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City and County of Limerick

Intercultural Profile

Background[1]

Limerick is Ireland's third largest city with a metropolitan population of 91,456 and serving a wider area of about a quarter of a million people in the mid-west of the country. Located at the head of the estuary of Ireland's largest river, the Shannon, it grew historically as an important communications and market town in a rich agricultural region. Its fortunes have waxed and waned over the centuries according to the fluctuating political and economic fortunes of the country. Extensive historic buildings from the mediaeval and Georgian periods testify to Limerick's strategic and commercial importance in the past, but the area also suffered grievously in the aftermath of the 19th century famines and it also stagnated in the mid-20th century. As a consequence it has been a major source of emigrants to many parts of the English-speaking world, carrying its name and reputation far and wide, but also suppressing its growth and opportunity.

Emigration and trade have always kept Limerick open to the wider world. This was exemplified by the opening of the nearby transatlantic Shannon Airport and the declaration in 1959 of the Shannon Free Zone as the world's first free trade zone. Limerick played a particularly prominent role in the struggle for independence from British rule, including the formation of the Limerick Soviet in 1919. This independence of spirit is said to be an important part of the self-image of the city and wider county. Limerick also holds a less celebrated attribute of hosting Ireland's most serious outbreak of anti-Semitic discrimination, the notorious Limerick Boycott of 1904.

Looking much further back in time, the first church in Limerick was founded by the monk St Munchin in the 7th century. Allegedly, whilst he was building it, the local people refused to help but he was given assistance by some strangers from out of town. As a result, Munchin placed a curse on the city that the stranger would flourish whilst the native would perish. St Munchin's curse is now taken to mean that Limerick is a place which is reluctant to acknowledge the achievements of its own native sons and daughters, always considering them to be outshone by those of outsiders. Whether this be the case or not, this local legend would certainly offer a useful foundation upon which Limerick could construct its very own brand of 'diversity advantage'.

National Diversity Context

Between 1983 and 2008 the Irish economy experienced an uninterrupted and unprecedented period of growth, including consecutive years between 1994 and 2000 when GDP never fell below 8% per annum – the years of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy. This new vibrancy firstly meant young Irish workers no longer had to look abroad for work, then the economy started to attract back Irish expatriate workers, and finally, as the labour market remained unsatiated, the novel phenomenon of foreign workers seeking access to Ireland's labour market increased significantly. From 1991 Ireland moved

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[1] This report is based upon the visit of the CoE inspection team on 2 & 3 April 2014, comprising Irena Guidikova, Daniel de Torres Barderi, Marcel La Rose and Phil Wood.

into a condition of positive net migration (the last member state within the EU at that time to achieve it) and this remained emphatically the case at the last national census in 2006.

The great bulk of foreign workers arrived from Poland and other EU accession states, although numbers are difficult to verify. However, many asylum seekers were also admitted from Nigeria, Pakistan, Iraq, China, Georgia and other places. Although the majority of overseas workers and asylum seekers settled in the Greater Dublin Area, the pattern of Irish immigration is notable by its dispersal, and particularly by its impact upon market towns and even deeply rural areas.
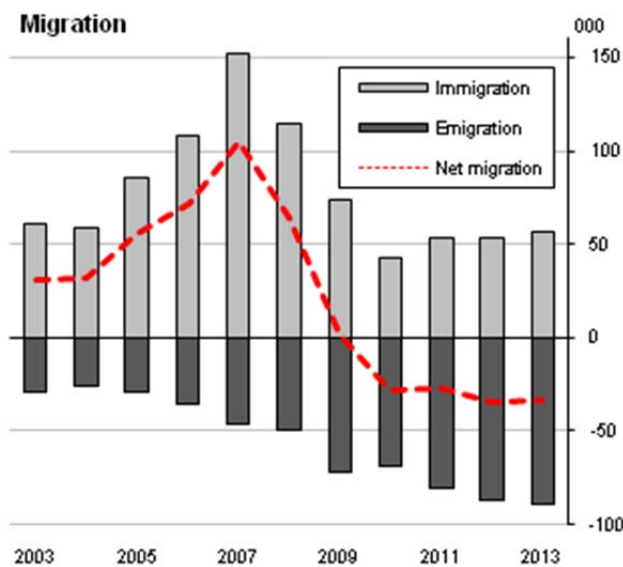
In the meantime, however, Ireland has taken the full force of the international financial crisis, necessitating a €85 billion bailout from the IMF in November 2010. Well before this date, the slow-down in the Irish economy was seeing many eastern Europeans either returning home or moving on to other countries, and homelessness and destitution faced some of those who stayed on, whilst before the economic collapse, asylum applications and approvals had been in decline since 2002.

