

# BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE WESTMEATH



A Report on the Needs of Migrant Workers and their Families in County Westmeath





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A Report on the Needs of  
Migrant Workers and their Families in County Westmeath

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Westmeath Employment Pact

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## *Foreword*

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Migrant workers from a broad range of countries have been living in most local communities in Westmeath for a number of years and an increasing number are accompanied by family members. Some migrants stay for shorter or longer periods of time, with some planning to settle in Westmeath, but the fact is that migrants are permanent members of our communities.

Migrant workers in Westmeath are making a very important contribution to the economy both as workers in public and private organisations and as taxpayers and consumers. However, migrants are not only economic entities and can also make an important contribution socially and culturally to the county.

Similar to everyone else in their community's migrant workers and their families have social, cultural and economic rights and needs which have to be recognised if they are to feel welcome and respected workers and members of their communities.

The experience of Irish people travelling to live and work abroad for many generations should inform our understanding of the issues involved and of the importance of building a county which values the diverse backgrounds of all its residents.

A number of agencies in Westmeath have come together to carry out this research to get a greater understanding of the issues facing migrant workers and their families and to see how best to respond to them. It is hoped that this research can contribute to the building of a diverse Westmeath.

## Executive Summary

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*“My diploma – my qualification, they don’t accept here.... For three years I was working in the same restaurant. I was given the hardest jobs and treated unfairly. But all the time I was saying, ‘Someday will be my day’. And I told them and they didn’t take me seriously. And then one day one of the customers asked me, ‘What did you do in your country?’ And I told them, I was at university, I wasn’t a waitress. For three years I had been trying to tell them I wasn’t a waitress. It’s really hard to explain to people”. (Eastern European Woman working in Westmeath on a Work Permit)*

Migrant workers and their families have been living in all parts of Westmeath for a number of years. A number of Westmeath-based statutory and voluntary organisations have been working with this community. Much of this work has, however, been informal and ad hoc – almost none of it has been supported by new or specific resourcing. This research seeks to begin the process of working with migrant workers and their families to address their social, economic, political, cultural and other needs. The aim of the research was to:

*“Inform the strategies of local organisations in addressing the needs of migrant workers and their families”.*

The objectives were to:

1. Provide a very brief presentation of the national context of migrant workers in Ireland.
2. Provide a mapping exercise to give a profile of the migrant workers and their families in Westmeath e.g. age, nationality, family status, where they are living, industry they are working in, length of time they have been there etc.
3. Identify the main social, economic, political and cultural issues for migrant workers and their families.
4. Recommend possible strategies for local organisations to address the issues facing migrant workers and their families at a local level and identify issues that need to be raised at national policy level.

The commissioning agencies involved in coordinating the research were Westmeath EQUAL Development Partnership and Westmeath Employment Pact. The research also involved two national organisations - the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism and the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland. It also involved several Westmeath based organisations including Westmeath County Council, Athlone Community Taskforce, Westmeath Community Development, Athlone Chamber of Commerce and Athlone Citizens Information Service. A steering group was established involving all of these groups within Westmeath EQUAL.

The research comes to a number of conclusions and makes a series of recommendations. In terms of demography, it confirms that there are substantial numbers of migrant workers living and working in County Westmeath. These workers come from many different countries but roughly half are from the new ‘accession states’ of the European Union and about half from other states in Europe, Asia and Africa. More migrant workers live in Westmeath than work in Westmeath since accommodation in the county is particularly attractive and relatively affordable to migrant workers.

Migrant workers are working in three key sectors in the labour market in Westmeath – health service, agriculture and factory work. There are major national, ethnic and gender differences within this population which are not spread evenly across the whole population. For example, there is a large number of Filipino women nurses working in Westmeath hospitals and nursing homes.

The research had great difficulty in locating and consulting with migrant workers. This is in itself evidence of the marginalisation of this group of people within Westmeath. Most migrant workers are not linked into any community structures at all. Generally migrant workers only 'connect' with existing organisations when some problem – often associated with status or employment – develops. One Westmeath organisation explains how this develops:

*“The support that we give is generally when people are working – migrant workers – and they have problems, that’s where we come in. The Jobs Club would intervene as well and help people looking for employment but overall the service that we give would be to people who are in jobs but are not getting their proper conditions and also somebody like [name given] where a job has ended, we would be in contact with the agency to make sure that he gets his dues and so on. We would process that through a third party – the Labour Relations Commission or whatever – A little bit of support with immigration - going along to [the local Immigration Garda] talking to him, we would have a good rapport with him... Generally people are referred to us – we do a little bit of advertising – but we depend on people walking off the street or meeting somebody who knows about us”.*

Some migrant workers have a relationship with national migrant worker or country of origin organisations. Generally, however, the population remains 'invisible'. This invisibility becomes increasingly problematic the longer migrant workers and their families are resident in Westmeath. Migrant workers had different ideas about how to address the problems they had identified. However one theme dominated – the notion of legal and paralegal advice and support for migrant workers:

*“If there was some kind of organisation, some kind of centre, they could come if they need a work permit, there is a jobs club but we would like a lawyer, a solicitor who could work with them and explain to them what kind of rights they have and who could help them get their rights. We would also like medical assistance – they have to go to the agency doctor – and some of them are working at night so it is very hard to do that. So people have to go back home in a really bad situation because it is so expensive to get a doctor here – just to visit you have to have 40 Euro. So the two things we would like a lawyer and medical assistance”.* (Eastern European Man working in Westmeath on a Work Permit)

A number of migrant workers highlighted that staff in some agencies were not clear on the rights of migrant workers and at times confused them with asylum seekers. This made it difficult for them to access services to which they had a right.

There is generally goodwill towards migrant workers in Westmeath. Employers are positive about the benefits of employing migrant workers and other organisations are keen to find ways of supporting migrant. Some employers exhibit a sophisticated analysis of migrant workers and migrant worker culture:

*“I have employed Migrant workers for the past three years and found a few problems at the start, mainly with paper work. However employing these people now is no more difficult than employing an Irish person. I think an employer taking on a non-national for the first time and a non-national just arriving in Ireland would be most in need of help or information. I have found that the people here settled in quite quickly. They are in two groups. The larger group is here for a few years only. They will work non-stop, spend little, rarely socialise with locals and go home with as much money as possible. The second smaller group is happy to get involved locally, are not as financially driven and intend to spend a much longer time in Ireland. Anyone in this group that are from outside the EU will be badly affected by the new work permit rules. They are dependent on their present employer to keep them legally in Ireland”.* (Employer working in Agriculture & Fisheries)

There is little evidence of sustained, organised racism towards the migrant worker community in Westmeath. There is, however, a great deal of evidence of routine, everyday racism. There is a need to address this often unthinking racism. While there is a need for vigilance on the related question of organised racism, by and large the community is either welcomed or ignored. There is general support for the development of programmes to support the integration of migrant workers.

Organisations working with migrant workers tend to have developed this work in a piecemeal ad hoc manner. Organisations are looking for guidance in terms of developing their work with migrant workers but most regard this as a positive challenge. There is little evidence, however, of this new workload being resourced or funded in any sustained way. In other words, organisations addressing the needs of migrant workers are unlikely to be able to source additional funding to support this work. Clearly this issue cannot be resolved at the level of one county, but it is crucial that migrant worker specific funding is provided to support this work.

There is a clear need for welfare rights work with migrant workers in Westmeath. This should involve supporting existing organisations with a remit in this area to effectively carry out their role. There is also a clear need for community development work with migrant workers in Westmeath and to support migrant workers to have a voice in relation to their own issues and how they are addressed. In time there may be a need for a community worker to work with migrant workers. Whether this is sustainable at Westmeath level is moot, but this might be developed across a number of counties in the region. A challenge in this work is that while migrant workers may share a common identity in terms of their economic location in Ireland, they often share nothing at all in cultural and political terms. A migrant worker from Latvia may have less in common with a migrant worker from Sri Lanka than either has with an Irish worker. Moreover, there can be racism between migrant worker communities as well as from the host community. The category 'migrant worker' is a very specific one to organize community development around.

Generally, the goodwill towards migrant workers across the Westmeath community is a positive which should be mobilised to address the serious problems with invisibility, isolation and lack of awareness of rights that characterise the migrant worker population.

## Recommendations

1. Groups should continue to work with the broadest notion of ‘migrant worker’. However they should also be conscious of the many differences between different categories of migrant workers. For example, new EU member state nationals now enjoy a series of rights which are denied other migrant workers. These differences are as important in migrant worker support work as the commonalities that flow from being a ‘migrant worker’.
2. The Steering Group for the Migrant Worker Research should meet to agree on the re-constitution of the group possibly as an advocacy group in relation to migrant workers which will progress the issues raised through the research as well as other issues that may arise. Westmeath Employment Pact has agreed to co-ordinate this work. Some of the work that develops may have links on a regional level.
3. There should be proactive targeting of Migrant Workers in Westmeath in the area of information provision about employment, social rights, access to services, etc. There should be support for migrant workers in Westmeath to access their rights – support with making complaints and so on. This includes enhancing the capacity of existing organisations which have a remit in this area.
4. Programmes such as the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and the Community Development Programme should continue to include actions in relation to migrant workers and to find ways of supporting migrant workers to have their own voice. In time a full-time community development worker may be appropriate for working with migrant workers in Westmeath.
5. The wider issue of resourcing support for migrant workers in Westmeath cannot be resolved at county level. It is imperative therefore that appropriate funding structure is developed and sourced at both national and EU level to underpin the kind of work that is clearly necessary in support of migrant workers in Westmeath.
6. Westmeath County Development Board should revisit Goal 2.7 of their Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development and develop an agreed inter-agency approach to addressing the needs of migrant workers and their families.
7. There should be training, including anti-racism training, for all frontline service providers and decision makers in Westmeath. This training needs to focus on the specific status and rights of, and policies towards, migrant workers. This includes social welfare, health, local authorities, community welfare officers, education and policing. Relevant training should also be provided to businesses and employer organisations.
8. Within the work that is being developed the particular needs of migrant women and migrant worker families needs to be recognised. This includes initiatives and organisations with a specific focus on women and families.
9. A mechanism should be established locally to collate data and information in relation to migrant workers in Westmeath including monitoring the impact of policies such as the Habitual Residency Conditions which related to qualification for social welfare, family reunification, etc. The details of this should be looked into as part of the remit of the group referred to under the second recommendation.

