful Civic, Political and Global Citizenship Education at all educational levels from pre-school to third level.
- Recognise that migrants are like anyone else, they may not always ‘just want a job’, many want to follow career paths in their chosen fields and a stop gap job may help in the short term but not in the long term;
- Migrants are not just economic contributors in Ireland, they are fully part of Irish society now and need to be respected as people with full lives with a wide range of needs, not just workers or students;
- All employers, statutory agencies and community organisations should continue with efforts to promote equality, inclusivity and anti-racism, with professional training which helps the population to understand the nuances of the migrant experience and why a migrant might consider an incident as discriminatory, patronising or racist even if others do not.
- Strengthen childcare supports and services to enable labour market participation for migrant women.

1.2 Primary and Secondary Schools:

- All school principals and staff should be given the opportunity to participate in comprehensive, well-funded, development, intercultural, anti-racism and global citizenship education;
- Invest in the provision of cultural and language education in primary and secondary schools, and pre-schools so that children from migrant families can, if they choose, retain their cultural identities and gain credit and recognition for doing so;
- The strong feelings relating to the separation of church and state seem to indicate that there is an appetite for more schools that reflect an Educate Together type of ethos;
- Within schools, careful planning and consultation with parents is required in order to establish the best approach to situations where religious instruction or cultural mores are different from the majority. Where possible this should be child-centered and not a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Consideration is needed too for those people, Irish included, who do not practice any faith. It must become normal within schools’ systems and society as a whole, that many people do not practice a religion or do not adhere to a faith.
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1.3 Community and Voluntary Sector:

- Linking, if possible, to a qualification, provide basic to very advanced level English language classes at a very local level, which migrant women can access. This may need to be on a one to one basis in rural areas and should be student-focused with an emphasis on the kind of English language they need for the successful development of their lives and careers;
- Recognise that some migrant women feel very frustrated with their employment status in Ireland, provide services which help migrant women to network within their areas of interest. For example, make links with third level institutions or employers or individuals in the community who work in areas which interest newer members of the community. Support migrant women with transport and childcare to enable them to access these networks;
- Engage with migrant women with a view to understanding and helping women to achieve individual education, training and employment needs and progression ambitions;

- Provide professional support in CV preparation, interview techniques and presentation skills;
- Provide supports to migrant women to come together, especially those working or living in remote areas, in a pre-developmental community development approach if necessary. Through these local level community groups help build confidence of migrant women in understanding their work-related rights. Given the numbers in East Cork, nationality may not be the best mechanism of bringing women together. It may be more useful to bring different work sectors together (e.g. agriculture) or to have local groups for migrant women in general. In this study the latter approach was favoured by participants. This ‘coming together’ should not be the final ‘outcome’ of outreach work, but rather a concerted effort to build the collective capacity of migrant women to address work and educational needs and rights.
- Work closely with asylum seekers and recognise that there is frustration if women have degrees from their own countries but find only lower level qualifications are available to them. Understand the profile of the asylum seekers in your area. Become knowledgeable about the details of employment and education rights of asylum seekers in order to provide appropriate and detailed information and advice at a very local level.

1.4 *Employers and Employer bodies e.g. business associations:*

- Proactively work with migrant women. Working through local business associations a broad range of sectors could link very practically to migrant women and support them, along with other agencies to develop networks and understand the sectors that interest them in terms of their future careers in Ireland.
- Within workplaces employers might consider familiarising themselves with the particular challenges faced by migrant women and work with them to help them reach their potential.

2.

HOUSING, HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE

2.1 *Statutory Agencies and Service Providers:*

- Urgent attention is needed for refugees and people with leave to remain who are moving out of Direct Provision. As the current system stands it is virtually impossible to find housing and they find themselves stuck in a limbo situation. A detail which is often unnoticed is that moving out of DP means living nearby if your child is already at school. This is restrictive. Housing authorities and agencies need to work closely with those moving out of DP to support their transition to the community.
- Provide detailed information on the most important housing, social welfare and health facts which migrant woman should be aware of, in different languages (know the languages in your area). For information which may be specific to individual needs find out where you can access translators or interpreters from time to time so that you know you are providing the best possible advice to the community you serve. If such supports are not available, work with other agencies to find ways of accessing centralised telephone translation services;
- All staff should be aware of colloquial language or acronyms they use. A migrant person, especially those new to the country, may never have heard of the most common of services to a person born in Ireland. The ‘HSE’ or even ‘Social Welfare’ or ‘HAP’ may mean nothing to the person whom you are providing a service to;