The table from the Irish Central Office of Statistics summarises the recent pattern, with immigration to Ireland falling dramatically between 2007 and 2010 and then beginning a slow recovery, whilst emigration has been steadily growing since 2004, resulting in a significantly negative net overall migration figure.

Local Diversity Context

The 2011 Census revealed that 18, 427 persons were non-Irish nationals, representing 9.7% of the total population in the Limerick region. Limerick city's population was 56,521 persons, of which 6,847 were non-Irish nationals, representing 12.1% of the city's total population. Limerick county (excluding Limerick city) comprises a total of 133, 422 persons, of whom 11,580 were non-Irish nationals.

Migrant population of Limerick city and county

Area	Total population	Migrant population	Migrant population as % of total population
Limerick city	56,521	6,847	12.1%
Limerick county	133,422	11,580	8.7%
Limerick region (city and county)	189,943	18,427	9.7%

People of Polish nationality represent the largest minority group in the Limerick region, 3.2% of the total population. In Limerick city, they represent 4.5% of the city's population and 2.6% of Limerick county population. Migrants from other EU countries represent 4.2% of the Limerick region population (4.3% of the city's population; 3.9% of the county's population). Persons from outside the EU comprise 2.5% of the Limerick region population.

Breakdown of nationality in Limerick city and county

Limerick city			Limerick county		
Nationality	**Population**	**% of total population**	**Nationality**	**Population**	**% of total population**
Ireland	48,859	86.5%	Ireland	120,364	90.2%
UK	685	1.2%	UK	2,864	2.1%
Poland	2,572	4.5%	Poland	3,518	2.6%
Lithuania	301	0.5%	Lithuania	617	0.5%
Other EU 27	1,414	2.5%	Other EU 27	1,711	1.3%
Rest of World	1,875	3.4%	Rest of World	2,870	2.2%
Not stated	815	1.4%	Not stated	1,478	1.1%
Total	**56,521**	**100%**	**Total**	**133,422**	**100%**

The census also reveals that a significant proportion of people living in the Limerick region (9.7%; total of 18,451 persons) speak languages other than English and Irish. Languages listed as being spoken in the Limerick region, in addition to Polish, French and Lithuanian listed above, include Spanish; Latvian; Chinese; Urdu; Arabic; Slovak; Portuguese; Czech; Hungarian; Yoruba; and Dutch. In Limerick city, 12.5% (7,063 persons), speak languages other than English and Irish. In Limerick county (excluding the city) there are a further 11,388 speakers (8.5%) of foreign languages.

National Policy Context

Ireland has a relatively long history of engaging with the terminology of interculturality in public and political life. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) was established in 1998 as an independent expert body funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. It was a partnership body, bringing together government and NGOs to:

- develop an inclusive and strategic approach to combat racism by focusing on its prevention and promoting an intercultural society;
- contribute to policy and legislative developments and seek to encourage dialogue and progress in all areas relating to racism and interculturalism;
- encourage integrated actions towards acknowledging, celebrating and accommodating cultural diversity;
- establish and maintain links with organisations or individuals involved in addressing racism and promoting interculturalism at national, European and international levels.

The NCCRI played a key role in the formation of policy on and awareness towards interculturalism and integration.

A Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) was set up in 2001 within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to coordinate services for refugees and asylum seekers and to implement integration policy for refugees. Its priorities are the protection of rights, the creation of opportunities to participate in economic, social and cultural aspects of Irish society, and the development of a tolerant and inclusive society. With guidance from NCCRI a National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) for Ireland was launched in 2005, with a focus on 'reasonable and common sense measures to accommodate cultural diversity', including the emergence of an 'intercultural workplace'. The NPAR concluded at the end of 2008.

NCCRI's operations were also wound up by the government in December 2008 following a review within the context of economic recession, with its remit subsumed within the Office of the Minister for Integration. This decision gave rise to widespread debate, with NGOs in the field of immigration and integration concerned at the loss of expertise and capacity.

A new Office of the Minister for Integration (OMI) had been set up in June 2007 to deal with issues arising from large-scale immigration into Ireland, and the Minister for Integration published a policy statement in May 2008 entitled 'Migration Nation', recommending a wide range of new structures and procedures. In 2007, the Houses of the *Oireachtas* [National Parliament] Joint Committee on European Affairs proposed the establishment of a National Forum on Integration, chaired by the government, to provide for a permanent dialogue between central government, local authorities, migrant representatives, NGOs and similar groups. The committee also recommended the setting up of one-stop shops in larger cities and towns so that migrants can access information about employment opportunities, as well as guidance to enable them to integrate fully into Irish society.

In 2010 the OMI became the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI). With regard to new structures and co-ordinating mechanisms recommended by 'Migration Nation' however, the OPMI now states that "it is not now proposed to establish the three new bodies referred to in Migration Nation because such a move would be inappropriate in current circumstances when State bodies are being rationalised or abolished".

NGOs (including Doras Luimní, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, and the Irish Refugee Council) suggest that this represents a significant backward step by the Irish government and even an abrogation of its responsibilities in the field, leaving civil society and local institutions to pick up the pieces.[2] Others have suggested that there is an increasingly narrow perspective being taken by Irish authorities towards migration, with it being understood only in terms of the economic impacts (positive or negative) it might have upon Ireland.[3]

There is also widespread concern that since the winding-up of NCCRI there is no platform within Ireland for co-ordination of issues or a hub for the networking of local and regional affairs.

Finally there is concern (from the Irish Refugee Council amongst others) that the national approach to asylum seekers and refugees is becoming incoherent and, in the case of many people, unjust, cruel and wasteful of human potential.[4]

Local Policy Context

The first point to note is that until recently Limerick was governed by a City Council and a County Council but that the two are now in the advanced stages of a merger.

Limerick's commitment to enshrine cultural diversity into policy-making began in 2002 with the County Development Board Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development 2002-11. It included a statement on equality: "to create a more equitable society by promoting the right to equal opportunities and an understanding of minorities"; with an ongoing ambition to make Limerick a 'City of Equality'. This was followed by an Integrating Limerick Plan 2010-2013 with a strategic

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[2] Boucher, G (2010) *The entrenchment of Ireland's laissez-faire integration policy*. Translocations: Migration and Social Change 6(2)

[3] Gilmartin, M & Migge, B (2013) *European migrants in Ireland: pathways to integration*. European Urban and Regional Studies, doi: 10.1177/0969776412474583.

[4] http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/news/direct-provision-framing-an-alternative-reception-system-for-people-seeking-international-protection/2288

objective "to ensure refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities are welcomed, supported and valued in the community". This in turn has been superseded by the current Integration Plan 2013-2016 entitled *Towards Intercultural Limerick*[5]. The document includes a striking statement which gives a clear flavour of its intents, and bears repetition in full:

Integration - A Two Way Process

If you are from Limerick …
- Meet with people who are different to you
- Get involved in local integration and education initiatives
- Always remember respect and tolerance

If you are a migrant …
- Get involved in host community activities
- Learn more about local traditions
- Always remember respect and tolerance