## 1. Background to research

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Migrant workers and their families have been living in all parts of Westmeath for a number of years. A number of statutory and voluntary organisations in the county recognised that this new population had needs that were not being met. Anecdotal evidence suggested that these migrant workers have limited interaction with other people in the communities where they live. It was also clear that they have little engagement with statutory, community and voluntary agencies. There was limited research at both local and national level to identify the needs of migrant workers and their families or to indicate how agencies could address these needs. In this context, it was recognised that there was a specific need in Westmeath for information to provide a starting point for agencies to engage with migrant workers. This would begin the process of working with migrant workers and their families to address their social, economic, political, cultural and other needs.

The aim of the research was to:

inform the strategies of local organisations in addressing the needs of migrant workers and their families.

The objectives were to:

1. Provide a very brief presentation of the national context of migrant workers in Ireland.
2. Provide a mapping exercise to give a profile of the migrant workers and their families in Westmeath e.g. age, nationality, family status, where they are living, industry they are working in, length of time they have been there etc.
3. Identify the main social, economic, political and cultural issues for migrant workers and their families.
4. Recommend possible strategies for local organisations to address the issues facing migrant workers and their families at a local level and identify issues that need to be raised at national policy level.

### **Participant Organisations**

The commissioning agencies involved in coordinating the research were Westmeath EQUAL Development Partnership and Westmeath Employment Pact. The research also involved two national organisations - the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) and the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland. It also involved several Westmeath based organisations including Westmeath County Council, Athlone Community Taskforce, Westmeath Community Development, Athlone Chamber of Commerce, Mullingar Congress Information and Development Centre and Athlone Citizens Information Service. A steering group was established involving all of these groups within Westmeath EQUAL.

### ***Westmeath EQUAL***

Westmeath EQUAL is one of 21 projects in the Republic of Ireland funded under the European Social Fund (ESF) EQUAL Community Initiative 2000-2006. The Initiative is managed nationally by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment and its priorities fit within those of the National Employment Action Plan. Westmeath EQUAL was initiated as a result of a number of organisations in Co. Westmeath coming together at the end of 2001 to form a development partnership which looks at ways of addressing issues in relation to equality in employment. The vision of Westmeath EQUAL is that 'everyone in Westmeath has equal access to appropriate, sustainable, quality employment and training opportunities'.

Westmeath EQUAL aims to achieve its vision through a number of key activities targeting employers, training and employment support agencies and groups experiencing inequality, discrimination and exclusion. Through its activities the project aims to impact on local, national and EU policy in relation to the labour market. Migrant workers are one of the Westmeath EQUAL's target groups.

### ***Westmeath Employment Pact***

Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) originated in 1998 as an initiative of the EU aimed at developing local, participatory and co-ordinated actions targeting unemployment and new employment opportunities in regions, cities, towns, rural areas, and employment catchment areas that share certain socio-economic characteristics. Eighty five TEPs were established throughout the EU. The four Employment Pacts established in the Republic have been mainstreamed within the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and now receive their core funding from the National Development Plan via Area Development Management Limited (ADM).

Within the LDSIP, employment pacts are tasked with a key role in relation to research and analysis which informs both regional socio economic development and the work undertaken by Partnerships and Community Groups, targeting the most marginalised, and ensuring that opportunities arising from economic development are tilted towards the socially excluded.

### **Methodology**

Most of the mapping exercise was executed through desk top/web-based research. The key methodology with the statutory, voluntary and community sector was an email questionnaire. The target group here was statutory, community and voluntary agencies which either have or might have a role in relation to migrant workers. Some of these agencies at local level include, the Health Board, County Council, the Citizens Information Service, Gardaí, education, training and employment agencies, trade unions, employer organisations, local development organisations, and community groups. At national level the agencies include the Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland and the NCCRI.

A number of employers also completed an e-mail questionnaire.

The methodology with migrant workers and their families was necessarily ad hoc. It was recognised that there might be difficulties in making contact with migrant workers and their families. There were no obvious existing structures within Westmeath to facilitate this process. The local organisations involved in the research worked alongside the researcher to identify opportunities for individual and group interview. In the event, different organisations were able to identify migrant workers they were in contact with and facilitate interviews.

## *2. Migrant Workers – The International Context*

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Migrant workers have always been central to the key mechanisms of the United Nations. Their concerns are represented within broad human rights legislation as well as more specific work.<sup>1</sup> The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has had a specific focus on migrant workers.<sup>2</sup> The key legislative mechanism is the Migrant Worker's Convention. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (New York, 18 December 1990) entered into force on 1 July 2003.<sup>3</sup> At present the signatories are confined to countries of out-migration – that is countries who want to see their citizens protected as migrant workers in the other countries in which they work. Ireland is obviously a country with a long history of out-migration of Irish citizens as migrant workers. It also has challenges in terms of the new in-migration of migrant workers that our research addresses directly. The Irish Government could make a key international contribution on migrant's rights by becoming the first western country to sign and ratify the convention. There is an ongoing campaign in support of this, sponsored by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

There are also a number of key mechanisms within the European Union and the Council of Europe which offer protection and support to migrant workers.<sup>4</sup> The European Convention on the Legal Status on Migrant Workers is the key Council of Europe document relating to the treatment of aliens on the territory of the member states of the Council. In so far as it deals with social and economic rights of workers, it compliments some provisions of the European Social Charter (ESC). The Council of Europe counterpart on residence rights is the Convention on Establishment. The issue of social security rights of migrant workers is more specifically treated in the European Convention on Social Security. The migrant workers convention is based on the principle of according rights to aliens who are nationals of other contracting parties. To this extent it differs from the Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) which sets out fundamental human rights which must be protected irrespective of the nationality of the person concerned (Guild 1999). The ECHR contains a number of provisions of which are of relevance to migrant workers - its Fourth Protocol deals specifically with protection of aliens from expulsion. As we begin to make sense of the needs of migrant workers in Westmeath, it is important to situate these in terms of this existing infrastructure of rights.

1 See for example: United Nations System and Migrant Rights; UN Special Rapporteur on the HR of Migrants ; 2003 UN Invitation and questionnaire to report on situation of domestic migrant workers (PDF); December 18

2 See for example: ILO and Migrant Workers ; International Labour Conference, 1-17 June 2004 ; ILO ACTRAV (Bureau for Workers activities) ; ILO Conventions

3 Information about the UN Migrant Workers' Convention

4 See at December 18 under Europe

### 3. Irish National Policy Context

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There is a growing literature on the situation of migrant workers in Ireland. The Equality Authority's *Migrant Workers and their Experiences* (Conroy and Brennan 2003) provides a useful overview of migrant workers experiences. Other statutory and voluntary organisations have made important contributions in terms of issues and policy (Irish Human Rights Commission and NCCRI 2004; NCCRI 2002; Immigrant Council of Ireland 2003, 2004; Migrant Rights Center Ireland 2004).

The 2002 Irish Census showed that the number of foreign-born usual residents from countries other than the EU or USA has grown from 26,100 in 1996 to 97,200 in 2002. This 'foreign-born' population now represents 2.5 per cent of the usually resident population. This marked increase indicates a large and relatively swift transition in the Irish labour market associated with the 'Celtic Tiger'. In a short time, Ireland moved from having an economy characterised by high unemployment and high levels of emigration - much of this directly associated with migrant work - to having one of the highest growth economies in Europe. This growth was accompanied by the new phenomenon of migrant workers coming to Ireland to meet associated labour shortages. This meant that the Irish state had to develop policies towards migrant workers within a wider immigration policy fairly quickly. A new Immigration Bill was passed through the Dáil on Thursday 5 February 2004. There were serious concerns about the content of the Bill and much controversy concerning the speed by which the Bill was passed. Nevertheless the Immigration Act 2004 now provides the policy regime for migrant workers in Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

The key role of migrant workers in Ireland is also increasingly being integrated across policy areas. For example, the National Employment Action Plan recognises the specific role of migrant workers. (This is also recognised locally in Westmeath – experts have suggested that the health service in the Midlands would 'collapse' without the contribution of migrant worker nurses.) The situation of migrant workers has also been the focus on some broader political discussion. For example, Mary Robinson recently attacked Ireland's temporary work permits system, claiming it creates a situation which resembles 'bonded servitude' (Reid 2003). The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland recently called for the Irish Government to protect migrant workers whose employers fail to renew their work permit without a valid reason. The MRCI stated that while the Dept of Enterprise, Trade and Employment deals with such situations on a case by case basis there is a need for a standard procedure that is communicated to both migrant workers and their employers. The MRCI has also stressed the need to protect those migrant workers living and working in Ireland who are from outside the enlarged Europe region. They have also stressed the need to be vigilant in the protection of workers migrating from the new accession countries. Other commentators have, of course, been less supportive to the rights of migrant workers. By and large, however, the positive contribution of migrant workers is recognised by the state, employers organisations and the voluntary sector.

#### **Who are migrant workers in Ireland?**

The UN Convention defines the concept of 'migrant workers' very broadly. Article 2 of the Convention states:

1. The term "migrant worker" refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.

The MRCI also works with this definition in an Irish context. This definition is, however, not unproblematic – particularly because of the specific working rights of EU and EEA nationals within Ireland (and other EU countries).<sup>6</sup> These accord broadly to those of a 'national':

All European Economic Area (EEA) nationals are allowed to work in any European Union country without requiring Work Permits. (DETE 2003: 6)

Moreover, overseas students who work are excluded from this definition of migrant worker. Yet, in the Irish context, these students are often a core part of the migrant worker population.

<sup>5</sup> Available at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/bills28/acts/2004/default.htm>

<sup>6</sup> The European Economic Area (EEA) consists of the EU, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Certainly, in Ireland it is clear that the most vulnerable migrant workers are ‘non-EEA nationals’ whose status is characterised by the absence of full rights to work in Ireland:

*Non-EEA nationals will require differing types of permission depending on their circumstances. Broadly speaking, there are two main methods of acquiring specific permission to work in Ireland, or if you are an employer, permission to employ somebody from a Non-EEA country. The first is the Working Visa/Work Authorisation scheme. This scheme was introduced to facilitate the recruitment of suitably qualified people from non-EEA countries for designated sectors of the employment market where skill shortages are particularly acute. This makes it possible for prospective employees with job offers from employers in Ireland to obtain immigration and employment clearance in advance from Irish Embassies and Consulates. The new arrangements cover the information and computing technologies, construction professionals, and across a broad range of medical, health and social care professions.... The second method of employing non-EEA nationals in Ireland is to apply for a Work Permit. Work permits are issued by the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment. They are issued to employers as permission to employ non-EEA nationals, and as such they are non-transferable. Employers are obliged to have demonstrated that they have made every effort to employ an EEA national before a work permit will be issued. (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2003: 6-7)*

This situation is further complicated by EU enlargement. The Irish Government changed its rules with regard to ‘Accession State’ nationals. The Accession States or new EU member states are: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus. From February 1st 2004 employers no longer required FÁS documentation for work permit candidates from the new EU member states and from 1st May, 2004 new EU member state nationals no longer required work permits to work in Ireland. Most migrant workers in Ireland currently come from new EU member countries. There is some evidence to suggest, however, that as these workers benefit from an enhanced and simplified right to work in Ireland, other migrant workers are being disadvantaged by this process.