- All services should treat a migrant woman as they would treat any other woman. There needs to be particular sensitivity and knowledge amongst service providers of some of the issues which may arise for migrant women. For instance if there is domestic violence in the home and the legal status of the woman depends on the spouse or partner, disclosure is very difficult; in some religions and countries it may not be appropriate for a man to accompany a woman to a medical visit or during childbirth; for women in general, they may not wish to discuss some matters in front of their husband or anyone else and again a professional translator by telephone may be the best option.
- Form filling is particularly difficult if English is not your first language. Without appearing to patronise staff should be aware of how to support a person who may not have English as their first language;
- A woman giving birth and a woman being transported by ambulance in an emergency should have access to a translator at all times by telephone;
- Pay particular attention to women's health and do not presume that all women living in Ireland are aware of the basic information about reproductive health services, smear tests, breast check etc. Proactively target migrant women, particularly those who are single and have not accessed health services because of their pregnancy;
- Be aware that asking women to bring friends or children to translate is not always appropriate or feasible. Children should not be subjected to certain kinds of knowledge which are not age appropriate and women may not want friends to know about their health, social welfare or housing needs;
- Mental health services need to proactively target migrant women in rural areas, ensure that they are aware of and can access services that are available to them. Services need to understand and train for issues which may be of particular concern to migrant women and asylum seekers, such as rural isolation, sense of displacement, bereavement, traumas from past lives, cultural disorientation, home sickness, the need to reinvent their lives, feeling unfulfilled because of moves backwards in career or educational journeys.

2.2 *Community and Voluntary Sector (and communities as a whole):*

- The community and voluntary sector should consider lobbying political leaders regarding those transitioning out of direct provision. Women who are on their own with school going children are finding it impossible to find housing which is also near the local school. Community groups might take a proactive role in bringing together members of the community who might help refugees coming out of DP, to find housing. This is already happening in East Cork with incoming (e.g. Syrian) refugees but not with those currently in DP.
- The issue that was of greatest concern in relation to giving birth and childcare for women in this study was the lack of extended family supports and for some, loneliness in that experience. It would be helpful if communities could establish support groups, either between migrant women from similar parts of the world/language groups and/or with women in general in the community who have experience of childbirth, understand pre-natal depression and who can support isolated women particularly in rural areas or small towns, particularly in the early months after the birth of a child. Such allies should be provided with training and supports to help them support migrant women.

3.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

3.1 *Political Leaders, Statutory Agencies and Community and Voluntary Sector:*

- Strong political and local leadership is required to instil a strong sense of ‘who is Ireland now’. Looking at other parts of the world we cannot become complacent about the move to the alt-right, extreme nationalism and support for anti-immigration politics. If Ireland is to avoid this leadership is required at local and national levels. No mother for instance, should worry that her Irish born child might have less of a chance in life than his classmates because of the colour of his skin. Being Irish no longer means ‘white, Catholic’. We need to embrace and celebrate diversity in a positive light and this requires strong leadership, workshops about multi culturalism at local level, in communities, in schools and within media and political debates. Staff at media outlets of all kinds should be exposed to the idea of balance and justice in their reporting.

3.2 *Community Sector and Service Providers:*

- Proactively invite migrant women to establish or participate in support groups or services which can help women who have cared for their children throughout their school years. Migrant women have expressed a sense of loss, lack of identity and loneliness.
- Recognise that young people from diverse backgrounds may have different or specific social needs. Talk with teenagers and parents about what activities they would like to see in the local community.
- Provide supports to migrant women in relation to coping for their teenagers in a country to which they are not accustomed. Workshops or one to one advice about dealing with some of the societal issues that concern migrant women and which they may not be as equipped to cope with for a variety of reasons.
- The cost of childcare and transport are the issues which impact most on women living in Direct Provision, in terms of them accessing education, training and employment. Community groups can visit the DP centres and talk to women about their individual needs and seek to find solutions to childcare and transport costs.
- This applies to migrant women as a whole, as it does to the wider population, therefore community groups might consider outreach work to migrant families to ensure they are aware of any transport or childcare facilities that are available in the area.

3.3 *Schools:*

- Celebrate diverse cultures and faiths. Discuss with parents of migrant children what their needs are in relation to preservation of country of origin culture and language. Ask how the school can help. Parents and schools could work on a plan together to find resources and networks which could help in the preservation of their different identities.

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| 4. | CIVIC ENGAGEMENT - Political and Community Participation |
| 4.1 | <p><i>Political Leaders and Civic Society:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show leadership in promoting responsible, mature dialogue about migrant issues, the causes of forced migration and the need for us as a society to discuss global issues. • Proactively encourage and support migrant women to access local and national politics. |
| 4.2 | <p><i>Community and Voluntary Sector:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boards and staff should discuss the tensions (perceived and real) which exist between ‘old’ and ‘new’ communities and proactively include migrant women and newcomers to the area in general, to have a meaningful role in progressing the area. • Provide ‘Development and Global Citizenship Education’ as educational opportunities in local areas (formal and informal). • Provide workshops or at least visible information to the migrant population locally explain how Irish political and civic life works. • Outreach to migrant women in small villages and rural areas to provide information and advice about services available locally and to ask them what activities and services might be useful to them. |
| 4.3 | <p><i>Schools and Colleges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ‘Development and Global Citizenship Education’ to students and staff at all levels. |
| 4.4 | <p><i>Media:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More serious discussions and documentaries are needed on global issues, which are responsible and non-sensational. |