If you are active in a local community group …
- Get actively involved with integration actions through the IWG
- Let the IWG know where there is a need for integration work
- Actively work to ensure that migrants are included in local community groups

If you are from the business community …
- Develop awareness in the areas of employment and diversity
- Actively participate and promote diversity
- Allow people the opportunity to learn through internships

If you are from an educational institution …
- Help to ensure that all young people have equal access to education
- Ensure that intercultural understanding and diversity are part of the education experience
- Promote diversity and inclusion of young people in the community

If you are a politician …
- Take responsibility for giving political and economic priority to inclusion
- Words are important: make sure that your communication and actions are inclusive
- Help to develop the region in a way that makes the most of diversity

The responsibility for guiding and driving the two Integration Plans has fallen not solely to the local authorities but to the Integration Working Group, formed in 2007, which represents a wide range of different institutional, community, professional and ethnic interests. The Working Group makes an annual review of progress towards achieving the Actions defined within its 6 main themes:

> 1: Language and Education
> 2: Information and Training
> 3: Supporting Communities
> 4: Employment
> 5: Health and Welfare
> 6: Non Discrimination and Justice

The Chair of the Working Group is held jointly by Doras Luimní, a small non-governmental organisation which nevertheless plays a central and catalytic role within the Limerick and Mid-West scene.[6] The Irish name conveys the sense of Limerick as an open door. The organisation was founded in 2000 in response to the establishment of the 'direct provision' system by the Irish

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[5] http://tinyurl.com/mnntga7
[6] http://dorasluimni.org/

government, which dispersed asylum seekers to accommodation centres around the country. But whilst originally established as a Development Organisation for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Doras Luimní now provides services open to all migrants living in the Limerick area, as well creating connective tissue between the many agencies and groupings with either an interest in or responsibility for intercultural issues. It employs more than 2 full-time and approximately 8 part-time staff members depending on projects and funding available.

Local Economy

Limerick has prospered on the strength of its location and its capacity to offer attractive fiscal, logistical and labour market incentives to both inward investors and local employers. The original free trade initiative around Shannon triggered many more business park developments which peaked during the last decade. These attracted major American and multinational companies such as the European manufacturing base of Analog Devices employing more than 1,000 people; Johnson & Johnson subsidiary Vistakon (the world's largest manufacturer of contact lenses) which also employs close to 1,000 people; and Cook Medical, the world's largest privately owned medical devices company. However, the largest inward investor was Dell which had its main European manufacturing facility in Limerick.

These investments, along with a booming construction market attracted many migrants to seek work over the past two decades. However the recent economic recession in Ireland has had a profound effect on Limerick, and not least its migrant workers. In particular the announcement in 2009 that Dell was to move its manufacturing facility from Limerick to Poland has devastated the local economy. 1900 jobs were lost and it is believed that for every job lost at Dell at least another 4 to 5 were put at risk. The closure of the Dell manufacturing facility amounted to 2% of Ireland's national GDP. The downturn in the construction industry has also cost many jobs.

Unemployment has become a major problem across the city, hovering above 14% (and above the national average) for many months, although it is now starting to fall.

A point that was raised in the focus group was that there was a shortage of space and facilities for organisations who were trying to promote intercultural relations in Limerick. It was also suggested that many people were still stuck in a mindset of seeing migrants as victims or short-term workers resulting in Limerick still being insufficiently open to the diversity advantages of making new international trade links based upon the expertise of their local migrant community.

Education and training

As primary and secondary education is a function of the national rather than the local state in Ireland, schools were not a feature of the visit. Discussion instead focused upon informal, adult and tertiary education as well as language training.

Both the University of Limerick and the Limerick Institute of Technology are growing and dynamic organisations and highly international in outlook. A representative from Limerick Institute of Technology informed us that about 25% of students are of non-Irish nationals and this can rise to much higher levels amongst post-graduate and doctoral students as well as researchers and lecturers in some departments. In departments such as engineering and bio-tech there are links with many countries around the world, for example Brazil, as well as with multi-national companies based in Limerick, making for an active web of connections.