We need, therefore, to be careful with the notion of ‘migrant workers’ with which we work. This category is certainly not homogeneous. Even within those groups of people recognised as migrant workers by the Irish government, we have very different categories - those on work permits, work visas and work authorisations. There are also students from outside the EU who can work part time. In terms of the broader notion of migrant workers, it is clear that some migrant workers have many more rights than others – the status of migrant workers can range from those of a British citizen working in Ireland - with effectively the same rights as an Irish citizen - to those of an ‘undocumented worker’ – with effectively almost no rights at all.

### **Habitual Residency Condition**

It is important in the context of Irish immigration policy to mention the ‘habitual residency condition’ which came into effect on 1st May 2004. The HRC came into effect due to the Common Travel Area with the United Kingdom and as an Irish government response to the decision of the UK government to restrict access to welfare after the accession of new EU member states on 1 May 2004. It puts in place conditions for access to social assistance payments in Ireland based on an individual's ability to prove that there is a degree of permanency in relation to their residence and intention to reside in the state. Two years residency in Ireland up to the date of application for assistance is a minimum condition for qualification. The Department of Social Family Affairs web-site<sup>7</sup> has details of the habitual residency condition (HRC).

The existence of the HRC clearly raises concerns for migrant workers in Ireland particularly those from EEA countries who come to Ireland to seek work and for those who are resident in Ireland for less than two years and find themselves out of employment for some reason.

7 <http://www.welfare.ie/publications/hrc.html>.

#### 4. Demographic profile – migrant workers nationally and in Westmeath

We get a general impression of the broad characteristics of the migrant worker population in Ireland from Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment statistics. These detail country of origin, county worked in, employment category and employers using workers on work permits.<sup>8</sup> The Department does not disaggregate these statistics at county level since ‘this might infringe the Data Protection Act’ (personal communication) but they still provide good baseline data. Table One shows permits issued by county – we see from this that Westmeath has fewer migrant workers than most Irish counties. It comes seventeenth out of the twenty six counties in terms of numbers and it has far fewer migrant workers than counties like Dublin, Cork, Kildare and Meath.

**Table One – Permits Issued by County ranked by number: 1 January – 31 December 2003**

County	New Permits	Renewals	Group	Issued
Dublin	8424	10108	439	18971
Cork	1575	1846	24	3445
Kildare	1311	1804	0	3115
Meath	1227	1164	0	2391
Galway	910	979	7	1896
Tipperary	970	796	6	1772
Wicklow	662	879	4	1545
Limerick	575	934	4	1513
Wexford	766	652	13	1431
Monaghan	580	709	0	1289
Clare	523	669	1	1193
Kerry	542	633	2	1177
Cavan	616	439	0	1055
Louth	341	466	1	808
Mayo	377	411	0	788
Offaly	415	368	0	783
Westmeath	384	395	1	780
Waterford	326	358	2	686
Carlow	274	227	0	501
Kilkenny	247	210	14	471
Roscommon	184	276	0	460
Donegal	241	193	3	437
Laois	188	142	0	330
Longford	126	139	0	265
Sligo	97	137	0	234
Leitrim	76	92	0	168
Total	21 965	25 039	547	47 551

*Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. There is a discrepancy between these county totals and the overall total since this includes a number of workers registered by companies whose legal address is in the north of Ireland.*

<sup>8</sup> These are periodically updated at <http://www.entemp.ie/labour/workpermits/statistics.htm>

Table Two makes this situation clearer. It illustrates that Westmeath represents a relatively small part of the national migrant worker population. It also shows a marked decline in numbers of migrant workers at both national and county level between 2003 and 2004. It bears emphasis that this reflects the change in the status of migrant workers from new EU member states rather than an absolute decline in numbers of migrant workers. Since these workers no longer require work permits, they are no longer enumerated in these statistics.

Table Two: Permits Issued Ireland and County Westmeath: Comparison of 2003 and 2004					
	New Permits	Renewals	Group	Refused	Issued
Ireland 2003	21 965	25 039	547	1 838	47 551
County Westmeath 2003	384	395	1	49	780
Ireland 2004	9 452	21 931	787	1401	32 170
County Westmeath 2004	274	283	0	49	557

*Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Figures for 2004 are up to 30 November 2004 only.*

Table Three illustrates the country of origin of migrant workers nationally. It shows that until recently most migrant workers came from the new EU member states. This accords broadly with anecdotal experience regarding the nationality of migrant workers in Westmeath.

Table Three – Permits Issued by Nationality 1 January – 31 December 2003 - Ranked in ascending order by number				
Nationality	New Permits	Renewals	Group	Issued
Poland	2757	2051	0	4808
Lithuania	2089	2462	0	4551
Latvia	1760	2400	0	4160
Philippines	1377	2665	0	4042
Ukraine	1526	1340	0	2866
Romania	887	1640	0	2527
South Africa	1286	1182	0	2468
China	732	861	0	1593
Brazil	681	873	0	1554
Australia	674	475	0	1149
Czech Republic	538	573	0	1111
Russian Federation	308	783	0	1091
Moldova	489	554	0	1043
Bangladesh	406	632	0	1038
India	482	548	0	1030
Malaysia	420	610	0	1030
Belarus	456	572	0	1028
Estonia	623	389	0	1012

*Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment*

*There are also some 2 300 other migrant workers from nearly 130 other countries with less than 200 workers in Ireland. In addition 518 people are resident on group permits – their nationality is unidentified.*

Table Four illustrates the permits issued by sector of the economy nationally over recent years. It shows that most migrant workers are working in agriculture, catering and service industry.

Again this accords generally with anecdotal evidence of the situation in Westmeath.

**Table Four - Analysis of work permits by sector: 1999-2002**

Sector	1999	2000	2001	2002
Service	3 010	6 538	14 018	15 068
Catering	694	3 907	9 129	10 306
Agriculture/Fisheries	449	2 963	5 714	6 248
Industry	414	1 744	3 119	3 094
Medical and Nursing	721	1 353	2 252	2 883
Entertainment	452	650	1 021	874
Domestic	80	195	521	788
Education	304	364	480	610
Sport	60	118	121	153
Exchange agreements	60	72	61	297

*Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment*

Table Five shows the Westmeath-based companies with the largest number of work permits on January 1st 2005. This does not tell the full story since we know through our research that there are migrant workers working in Westmeath for companies which do not appear on the list. We also know that migrant workers from the new EU member states are no longer on this list. Nevertheless it offers a clear sense of the kind of companies that migrant workers are employed by in Westmeath. The striking thing about these figures is the sheer volume of employers employing migrant workers. On January 1st 2005 there were 175 companies in Westmeath employing at least one migrant worker.<sup>9</sup> Some of these are large firms but most are not. The majority of these – around one hundred firms – are only employing one migrant worker on a permit.

**Table Five: Westmeath Companies issued with more than 5 Work Permits at January 1st 2005**

Company Name	New	Renewal	Total
Zre Katowice (Ireland) Construction Ltd	88	0	88
Exel Meats (Clara Road)	36	2	38
Exel Meats Ltd.	9	17	26
Newbrook Nursing Home	2	16	18
N.J. Doyne Construction Ltd	0	18	18
Hodson Bay Hotel (Inland Properties Ltd.)	0	14	14
Excel Meats Ltd.,	0	11	11
Andrew Mannion Engineering Ltd.	6	3	9
Shay Murtagh Precast Limited	9	0	9
Roma Cafe	2	6	8
Jia Jia Take-Away	0	6	6
Oliver Scally	0	6	6
Reilly Mushrooms	5	1	6
Sedor Restaurant T/A McDonald's, Drive Thru	0	6	6

*Source: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment*

<sup>9</sup> This list is available and updated online at <http://www.entemp.ie/labour/workpermits/statistics.htm> under the heading 'companies issued with permits' where it is downloadable as an excel file. It is periodically updated through the year.

Alongside these figures from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Garda National Immigration Bureau also collects statistics which offer a different perspective on numbers of migrant workers. These are based on place of residence rather than place of work. With regard to Westmeath, the Gardaí suggest that figures are higher since Westmeath is particularly attractive as a place of residence for migrant workers. In other words, a disproportionate number of migrant workers are living in Westmeath and working elsewhere. These figures are calculated in different ways to the Department of Employment figures but they suggest that there may be many more migrant workers living in Westmeath than there are people registered on work permits. This accords with our earlier recognition that there is a marked differential between the Convention definition of who is a 'migrant worker' and the much smaller number of people who are working on work permits. Obviously the broader the notion of 'migrant workers' we use, the more people in the category we identify. This is as true in Westmeath as it is elsewhere.

## 5. Researching the experiences of Migrant Workers in Westmeath

As was anticipated at the start of the research, it was difficult to access the migrant worker community in Westmeath. It is particularly challenging to work with migrant worker communities and provide them with an opportunity to genuinely offer their perspectives. First, these are communities that have more pressing things to do than talk to researchers – they are often working long hours in poor conditions for poor pay. Second, there are also issues around language and issues around feelings of vulnerability and reluctance to engage with research that they do not understand and are wary of. All of these elements conspire to make this a challenging group to research.