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| 5. | SOCIAL AND CULTURAL |
| 5.1 | <p><i>Policy Makers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning permission, often a contentious issue in local areas, is deeply biased against migrant women. Planning authorities need to address this bias. • In planning towns, villages and rural communities, planners and policy makers need to consult with migrants in a meaningful manner. Migrant women seek access for themselves and their families to appropriate social outlets...not separate from the wider population, but inclusive. This should be seen as an opportunity to incorporate innovative, new, multi-cultural and exciting activities. Policy makers need to fully understand that integration does not mean ‘making them like us’, but rather it is about us all growing together as a society and merging or sharing traditions rather than remaining static. |

- At the same time policy makers need to make resources available for outreaching to migrant women who may not be aware of the full range of existing social outlets, sports facilities, etc.
- Isolation in small rural areas is a concern which community organisations might address. The problem for isolated individuals is that community groups and service providers do not always have resources to reach those who are most at risk since there is not a ‘critical mass’ of people. This has been identified as an important issue in this study. Interagency cooperation and links to existing plans to combat rural isolation should take serious note of this and audit plans and strategies from a migrant woman perspective.

5.2 *Community and Voluntary Sector:*

- The C&V sector should work to influence policy makers and plans relating to rural isolation and seek funds which are not attached to success from a ‘critical number’ perspective but one which is based on reaching out with quality supports to smaller more dispersed individuals and groups;
- The sector can play a strong role in supporting migrant women to develop social networks. This is a key recommendation of this study. Supports may include one to one outreach to invite women to social meetings and activities, provision of meeting spaces and small funds for social, cultural and recreational activities, provision of culturally appropriate cultural, social and sports facilities and activities.
- While some migrant women may prefer to meet initially only with other migrant women, generally the women in the study are very interested in developing friendships with Irish families. Providing space, ideas and supports for intercultural friendships to develop is also very important for a safe, modern democracy. Communities need to talk about what ‘friendship’ and ‘neighbourliness’ mean to them. This study shows that many (not all) migrant women do struggle to make meaningful friendships with Irish people
- The C&V sector may have a role in alleviating the exhaustion of migrant women working in difficult jobs, again in an inclusive environment. In as much as possible outreach to migrant women to let them know about existing social, cultural and sports activities but also plan around working days and childcare hours, perhaps also talking to local employers, with a view to establishing bite size recreational activities in the morning or at break times (see below).
- Recognise that just as there is in the wider community, within the intense world of Direct Provision, there are many different nationalities and women with many stressful experiences. There are conflicts and difficulties. Women often feel that they cannot complain because of their asylum status. Community groups might consider ways to help with these tensions, starting by asking women might help.

5.3 *Employers:*

- Women in this study point to exhaustion due to long work hours and childcare as impediments to engaging in social activities. Employers should consider if there any ways in which they can play a role in alleviating work-related stress. Depending on the work and sector they might consider introducing flexible working hours, if possible, some hours of work from home, childcare support, lunch time relaxation activities such as yoga, walking groups or meditation and social events enabling staff to socialise. Employers have a role too in informing workers of their rights and entitlements around breaks, holidays and related areas.

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| 6. | Racism and Discrimination |
| 6.1 | <p><i>Policy Makers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop local level integration, diversity and anti-racism plans suitable for East Cork, taking account of life in villages and small towns and villages as well as more rural areas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pay attention to tensions that exist between ‘old’ and ‘new’ communities – including Irish - and strive to combat these tensions through positive actions. ○ Ensure gender and equality proofing is built into the process from the design and implementation stage. |
| 6.2 | <p><i>Schools and Colleges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide accredited training courses for staff and students on integration, diversity, anti-racism and local and global citizenship. |
| 6.3 | <p><i>Community and Voluntary Sectors:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking into account the growth in anti-immigrant sentiment around the world, do not become complacent. All sectors have a role in strengthening and valuing democratic values and processes. • Provide supports to migrant women on ‘dealing with prejudice and racism’, including advice on approaches to personal safety and where to find support; exploring what is meant by the term “racism”, how to recognise and report racist incidents; and how to join with others to combat or prevent the growth of racism in East Cork. Enlist the help of local allies where migrant women might find some initial ‘first responder’ support. • Revisit integration, diversity, anti-racism plans and local and global citizenship plans and policies with a view to developing robust approaches to stamping out racism and enhancing meaningful integration and diversity as a normalised way of life in East Cork. |