Limerick College of Further Education reports that 40% of its student body are now non-Irish nationals. The college has an extensive programme for introducing non-English speakers with

separate classes in the first year and integrated classes in year 2. It also holds an annual Intercultural Day to ensure all nationalities are able to announce their presence and express their cultural distinctiveness.

Some concern was raised in the focus group that attention is rather too narrowly focused upon language and employability skills and the broader range of social and interpersonal skills which are so necessary to integration are being overlooked. This is partly due to the perception by migrants that these will not enhance their employability, but this is not being dispelled by employers.

Limerick has declared itself a Learning Region by making the Limerick Declaration[7]. Unfortunately the document has nothing to say about migration or diversity.

The Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board takes the lead in the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). It was reported that with budget cuts the services was struggling to find adequate staff and classrooms with which to meet the demand for teaching. It was raised in one of the focus groups that the situation might be helped through better co-ordination with agencies such as the University which has ample space.

Several of the larger minority groups are active in mother-tongue language training. The Polish community provides tuition to adults and children as well as to a growing number of Irish nationals. The Russian-speaking community also provides language as part of a wide range of cultural and practical training.

Employment and business

About 20 of the 600 staff of the local authority are of migrant background. The figure has remained at this low level for some time because there have been severe restrictions on recruitment for the last eight years. With the merger of the two Councils, the Head of Human Resources is hoping to introduce new methods for recruitment and training which should increase this level.

Limerick is proud of its structures for support of business and considers them second to none in Ireland. It has over 100,000 m² of subsidised enterprise, start-up and business incubator space.

The PAUL Partnership is a local, area-based, multi-sectoral partnership company, based in Limerick City. It was initially established in 1989, under the EU Poverty 3 Programme, as a local response to long-term unemployment. Since then, it has expanded its remit to address the wider issue of social exclusion and to promote social inclusion. 25% of the people it has helped into work and business have been ethnic minorities, particularly many former construction workers. It helps people to consider alternative employment sectors and self-employment and helps them with the start-up process. They are eligible to receive 100% benefits in their first year of trading and 75% in the second year. The survival rate after two years is an impressive 75% and minorities are more likely than Irish nationals to consider the enterprise option. However, they find that minorities are less likely to attend networking and social events and this may impede their business growth.

Access to credit is a general problem in Ireland since the financial crisis. Irish people have traditionally relied upon banks and there is little tradition of venture capital or business angels. Many minorities may be at an advantage in this regard as they are often able to access credit from families and extended ethnic networks. Perhaps this is one area in which Ireland could start to

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[7] http://eurolocal.info/sites/default/files/limerickdeclaration.pdf

consider migrants as less of a social problem and more of a diversity advantage from which it could learn.[8]

There has been little progress made on the idea of Supplier Diversity. It is very difficult for anyone, still less new migrants, to access public sector contracts, and is only likely to get harder in the foreseeable future. Successful tenderers need public liability insurance of €2 million and audited accounts for over two years. Public procurement is controlled by the national government and rules are being tightened even further making it extremely difficult for any SME to compete.

It was suggested that many businesses in Limerick report difficulties in recruiting workers who can offer a combination of appropriate professional skills and non-English language, yet there is widespread anecdotal awareness that many such people exist in Limerick's minority communities, often under-employed in low-skilled jobs. The city needs to find more effective means of connecting supply and demand.

Housing and neighbourhoods

Housing and neighbourhoods in Limerick have been defined by several distinct periods of policy and development. The legacy of British rule and then the economic stagnation of the Free State resulted in substandard living conditions for many people who were crowded into city centre tenements and cottages[9]. Slum clearance in the 1960s relocated many people to large social housing estates on the outskirts of the city. Whilst lower-density, greener and cleaner, these estates were often equipped with few public or retail facilities, and lacked the public transport to reach employment opportunities or the city centre. Many have become plagued with unemployment, poverty and disrepair and a stigmatised reputation. About 41% of all housing within the Limerick City Council boundary is local authority, the highest in Ireland, but this is reducing rapidly.