We were helped greatly by individuals and organisations working directly with migrant workers. The Congress Center in Mullingar was of particular help in this regard. Their perspective on their work with migrant workers is illustrative of the way in which organisation have adapted to a ‘new line’ of work:

*The support that we give is generally when people are working – migrant workers – and they have problems, that’s where we come in. The Jobs Club would intervene as well and help people looking for employment but overall the service that we give would be to people who are in jobs but are not getting their proper conditions and also somebody like [name given] where a job has ended, we would be in contact with the agency to make sure that he gets his dues and so on. We would process that through a third party – the Labour Relations Commission or whatever – A little bit of support with immigration - going along to [the local Immigration Garda] talking to him, we would have a good rapport with him... Generally people are referred to us – we do a little bit of advertising – but we depend on people walking off the street or meeting somebody who knows about us.*

Often organisations and individuals working with migrant workers in Westmeath have had develop this work in an ad hoc way without additional resourcing. These people have a series of insights and observations regarding the key needs of migrant workers:

*When they are not required in their first job any more in a month or so, there are very few employment agencies in Ireland helping migrant workers and it is quite complicated to find a new job (mainly for a new work permit).*

*I know three injured Lithuanians (lost part of a finger, got some lung disease on a chicken farm or were pressed by heavy loads and became lame), and all of them received only the first medical aid. I doubt if they were informed about any possibility to get better medical treatment here in Ireland where they became partially disabled.*

*Quite a number of foreign workers have a rather poor command of English (and therefore are quite restricted in job hunt). There are some English language courses arranged in County towns or bigger villages, but in my opinion that's waste both of time and money, though it may work quite well with native Irish population who're unemployed and are not concerned about what they are going to eat the next day (I am talking about 8-week 16-hour courses in community colleges for Euro 64). Have you learned any foreign language (even your native Irish if you come from an English speaking family and do not use Irish at home) in 16 hours? How many expressions/words do you remember after such courses? It is also quite often the case that foreigners without English live in groups and this does not facilitate learning English.*

*Women with children have a very restricted possibility to work because of prices in crèche. Though Irish women encounter with the same problem, unless they are educated and have a possibility to work from home, i.e. be double employed for one salary. I think this is one of ways to solve unemployment issue all over the world (not only in Ireland).*

Finally, one individual provided a useful reminder that these issues and challenges are not specific to Ireland or Irishness:

*My ideas might sound quite critical. Still I think that it is easier to be a foreigner (especially with English - sorry, I cannot say the same about Irish!) in Ireland than in Lithuania. I hope the situation will change in my country as well.*

In general, therefore, individuals and organisations working with migrant workers in Westmeath have developed an analysis of needs and issues. We used these insights to inform our research. Most of this work, however, has been ad hoc and they have not had the time to ‘theorise’ the new challenges that come with this new client base. This reminds us of the need to find a way of properly consulting with migrant workers themselves – despite the genuine difficulties associated with this alluded to above. Here were present an amalgam of perspectives and perceptions gathered in a necessarily informal manner. We talked to some twenty migrant workers from very different backgrounds. All of them lived or worked in Westmeath. This research cannot claim to be formally representative – although there is nothing to suggest that it is unrepresentative. (Up until 31st October there were 485 work permits issued in 2004 for migrant workers in Westmeath. When we include workers from the new EU member states, other migrants, and people living in Westmeath but working elsewhere, the figure is considerably higher.) Certainly, however, our research is illustrative of the experiences of migrant workers in Westmeath.

## 6. The views of Migrant Workers in Westmeath

Migrant workers are a diverse collection of people. This appears to be stating the obvious but the term 'migrant worker' often generates an image as one-dimensional and stereotypical as the terms 'asylum seeker' or 'immigrant'. From our research, it is clear that, even in Westmeath, the migrant worker experience involves a whole range of differences. Migrant workers are from all over the world – although Eastern Europe, South Asia and Africa predominate as areas of origin. Migrant workers are both male and female – although the partner of the migrant worker is more likely to be female than male. Migrant workers have very different statuses – some have new rights because they come from the new EU member states, some are on working visas, some are on permits and some are at the edge of 'legality' having lost their employment for some reason as they try to get alternative employment and avoid having to return home.

Within this diverse group of people, there are equally diverse experiences. Some migrant workers are apparently completely satisfied by their treatment in Ireland and Westmeath. As one interviewee put it, 'I have been treated really nice by all the people'. Other people suggest that Westmeath is particularly attractive location:

*At an early stage when we were looking to move to this house we wanted to choose a kind of a smaller place so that we have the convenience of going personally and finding out how things are happening in this town and how is the attitude with individuals. So we had the possibility to come and evaluate for ourselves how things are happening in this particular town. And we found that it is comfortable to live in this town. We also interacted with people in the shop, in the Garda office and sometimes on the road and we found that people are nice. We have been living in this town for the last almost 2 years and we find we are still comfortable in this town. (South Asian Woman: Work Visa)*

However, in terms of the people we talked to at least, most migrant workers have experienced at least some problems and difficulties. Assessing and addressing these is the core purpose of this research.

### **Being a migrant worker in Westmeath**

The question of needs is immediately linked to the question of expectations. Because many migrant workers have low expectations, they are often reluctant to either ask for favours or demand their rights. There is little awareness of what rights migrant workers have and an all too immediate awareness of how vulnerable they are in terms of their status as migrant workers. While, as we have seen, migrant workers do have rights, their status often makes them feel like 'guests'. It is also clear from our research that migrant workers often see their relationship to Ireland and Westmeath in precisely these terms. Subjectively they see themselves as 'guest workers'. In other words, their time in Ireland is regarded in almost completely functional terms. This contrasts with other 'new Irish' populations. For example, for many migrant workers, Ireland has neither the 'pull' factor which attracts those who immigrate here nor the 'push' factor which forces others to seek asylum here and means that they cannot go 'home'. Simplistically, therefore, migrant workers have neither the commitment of emigrants nor the constraints of refugees and asylum seekers:

*We are guests. The permits are strict and limited as well. [At the minute] We don't have work – we have to wait for our permits and wait for our money. You can feel that. There is no support. We came here to earn money – not for feeling that I belong here. At the same time we try to use the time as much as possible to work hard and save some money. That is why we came. It is not possible to go home – because back home is the worst option. To go home to get a visa to come back again. It's really hard to get a second visa – that's one of the big problems. So we have to wait until he can find another job. We try to stay – how do you say - underground. Because the worst is to go home. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

*That's what I feel too – we feel we are guests. It's not a big problem but we are always guests here. We don't need to be involved. We are not at home anyway. We came here for work. I came to save money. I'm not home. My situation in my country isn't good. So I have to be really good, really quiet, and feel like a guest. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

Other migrant workers, however, suggest that this notion of being a 'guest' is problematic:

*Each time they feel like a guest, they have problems. They should feel Irish. Everyone belongs here. If Ireland is your home, you belong here. Then you can live freely. In your mind, you are here, this is your home, then you can live freely. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

For others having Irish children marks symbolically a new relationship with the country. While they remain 'guests', clearly their children have a different, perhaps more positive, relationship with Irishness (and with being from Westmeath).

As we have seen already, what migrant workers 'need' is to a great extent dependent upon what they expect. As with everything else, notions of the 'rights' of migrant workers are very different for different migrant workers in Westmeath. Even when people have been very badly treated, reactions can be very different. Some migrant workers are stoical:

*Here there are problems, and in the Ukraine there are problems. This man ... [who had refused to pay me] maybe he was just a bad man.... I don't know ... (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

Others are more judgmental:

*We have experienced difficulties because of our skin colour. There are migrant workers in my country and we do not treat them like that. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

It can be painfully exasperating for migrant workers to try and exercise their rights, even when they know these rights very precisely. Ignorance or malice on the part of some Irish people can continue to frustrate them:

*I applied for study, to study in the Institute, I passed all the exams – but then you have to go to the education center (organisation named) to get your grant. I went to the centre, I showed them that I passed my exams, and that then I could get the grant. The trouble was that I couldn't explain to them why I was here. I told them that the only thing that you can have a plastic card and on it is stamped four. In the Department they know exactly what that means – Stamp Four – I gave the man phone numbers of the department and said you could ring the department because they aren't going to give me any letters. The man didn't know so he said he wasn't going to help me with the grant until he had some kind of special paper from the department. I rang them and they said that there weren't doing any special papers – I just had the plastic card. He rang the department and said, 'How can I know what status she has and what rights she has in Ireland?' and they said, 'on her ID card is stamped four which means she has all the rights of Irish people'. He said, 'Have you a stamp four on your ID?' I said yes – that's what I was trying to explain to you three days ago. But he said, 'No, that's not enough for me to give you a grant' and I lost my study. I had to pay €13,000 myself because he didn't accept any of my documents and didn't find any approval – it's really hard because it is hard to get them to accept my diploma from Russia here – but they did accept*

*that. I told that man that I am going to study for a few years and I am going to come back and explain to you why I was right and you were wrong. He was looking – ohhh – it's not only me..... Because the system is not clear, we have to explain to them and they still don't believe us! (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

Clearly, any migrant worker finds herself or himself in a complex interaction between his or her subjective and objective situation. People may wish to 'feel' Irish but until they have some right to remain in Ireland, the tendency will always be to feel like a 'guest'. People may feel that they are treated unfairly but, until they feel that they have a right not be treated unfairly, then they are often resigned to this unfairness. This reality dominates attitudes towards both 'rights' and 'needs' of migrant workers.

### **Status**

Migrant workers in Westmeath often have problems associated with legal status. It bears emphasis that migrant workers do not have the same rights as other workers. This makes them specifically vulnerable. At its rawest this can put people in very unpleasant and exposed situations:

*Now my problem is – I haven't money for the air fare [to go home] – but I am waiting for a new work permit and I can't work now. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

More generally, however, it renders migrant workers vulnerable:

*It's not just our problem – there are many people in this situation – we came here on a permit that was made for a businessman and an agency – employers just say if you don't like it, leave. You must only work for the employer that invited you. You have to stop and go home if you want to work somewhere else. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

This experience of a lack of clarity and consistency in dealing with the statutory sector is commonplace:

*Even if you ring the same department twice on one day, you could get two different answers. Depends who you are talking to – it depends on their interpretation of the question. We find that all the time. You would expect a definitive answer from the Department but you won't get it. It's very confusing. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

These needs cannot always be resolved in the sense that, for some migrant workers at least, there is no simple, positive solution to issues around their status. It is clear, however, that there is a need for further transparency and clarity around existing processes. Moreover, migrant workers would benefit from access to immediate and informed advice and support when issues associated with status do arise.

### **Work and Employment**

Most problems and difficulties for migrant workers in Westmeath are work and employment related. Being a migrant worker almost inevitably places people in the most vulnerable and worst paid sectors of the Westmeath economy – although some people are in relatively secure and well paid employment. In the more marginal areas of the economy, problems with different forms of exploitation and unfair treatment are almost endemic:

*I had a bad experience with my second employer - he treated me very badly -going through a bad experience for five months without job and I went to Social Welfare*

*and within one week they helped me out and I got support from the health board. Fr [name given] helped me. My first employer was really good. My second employer tried to pull me from the first employer by saying he would open a therapy centre for me and give me a share of the business – my clients told me to be careful – but he didn't give me my one week notice pay – he sacked me. I was made to work long hours and had been told that I would get a share of the takings, but [in the end] he took my personal notes and asked me to leave the premises. I requested my certificates and was told to leave and get someone to collect them. (South Asian Women: Work Permit)*

*He [the employer] said – it's normal here that you don't get paid for four weeks or six weeks – it's not normal. He paid, maybe, the first time, maybe four or five months.... But then later, and later, and later and he didn't pay the minimum. We were working six, seven days a week.... We worked sometimes in Dublin and there we had to start at eight o'clock after a two and half hour drive – about ten hours a day minimum, sometimes twelve hours, six days or seven days – so for a sixty or seventy hour week we were getting 300 Euro – he kept saying, 'you have the minimum' but it wasn't the minimum. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

When migrant workers are treated unfairly, it is especially difficult for them to do anything about it. They are objectively in a very difficult position since their continued stay in the country is often dependent on maintaining a relationship with their employer, no matter how badly that employer treats them:

*In my job all the Irish got money but I didn't get money because I wasn't Irish. And holidays and overtime – I was working twelve hours a day. It's discrimination. I would just like rights like Irish people.... I said that it was unfair but they said if you don't like it, you can go. And you have to be careful because if you lose your job, then you have to go home. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit, now accession state)*

*Before we work in forestry – we like that work – but sometimes we have problems with wages. We heard there was course for English from the European Union but we didn't have money for the course. But since then we found that the course is free. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

*I am working for [Agency named] and they have about 90 migrant workers and I was contracted out to a forestry work, myself and a couple of my friends – to a private firm – and the real employer – not the agency – and they were paying me four weeks in arrears and the company went bust and I am left waiting for four weeks wages. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

*Yes I was always treated differently from Irish workers – very hard job – just send me – waitress and cleaner, all kinds of jobs. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit, now accession state)*

On top of their status insecurity, people often have additional problems. The lack of English is a serious disadvantage for many migrant workers:

*I didn't have a choice before because I didn't speak English – for me it was a big, big problem, I couldn't move, I couldn't get another job. This man, every time, promise, promise, promise [to pay the workers]. For the work permit, we paid money – a half thousand – and we have been waiting [six months]. One man rung the department and [they said] 'your application is not registered' – three months later. It takes time and all the time we have no pay. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

There also may be complex dynamics and tensions between the theory of transnational companies – particularly the need for a mobile transnational workforce – and their practice on the ground in Ireland, where more prosaic and provincial concerns may dominate:

*Basically the American [Company] strategy was to have an international work force to get the best knowledge internationally but locally that they weren't prepared for that.... However after coming here I find that everything is reversed because of this process. Today they are much more happy and I am studying myself. I don't know what is going to happen to me in the next year. And this is all because one organisation [company named] which is not doing what they saying. There is a big difference between what they are doing and what they are saying actually. (South Asian Man: Work Visa)*

It is clear, therefore, that problems with employment are routine for migrant workers. At one level this is hardly surprising. However, it is clear that a core part of addressing the needs of migrant workers is addressing these problems and finding mechanisms to support them when these issues arise.

### **Racism**

Racism is also a defining feature of life in Westmeath for many migrant workers. Again, this is hardly surprising given the rise of racism in Ireland and the widespread concern with the different forms it takes. Certainly, it dominates many peoples experience:

*We have been called blacks – but we don't argue back we just keep walking and we do not fight. (Eastern Asian Man: Work Permit)*

*We are foreigners and have to face a lot of negative stuff. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

*We have been called black bastards. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

*We feel when we go into stores like Dunnes that people look at us as if we are going to steal things. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

*I was told by a client that me and my children should get out of this country. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

*I am a widow with two children and I was told that me and my bloody children should get out of this country. (Eastern Asian Woman: Work Permit)*

As we have seen the treatment of migrant workers of colour accords to 'traditional' racism:

*Why are we having difficulty in Ireland? It is because we have a different colour of skin. (Eastern Asian Man: Work Permit)*

However, it bears emphasis that white migrant workers are often racialised as well:

*Sometimes they call us 'white slaves'. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

Racism directed towards migrant workers is mediated by, but not dependent on, skin colour.

Other respondents recognised a difference with the experience of racism between Westmeath and elsewhere, while still recording very negative experiences:

*Compared to Dublin the country is much better.... if I go to some parts of Dublin by now I know which parts where I need to be careful but at the early stages - if I go there and don't know a particular address and if I select somebody from the public and I ask them can they please help me out to understand where this location is. If I make a mistake in talking to somebody and if the person is not right, if he is a grown up person he will give me an absolutely misleading direction, if I'm not alert I will go into an absolute goose chase and get lost somewhere. And if its a too young person that person will misbehave and too young children they will throw stones at our car.... Now children throwing stones is what they actually hear and understand and know from their homes this is what is coming out. Children are too innocent and they have nothing against anybody but if that's the behaviour children do then you can imagine what is happening within those houses where they live and what the adults are talking about people from non EU places. (South Asian Man: Work Visa)*

Even when racism has been serious, most migrant workers continue to distinguish between different categories of Irish people:

*Some Irish are good to foreigners and some are very bad. My husband was working in Castlepollard and he was victimised out of the job as the only black so he left the job and is working in Mullingar now and he is complaining again that two of his co-workers are racist, anything they are doing they want to pick on him and they are not the boss, they are working together .... So many people see foreign workers as a threat, they think people coming in here are causing problems for the Irish, problems for the economy, that is the way they see us, so they don't really like it. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

Some respondents reported a negative effect from the status changes associated with the accession of new EU member states:

*We are being treated like rubbish since the EU people came in. (Eastern European Man: non-accession state)*

It is also important to remember that there is nothing inevitable about racism. Migrant workers are continually negotiating with Irish people and, at least sometimes, attitudes can change:

*I was at the AIB Bank one day and an Irish man had left his card and money in the machine – I took it into the bank staff – the Irish man is very nice to me now. (East Asian Man: Work permit)*

*I relate more with Irish people than with people from my country. I have many Irish friends and I am learning from them. There are some things that I think are racism but they say, 'No, they would do the same thing to me'. One day, something happened that I couldn't believe. A friend of mine who is from Dublin was having a problem with her neighbour because she is not from Westmeath County. It was a very serious problem – the Council had to intervene. Because they had houses beside each other. I said, 'If this women can treat you like this and you are Irish, she is going to kill me!' (African Woman: Work Permit)*

Despite examples like this, however, for many migrant workers racism is a defining feature of their experience of life in Ireland in general and Westmeath in particular. While some of the 'needs' associated with addressing racism – protection from racist violence and discrimination –

are clearly much the same for people whether they are migrant workers or not, other issues may be migrant worker specific. For example, one of ways in which to challenge racism against migrants workers is to explain who migrant workers are and what they do. Without denying the generalities of Irish racism, there is a need to address the specific dynamics of ‘anti-migrant worker’ racism in Westmeath and elsewhere.

#### **Other services for migrant workers**

As we have already seen, many migrant workers are reluctant to ask for favours or demand their rights because they have low expectations. This acknowledged, however, our impression is that most people appeared relatively happy with their experience of other statutory services – the health service, the education service, the Gardaí and so on:

*My GP is grand – he is just like a father to me. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

*The Gardaí in Mullingar – once they know you, they don’t have any crime, they are good. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

*The school has been very good.... No problem with English. The child has been very happy and she has been treated like an Irish child. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

Likewise, we found relatively little evidence of unfair treatment in other goods and services:

*We have friends – Irish friends – and no problem between neighbours. They try to be quiet. The landlord is really friendly – he’s not really strict. No really big control, so relaxed. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

*Accommodation – okay – no problem – they have treated us okay. (Eastern Asian Man: Work Permit)*

#### **Some people indicated problems with accomodation:**

*[Named agency] has helped us with renting a new house, they gave notice to the first landlord but did not get there deposit – the agency changed the locks on the door. We reported this to the Gardaí they said they could not help to go and see a solicitor – but we do not have the money to go to a solicitor. (Eastern Asian Man: Work Permit)*

Sometimes, however, it is difficult to be certain about whether there is negative treatment involved because people are migrant workers or a given situation simply involves bad goods or services that might be provided to anyone. For example, one respondent said; ‘We rented a house - it was very damp’. It is impossible to know whether this was an example of discrimination or bad service. Certainly, however, migrant workers often feel that bad treatment is consequent upon their status. One spoke specifically about a negative experience with an organisation:

*We have stopped going to (organization named) due to the treatment we used to receive.*

Problems have arisen most commonly around the issue of qualifications:

*My diploma – my qualification, they don’t accept here. At the same time I was working in university – like lecturing assistant – and I was working there and I was really appreciated. But in the first years my English was really bad – I accepted any jobs. But now that I feel I could do something, they don’t accept me. I have to have that paper to show them – I have to go back to university. For three years I was working in the same restaurant. I was given the hardest jobs and treated*

*unfairly. But all the time I was saying, 'Someday will be my day'. And I told them and they didn't take me seriously. And then one day one of the customers asked me, 'What did you do in your country?' And I told them, I was at university, I wasn't a waitress. For three years I had been trying to tell them I wasn't a waitress. It's really hard to explain to people. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

In general, however, there was less dissatisfaction with services than might have been expected. Clearly there have been specific problems for some migrant workers in Westmeath. Broadly, however, migrant workers have found the provision at least adequate. Moreover, some migrant workers give very positive accounts of the treatment they have received.

#### **What can be done?**

In aspirational terms, what migrant workers want is fairly simple. Furthermore, it appears eminently reasonable:

*To have the same rights like Irish. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit, now accession state)*

*There should be equality – don't let people feel that they are slaves. If you want them to stay, let them stay. If you don't want them, let them go back to their country. Instead of staying here as if they are in hell – because the situation is really serious now. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

Another crucial point, is that, even when something negative does occur, this is tolerable if it is addressed and dealt with:

*In school, when we first came to Mullingar, in school they wanted to bully my son, they called him names, bad names, I reported that and serious action was taken and now he is very happy in school. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

At present there is no obvious focus for migrant worker advocacy in Westmeath. Since migrant workers are, primarily, defined as workers we might expect the trade union movement to be a key catalyst for advocacy. While some trades union organisations have been very supportive, however, other people have had a negative experience of unions:

*When my husband had a problem [with racism] in his workplace the union came in but they supported the Irish – the guy involved. It's like that in my country too. The so-called trade unions is for the Irish people, not for the foreigners. Because there are some people even among the unions who don't like blacks, who don't like foreigners coming to the country. It's there but it's not functioning for all. It is there but there aren't equal opportunities for all. Once you want us to stay, we are here, you embrace us and you give us equal opportunities. Don't let us feel like slaves or being left out. (African Woman: Work Permit)*

Respondents had different ideas about how to address the problems they had identified. However one theme dominated – the notion of legal and paralegal advice and support for migrant workers:

*If there was some kind of a center with lawyers and solicitors who knows exactly how to explain things. I have my solicitor here in Mullingar, I have been to them with problems with my immigration but they said they can't do discrimination cases. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit, now accession state)*

*If there was some kind of organisation, some kind of centre, they could come if they need a work permit, there is a jobs club but we would like a lawyer, a solicitor who could work with them and explain to them what kind of rights they have and who could help them get their rights. We would also like medical assistance – they have to go to the agency doctor – and some of them are working at night so it is*

*very hard to do that. So people have to go back home in a really bad situation because it is so expensive to get a doctor here – just to visit you have to have 40 Euro. So the two things we would like a lawyer and medical assistance. (Eastern European Man: Work Permit)*

*The big trouble is because the agency doesn't explain to them before they come all the rights - all the conditions – because they don't speak English they have to use some kind of an agency. They don't know any of the things like minimum wage, hours and conditions, holidays, all these things. The people who come get into trouble here because they don't know these things. It pays good – that's why they come. They are happy because they get paid well. The job is hard but not as hard as in Russia. They could get a really good job with a really good [status] in Russia but the money is much better here. That's why they agree to come here. That's why a lot of people who are qualified as - degrees, diplomas, doctors come here and they are cleaners. They came for money but the conditions are not so bad. We need some sort of agency or organisation that would explain things to us – more close contact between employers and workers and lawyers. (Eastern European Woman: Work Permit)*

It is clear therefore that the migrant worker population in Westmeath does have a series of needs that are not being met. We can observe that the population is extremely socially isolated – although migrant workers rarely complain about this. Most migrant workers do not interact with Irish people in social contexts. There is little evidence of any formal organisation within the community or communities. There is a great deal of evidence suggesting problems with lack of knowledge regarding status, employment and welfare rights. Exploitation appears endemic in at least some of the sectors employing migrant workers. The migrant worker population appears relatively happy, however, with most service provision. Finally, there is a specific demand for migrant worker advocacy and advice at local level.

## 7. The survey of Westmeath organisations

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We sent a questionnaire to a range of statutory, voluntary and community organisations in Westmeath. The list was intended to be as exhaustive as possible. It included all those organisations that might be working with migrant workers in Westmeath already and all those organisations that might identify a responsibility for working with them in the future. It drew on the extensive experience of the partner organisations in the research – working across the statutory, business, voluntary and community sectors in Westmeath. The short questionnaire was designed to be open-ended and flexible. It was designed to be completed on line and returned by email to make response as simple as possible. (Respondents were, however, offered a hard-copy alternative.) We asked national organisations to answer in terms of the services they might provide in Westmeath only. We asked respondents to record anything that they considered relevant to the research topic but we also reminded them that the research concerned the experiences of migrant workers – not asylum seekers or refugees or minority ethnic groups in general.

### Organisations Responding

The research received some seventeen responses from different organisations in Westmeath as well as three responses from national organisations with some responsibilities in Westmeath.<sup>10</sup> Of the Westmeath organisations, most had some contact with migrant workers already. Unsurprisingly, this indicates a disproportionate likelihood of organisations responding to the survey if they were already working with migrant workers.

What kind of service are Westmeath organisations already providing to migrant workers?  
Different organisations are already providing a range of services to migrant workers:

*As our role on the County Development Board we have stressed the importance of focusing on migrant workers in the county and their needs. Employers in Westmeath have had in recent times to go to the accession countries to fill vacancies. They were unable to fill these vacancies locally. Their experience of migrant workers is very positive. In our role on the County Development Board we have highlighted the need for all the agencies to work together to ensure that the new citizens of Westmeath are supported and their needs met. In addition we are happy to work with and partner with organisations in the county that have programmes that work with migrant workers. (Athlone Chamber of Commerce) In this office, information and advice on the rules and regulations regarding Work Permits, entitlement to FÁS services, eligibility for training. Also would direct them towards English classes if requested. (FÁS Employment and Training Authority). Access to Employment and/or training courses. One to one adult guidance service. (FÁS Employment Services)*

*We have done some small pieces of work with migrant workers on an individual basis. Usually this has involved: dealing with enquiries on employment rights and employment legislation issues; migrant workers calling into our business information centre seeking listings of local employers in particular sectors - this can be the case where the worker has lost their initial job and is seeking a new job. We can provide listings, a business directory and company profiles. We also have public access computers if a person wanted to look at a company website before doing an interview etc.; we have had numerous enquiries from migrant workers who would like to establish their own business here in Ireland. Most of these people need to go through a process called obtaining business permission from the*

<sup>10</sup> Westmeath based organisations who responded were: DSCFA; FÁS Employment & Training Authority; FÁS Employment Services – Athlone; Westmeath County Enterprise Board Ltd; New Horizon, Athlone Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support; County Westmeath Vocational Education Committee, Adult Education Service; Midland Health Board- community Liaison Nurse for Homelessness; Mullingar Congress Information & Development Centre; Dr Stevens Centre for the Unemployed; Athlone Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Athlone Community Taskforce; Westmeath Employment Pact; Westmeath Community Development Ltd; Mullingar Unemployed Action Group; Westmeath EQUAL; Women’s Community Projects (Mullingar) Association; Services Industrial Professional Technical Union (SIPTU).

*Department of Justice. This is a very difficult process and the information system on the scheme is most unsatisfactory. They have a help line that is constantly engaged. Letters and messages seem to yield no reply. It is most frustrating for us as people in an Irish agency trying to make enquiries on this scheme not to mind for non nationals with language difficulties - see [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie); a number of migrant workers who are interested in setting up their own business have obtained business information and advice from us and have participated in Start Your Own Business and other introductory level business courses. (Westmeath County Enterprise Board Ltd.)*

*We were originally formed to assist and support asylum seekers and refugees on the Athlone direct provision site. However we have found ourselves getting involved with migrant workers as a result of friendships between asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers from their home countries. Among the services we have provided to migrants in the past year are: Organised inaugural meeting of the Moslem family's network in Athlone; Provided translation of medical certificates from Russian, Czech, Portuguese; Put migrant workers with employer problems in contact with trade union; Attempted to solve immigration Garda staffing and facilities issue in Athlone (New Horizon)*

*Provision of Basic Skills training through Adult Literacy Schemes in North and South of the county. Mostly ESOL (English speaking other language) through what we call 'themed' literacy i.e. through learning English while doing cookery, cultural diversity or computer courses. (County Westmeath Vocational Education Committee, Adult Education Service)*

*Should Migrant workers present as homeless to my service they will be given the same service as the rest of the population except where there may be particular needs such as language or cultural needs. The service includes health screening and referral to the appropriate agencies for any health concerns, access to a GP and medical card if necessary, information on entitlements and accommodation options within the area. (Midland Health Board- community Liaison Nurse for Homelessness.)*

*We deal on a needs basis with migrant workers mostly those who are in work or are seeking work. We provide information on workers rights, and employment on legislation, which includes referral of issues to the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment - rights commissioners service - contact with employers - works permit information etc. (Mullingar Congress Information & Development Centre)*

Generally, therefore, we identify a growing sense of migrant workers as a client group across different organisations. Most of this development, however, appears ad hoc. Moreover, it has not generally been associated with any new funding or resourcing. Organisations have therefore had to absorb the costs of additional work with migrant workers within existing budgets.

#### **The key needs of migrant workers in Westmeath**

Organisations already working with migrants workers identified several different needs:

*Language training, skills training, awareness of Irish culture, and social inclusion (FÁS Employment Services)*

*Migrants require clear, accurate and precise information regarding rules, regulations and eligibility criteria regarding employment, training, education and other services. This information needs to be provided in the mother tongue language of the migrant. (FÁS)*

*An organisation to represent them. This possibly will have to be segmented on a language basis. Accessible information sources in various languages. Family unification rights for all migrants, recognition of spouses right to work, transparent and compassionate handling of visitors visa issue, recognition of qualifications, social events, right to their own religious observances. (New Horizon)*

*I think that most migrant workers are interested in working hard, being fairly paid and having good living conditions and quality of life during their stay in Ireland. Many are interested in working extra hours to help them to save money. They want to be treated on an equal footing with Irish and EU workers. Some are interested in improving their English. They do not want to be exploited in terms of work, rates of pay or other matters such as rent and quality of living accommodation. Obviously they may need to access healthcare and other services from time to time. As far as I am aware there is no difficulty with this when PRSI is being paid on their employment. (Westmeath County Enterprise Board Ltd)*

*Improved English. But probably also need access to information on their entitlements and options plus a social outlet. (County Westmeath Vocational Education Committee, Adult Education Service)*

*Access to good reliable information re. their entitlements in an appropriate language to suit their needs. Information on legislation regarding equality and rights. In my experience of working with migrants in the Midlands, there is a need for women to be given information on what to do in the case of domestic abuse and child welfare. Educational and job opportunities. A mechanism by which to be able to socialise and not become marginalised socially due to long working hours. Information on their rights as workers. (Midland Health Board- Community Liaison Nurse for Homelessness.)*

- a) To be treated with respect and not be exploited.*
- b) Greater awareness of the protection within labour legislative acts.*
- c) A better understanding of trade unions and their position within Irish society.*
- d) Recognition of their skills and talents and the opportunity to apply those skills in their employment. (Mullingar Congress Information & Development Centre)*

We get a picture of migrant worker needs which accords broadly with our own research with migrant workers. Organisations identify general needs in terms of fairness and equality of treatment and protection from discrimination and exploitation. They also identify more specific needs in terms of access to accurate information about rights and entitlements. There is recurring recognition of a specific need in terms of support with English.

#### **Developing or Extending work with migrant workers in Westmeath**

Organisations were asked about how their work might be developed with migrant workers. Some, of course, do not see a specific role in terms of migrant workers given the remit of their work:

*I do not see many avenues to extend our services to migrant workers. Our remit is to help small business and start up business. As the whole business permission issue is quite difficult I feel that it may not be worthwhile for us to offer any other services as it would only be building up people's hopes and expectations unrealistically. (Westmeath County Enterprise Board Ltd)*

Others are keen to point out that the migrant worker experience is positive for many people:

*Not all migrant workers have bad experiences. Not all migrant workers are in low paid employment. Not all employers treat their employees badly and operate illegally. Migrant workers in [named Westmeath firms] pay all employees the same rates and have happy experiences. Not all migrant workers are low skilled. Many migrant workers are highly skilled and educated. (Athlone Chamber of Commerce)*

Many do, however, see ways in which service provision might be improved or developed:

*Westmeath Employment Pact is a body with a research/policy remit funded under the LDSIP. We are conscious of a significant growth in the numbers of Migrant Workers over the past 7 years, and that local organisations with a social inclusion remit have largely failed to engage with this group. We note that there is no self help group/support network specifically for Migrant Workers based in Westmeath. In addition we suspect that little distinction is made between Migrant Workers and Asylum Seekers or Refugees. Our purpose in co funding this initial piece of research is to provide a reference point to service providers and LDSIP funded groups in providing a more effective response to the needs of migrant workers. Where the research throws up clear areas for action e.g. a local guide to services and supports in 6 or 7 key languages we are in a position to respond fairly immediately. In the event that an integrated service response is required we are prepared to act as a broker/catalyst, and finally where issues requiring further research are identified we may be in a position to support that research. By way of conclusion we are currently developing a regional remit and will be linking 3 partnerships together that i.e. OAK (Offaly and Kildare) Westmeath Community Development Ltd and Longford Community Resources so it may be possible to examine and develop regional responses to issues arising from the research. (Westmeath Employment Pact)*

*Provide language and culture awareness training. (FÁS Employment Services)*

*With [accurate mother-tongue information] FÁS would be in a better position to inform and explain rules etc. to migrant workers. (FÁS)*

*We can expand our information provision service to include migrant workers.*

*Cooperate with Athlone Community Taskforce to act as a facilitating organisation to help various migrant groups get set up. (New Horizon)*

*Have just recently started ESOL programme in Kilbeggan with workers living in Ballinagore area of Westmeath. Other students attend in Ad Ed Centres in Athlone & Mullingar. VEC would gladly offer programmes on an outreach basis. (County Westmeath Vocational Education Committee, Adult Education Service)*

*Information could be made available in appropriate languages. Appropriate use of interpreters when necessary. Training on the needs of migrant workers with migrants being part of the training - as facilitators or co-facilitators. Asking migrant workers their opinion on their needs. Research into the specific health and social care needs of the migrant population in the area. Appropriate and accurate information developed on needs of migrants to include such basics as types of foods eaten, cultural and spiritual practices and so on. Anti-discrimination and anti-racism training for all staff. (Midland Health Board- Community Liaison Nurse for Homelessness)*

*The development of awareness training and capacity building. To facilitate the setting up of support groups within the migrant workers. Contact with reputable employers. (Mullingar Congress Information & Development Centre)*

While many Westmeath organisations see ways in which their work with migrant workers can be developed, most of the analysis of developing work is based upon existing services. There is clearly a need to find ways to integrate and synthesise existing work. Most organisations are prepared to undertake further work but it is unclear that this fits into any kind of strategic thinking vis-à-vis migrant workers.

#### **Other issues for migrant workers in Westmeath**

Organisations were asked about 'other issues' relevant to the situation of migrant workers in Westmeath:

*In my experience one of the problem areas for migrant workers is accommodation and the way landlords exploit people. This is often because many landlords are unaware of the law and feel it does not apply to them. Many are inexperienced uneducated landlords and acquired property during the economic boom and do not treat people with foreign languages fairly. (Athlone Chamber of Commerce)*

*Migrant workers need to be better informed by the Dept. of Enterprise, Trade & Employment about current Labour Law, work permits etc. Also, they need to be able to make contact with appropriate bodies or individuals in a speedy and easy manner to make queries, get information and make complaints regarding unfair treatment, non compliance with labour law etc. (FÁS Employment and Training Authority)*

*Anti-racism information provision is important, particularly in the light of the current tabloid campaign against EU accession country nationals. (New Horizon)*

*The partners of the students (particularly the women) seem to be left at home caring for children and lack the opportunity to integrate into the local communities and to participate in programmes. The workers seem to be doing shift work or get moved at short notice and aren't always able to attend the classes. This can cause difficulties for tutors and other students. Employers tend not to appreciate contact from agencies through them. Hard then to make contact with workers themselves. Migrant workers tend to blend into broader 'foreign' national communities in urban areas.... This can be positive and negative for them. In rural areas they are probably so dispersed that they are invisible. (County Westmeath Vocational Education Committee, Adult Education Service)*

*'Migrant workers' covers a broad area. My experience of migrant workers in the MHB region is limited as migrant workers are almost invisible- sometimes because they are afraid to seek help as they are living in uncertainty regarding their visas and are in jobs where they are underpaid or working illegally and are threatened by their employees with deportation and therefore they endure long working hours in bad conditions which puts a strain on their physical and psychological health. Some migrants are reluctant to ask for help even if they are entitled to do so because they come from states where welfare is unheard. Support networks for migrant workers may have a role in getting migrant workers together to discuss and inform any research. (Midland Health Board- Community Liaison Nurse for Homelessness.)*

*Better integration policies and understanding that migrant workers are a benefit to the work force and not a threat to it. (Mullingar Congress Information & Development Centre)*

Organisations identify a range of issues for migrant workers. The identification of racism as a problem is a common theme as well as a broader need to facilitate integration.

**Conclusion**

In general, the survey of organisations supported the analysis developed in the research with migrant workers. Westmeath organisations have developed a level of support for migrant workers. Moreover, most organisations appear keen to develop this work and are open to explore ways in which their migrant worker client base can be expanded. However much of the existing work is ad hoc and there is a need to find more strategic ways to support migrant workers across the sectors. There is also a specific need to find ways of funding and resourcing this work – most organisations have not been able to identify new sources of income to support migrant worker-specific work.

## 8. The Survey of Westmeath Employers

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We sent a survey of the relevant employers in Westmeath through the offices of the Athlone Chamber of Commerce - one of the partner organisations on the research advisory group. As with the migrant workers themselves, we do claim that this survey was either exhaustive or formally representative. (There are 132 companies in Westmeath currently employing workers on work permits.) Once again, however, the responses are illustrative of the perspectives of employers. We received responses from some ten companies working in horticulture, telesales, food and entertainment, construction and factory processing. In other words, we received responses from employers working in most of the sectors identified with migrant labour. Countries of origin of workers mentioned were: France, Germany, Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic, Ukraine, India, South Africa, Nigeria, Lithuanian and Brazil. In other words, for these Westmeath employers at least, the workers were most commonly not from a new EU member state. One employer working in factory processing said: 'When a position becomes available there is not a lot of interest in the job except from non nationals and these may or may not be from Accession states - we employ who we can.'<sup>11</sup>

Employers in Westmeath are generally positive about the benefits of employing migrant workers. They are described as, 'honest and hard working' and 'good workers that are reliable'. One employer said of challenges or difficulties associated with employing migrant workers that there were, 'None except they put local workers to shame with their hard work and dedication'. Clearly this positive attitude is often dependent on economic necessity:

*It can be very difficult to get Irish people who want to work in the hotel industry at times. Migrant workers in general tend to be hardworking and reliable. (Catering)*

Generally, however, migrant workers are attractive to employers in Westmeath:

*They are reliable, come to work on time. They show job satisfaction, they enjoy their job. They don't demand higher wages. (Agriculture & Fisheries)*

*Lack of interest in this type of work by local people. [Migrant Workers are] Very good and fast workers keen to make money. Always punctual and never absent without permission. (Agriculture & Fisheries)*

Some employers exhibit a sophisticated analysis of migrant workers and migrant worker culture:

*I have employed Migrant workers for the past three years and found a few problems at the start, mainly with paper work. However employing these people now is no more difficult than employing an Irish person. I think an employer taking on a non-national for the first time and a non-national just arriving in Ireland would be most in need of help or information. I have found that the people here settled in quite quickly. They are in two groups. The larger group is here for a few years only. They will work non-stop, spend little, rarely socialise with locals and go home with as much money as possible. The second smaller group is happy to get involved locally, are not as financially driven and intend to spend a much longer time in Ireland. Anyone in this group that are from outside the EU will be badly affected by the new work permit rules. They are dependent on their present employer to keep them legally in Ireland. (Agriculture & Fisheries)*

Some employers did identify specific challenges in terms of migrant worker employees. Language problems and difficulties with migrant worker paperwork are recurring themes:

*Trying to get Work Permits, organising for them to keep all their documentation up to date and dealing with other day to day issues such as transport & accommodation. Ensuring they get suffice holidays at summer at Christmas to go home to their countries - usually have to get involved in organising their flights...*

<sup>11</sup> In order to protect confidentiality, companies are defined only by their economic sector, not by their name although all self-identified for the research.

*generally more involvement in helping them in general things than normal Irish employees. (Industry)*

*Language barrier can be a problem at times. Integration with the Irish employees can be a problem on occasions. A lot of assistance is required in organising accommodation, PPS number and banking facilities. (Agriculture and Fisheries)*

*Language problems, they must learn fluent English. (Agriculture and Fisheries)*

*Language was a small problem at first but all of the people here are top class. Employing them is neither a challenge nor difficult. As long as they earn money to take home they are happy. All the nationalities have a network of friends in Ireland and through their mobiles they can find out anything from their tax bands to the best value shops. (Agriculture & Fisheries)*

While some migrant workers record negative consequences to the accession of new EU states, most employers see this as a bonus:

*Not affected [by accession] – plenty of people available to fill positions from the Accession States and now we do not have to pay 600 for a work permit. (Entertainment)*

*Not really [affected by accession]. As long as we can renew permits it's not a problem. However I think a non-EU person already working in Ireland should be allowed to move employer and get a new permit. (Agriculture & Fisheries)*

Finally, an employer that currently does not employ migrant workers gives an interesting perspective:

*I believe that a lot needs to be done to make it easier for companies to recruit Migrants. For example, FÁS run the EURES program which could be adapted for people who are outside the EU. This service allows you to shortlist candidates based on your criteria and to arrange interviews where you would travel to the country in question and do block interviews. I believe that there should be regionally based centres set up specifically to provide information (websites / leaflets are good but not as good as a person to speak with) to migrant workers who have arrived in Ireland. I also believe that things like getting a PPS numbers and opening a bank account are very difficult to get that it makes living in Ireland more complicated. (Industry)*

This confirms the general concern that many employers have with the bureaucracy associated with employing migrant workers.

## **Conclusion**

Employers approach the issue of migrant workers very differently from other organisations. While this is not the only concern of employers, most are attracted to migrant workers because they are cheaper or more reliable than available Irish workers. For some employers, they are the only employees available at all. Generally migrant workers are seen as making an important positive contribution by employers. Our research also suggests that the Government policy of pushing employers towards recruiting workers within the expanded EU is having little effect. As one respondent indicated, 'we employ who we can'. If this pattern holds true generally, migrant workers from outside the EU – who have none of the rights of EU citizens – are likely to remain part of labour market of Westmeath for some time to come. While the research showed clear evidence of unfair treatment and exploitation of migrant workers by some employers, the survey of employers shows many employers keen to develop a functional relationship with migrant workers that is characterised by mutual self-interest rather than abuse. Moreover, some employers exhibit a quite sophisticated analysis of the needs and rights of migrant workers. Clearly, at least some employers can play a key, positive role in meeting the needs of migrant workers in Westmeath.

## 9. Conclusion – the Needs of Migrant Workers in Westmeath

There are substantial numbers of migrant workers living and working in County Westmeath. These workers come from many different countries but roughly half are from the new ‘accession states’ of the European Union and about half from other states in Europe, Asia and Africa. More migrant workers live in Westmeath than work in Westmeath since accommodation in the county is particularly attractive and relatively affordable to migrant workers.

Migrant workers are working in three key sectors in the labour market in Westmeath – health service, agriculture and factory work. There are major national, ethnic and gender differences within this population which are not spread evenly across the whole population. For example, there is a large number of Filipino women nurses working in Westmeath hospitals and nursing homes.

The difficulty that this research had with locating and consulting with migrant workers is itself evidence of the marginalisation of this group of people within Westmeath. Most migrant workers are not linked into any community structures at all. Generally migrant workers only ‘connect’ with existing organisations when some problem – often associated with status or employment – develops. Some migrant workers have a relationship with national migrant worker or country of origin organisations. Generally, however, the population remains ‘invisible’. This invisibility becomes increasingly problematic the longer that migrant workers and their families are resident in Westmeath.

There is generally good will towards migrant workers in Westmeath. Employers are positive about the benefits of employing migrant workers and other organisations are keen to find ways of supporting migrant workers. There is little evidence of sustained, organised racism towards the migrant worker community in Westmeath. There is, however, a great deal of evidence of routine, everyday racism. There is a need to address this often unthinking racism. While there is a need for vigilance on the related question of organised racism, by and large the community is either welcomed or ignored. There is general support for the development of programmes to support the integration of migrant workers.

Organisations working with migrant workers tend to have developed this work in a piecemeal ad hoc manner. Organisations are looking for guidance in terms of developing their work with migrant workers but most regard this as a positive challenge. There is a particular need for organizations involved in rights work with migrant workers to be supported. However, there is little evidence of this new workload being resourced or funded in any sustained way. In other words, organisations addressing the needs of migrant workers are unlikely to be able to source additional funding to support this work. Clearly this issue cannot be resolved at the level of one county, but it is crucial that migrant worker specific funding is provided to support this work.

There is a clear need to support migrant workers to develop their own voice. This can be done through support from existing organisations. In time there may be a need for a community worker to work with migrant workers. Whether this is sustainable at Westmeath level is moot, but this might be developed across a number of counties in the region. A challenge in working with migrant workers is that while migrant workers may share a common identity in terms of their economic location in Ireland, they often share nothing at all in cultural and political terms. A migrant worker from Latvia may have less in common with a migrant worker from Sri Lanka than either has with an Irish worker. Moreover, there can be racism between migrant worker communities as well as from the host community. The category ‘migrant worker’ does not lend itself in any simple or easy way to traditional notions of ‘community development’.

Generally, the goodwill towards migrant workers across the Westmeath community is a positive which should be mobilised to address the serious problems with invisibility, isolation and lack of awareness of rights that characterise the migrant worker population in Westmeath.

## 10. Recommendations

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1. Groups should continue to work with the broadest notion of ‘migrant worker’. However they should also be conscious of the many differences between different categories of migrant workers. For example, new EU member state nationals now enjoy a series of rights which are denied other migrant workers. These differences are as important in migrant worker support work as the commonalities that flow from being a ‘migrant worker’.
2. The Steering Group for the Migrant Worker Research should meet to agree on the re-constitution of the group possibly as an advocacy group in relation to migrant workers which will progress the issues raised through the research as well as other issues that may arise. Westmeath Employment Pact has agreed to co-ordinate this work. Some of the work that develops may have links on a regional level.
3. There should be proactive targeting of Migrant Workers in Westmeath in the area of information provision about employment, social rights, access to services, etc. There should be support for migrant workers in Westmeath to access their rights – support with making complaints and so on. This includes enhancing the capacity of existing organisations which have a remit in this area.
4. Programmes such as the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and the Community Development Programme should continue to include actions in relation to migrant workers and to find ways of supporting migrant workers to have their own voice. In time a full-time community development worker may be appropriate for working with migrant workers in Westmeath.
5. The wider issue of resourcing support for migrant workers in Westmeath cannot be resolved at county level. It is imperative therefore that appropriate funding structure is developed and sourced at both national and EU level to underpin the kind of work that is clearly necessary in support of migrant workers in Westmeath.
6. Westmeath County Development Board should revisit Goal 2.7 of their Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development and develop an agreed inter-agency approach to addressing the needs of migrant workers and their families.
7. There should be training, including anti-racism training, for all frontline service providers and decision makers in Westmeath. This training needs to focus on the specific status and rights of, and policies towards, migrant workers. This includes social welfare, health, local authorities, community welfare officers, education and policing. Relevant training should also be provided to businesses and employer organisations.
8. Within the work that is being developed the particular needs of migrant women and migrant worker families needs to be recognised. This includes initiatives and organisations with a specific focus on women and families.
9. A mechanism should be established locally to collate data and information in relation to migrant workers in Westmeath including monitoring the impact of policies such as the Habitual Residency Conditions which related to qualification for social welfare, family reunification, etc. The details of this should be looked into as part of the remit of the group referred to under the second recommendation.

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## APPENDIX ONE

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### **How to Strengthen Protection of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families with International Human Rights Treaties**

**A do-it-yourself kit**

**by**

**The International Catholic Migration Commission**

**January 2004**

This document seeks to equip individuals, non-governmental organisations, other interested stakeholders, including members of national administrations and diplomats involved in reporting or experts studying compliance with United Nations human rights norms and standards, with a concise and cross referenced collection of information. The combined documents proposed tap into existing literature and research and expand upon it to offer concrete tools for mapping out and implementing respect for the human rights applicable to migrant workers and members of their families. The do-it-yourself kit is available on its website at <http://www.icmc.net/docs/en> and is posted as a series of pdf files, as follows:

- Chapters 1 and 2
  - Introduction
  - A short walk through the International Migrant Workers Convention
- Chapter 3
  - Comparing relevant provisions in seven core international human rights instruments
    - Table I: Characteristics and treaty monitoring bodies
    - Table II: Related provisions in seven core international human rights instruments
    - Table III: Provisions specific to the International Migrant Workers Convention
- Chapters 4 and 5
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## GLOSSARY

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This page provides a basic overview of the vocabulary of international migration statistics and concepts. The list uses the latest United Nations definitions. The full 1997 UN report, entitled *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*, is available online.

**Border workers:** Persons commuting between their country of usual residence (which is usually their country of citizenship as well) and their place of employment abroad.

**Citizenship:** The country in which a person is born or naturalised and in which that person has rights and responsibilities.

**Contract migrant workers:** Persons working in a country other than their own under contractual arrangements that set limits on the period of employment and on the specific job held by the migrant.

**Country of usual residence:** The country in which a person lives, that is to say, the country in which he or she has a place to live where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest.

**Dependants:** Immediate relatives of the principal migrant who are normally admitted in the same migration category as that person. Although the definition of immediate relative varies from country to country, the spouse and minor children of a principal migrant usually qualify as dependants.

**Foreign-born population of a country:** All persons who have that country as the country of usual residence and whose place of birth is located in another country.

**Foreign migrant workers:** Foreigners admitted by the receiving State for the specific purpose of exercising an economic activity remunerated from within the receiving country. Their length of stay is usually restricted as is the type of employment they can hold.

**Foreign population of a country:** All persons who have that country as country of usual residence and who are the citizens of another country.

**Jus Sanguinis:** Literally meaning right of blood, it makes descent from a family member the primary determinant of citizenship.

**Jus Solis:** States that a person is granted citizenship through place of birth.

**Long-term migrant:** A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. From the perspective of the country of departure, the person will be a long-term emigrant and from that of the country of arrival, the person will be a long-term immigrant.

**Principal migrant:** Within a family group, the person who is considered by immigration authorities to be the head of the family and upon whose admission depends that of the other members of the family.

**Project-tied migrant workers:** Migrant workers admitted by the country of employment for a defined period to work solely on a specific project carried out in that country by the migrant workers' employer.

**Replacement Population:** The population that is necessary to offset declines in the general population, the population of working age, as well as to make up for the ageing of a population. (Source: United Nations Development Program).

**Returning migrants:** Persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short-term or long-term) in another country and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year.

**Seasonal migrant workers:** Persons employed by a country other than their own for only part of a year because the work they perform depends on seasonal conditions. They are a subcategory of foreign migrant workers.

**Stateless persons:** Persons who are not recognised as citizens of any State.

**Trafficking:** When a migrant is illegally recruited, coerced and/or forcibly moved within national or across national borders. Traffickers are those who transport migrants and profit economically or otherwise from their relocation. (Source: International Organisation for Migration).

Source: Migration Policy Institute 2004





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