During the economic boom a further wave of private sector, out-of-town housing development took even more people out of the city centre and, whilst Limerick suffered less than many from the excesses of housing speculation and 'ghost estates', it has left a rather skewed housing infrastructure and market. The housing developments were complemented by extensive suburban, car-dependent, shopping and leisure developments, some of which were abandoned half-built. Many businesses also abandoned the city centre, attracted by lower taxes and business rates in the suburbs. The outcome is a classic 'doughnut' urban form, so familiar in the US and UK but less familiar in mainland Europe, with a dense outer ring and a hollowed-out centre.

With government policy encouraging social tenants to buy their homes and a general preference in Ireland for home ownership, the social sector has shrunk. The local authority has subsequently adopted a 'pepper-potting' approach mixing private and social housing as much as possible. Into this scenario arrived large numbers of migrants in search of housing.

The majority of foreign nationals in Limerick live in or near the city centre, with the greatest concentrations in the Dock A and Shannon districts adjacent to the south bank of the river. Several factors have led them to concentrate in the city centre. Firstly, there was abundant and relatively cheap housing and retail property in the city centre. Secondly, the local authority has been reluctant to place new migrants in the outer city social housing estates for fear of antagonism. Several of Limerick's estates (particularly Ballinacurra Weston, St Mary's Park, Moyross, Clarina Park and

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[8] There was a recent national initiative in Ireland around leveraging the large Irish Diaspora. It was centred around a conference held in Dublin Castle and featured Irish Economist David McWilliams.
[9] As is most graphically portrayed in the book and Hollywood film of *Angela's Ashes*, an autobiographical memoir of life in 1930s and 1940sLimerick by Frank McCourt.

Southill) are the home to families who derive their income from unlawful activities. Whilst there is only anecdotal evidence of racist violence in these areas, the local authority has felt it prudent to minimise risk by not encouraging foreigners to settle in their vicinity. The mark of shame and self-depreciation left upon the city self-identity by these marginalised estates is however strongly felt in Limerick and the new city and county authority has made it a priority to invest in the rebranding of Limerick as a welcoming and attractive place to live, inviting residents to become more actively involved in the process of re-invention of the city with a new image and a new urban identity. The arts and sport sectors, as well as urban regeneration are expected to play a major role in this effort.

The 2011 Census found that whilst 3,456 Irish nationals were registered on the waiting list for social housing in Limerick City and County, the figure for non-Irish nationals was 835. There was a call from one local politician for an 'Irish First' housing allocation policy but this was dismissed by other council members.

Although it is illegal for landlords to discriminate explicitly against minorities, there is evidence of some landlords stipulating 'no rent allowance' on some lettings. Rent allowance is a form of subsidy made by the Irish government which is prevalent amongst persons availing of social housing which includes some migrants.

Governance and democratic participation

A research study commissioned by Doras Luimni[10] in 2010 suggested that politicians of all parties were failing to engage with the issues of migration and diversity beyond a superficial level. Whilst there were differences across the political spectrum, the great majority of politicians of all parties were likely to interpret migration quite simplistically and generally negatively as a social problem. However, the adoption of the Toward Intercultural Limerick strategy and the city's engagement with the Intercultural cities programme indicate that there is a positive change and that a commitment to diversity and inclusion is building up among the political leadership in the city. Interculturalism is a long-term effort whose results may take years to

Across Ireland there has been relatively little sign of active political participation by ethnic minorities[11] and this is echoed in Limerick. A particular problem is the failure of many minorities to even place themselves on the electoral register to vote. Presently there is no-one from a minority background elected to a political office, and only two people from a non-Irish background standing for election at the forthcoming local and European elections.

In a more positive vein, attention was drawn to the community councils which play a very active role at the local level, particularly in rural communities, and it was said that migrants were playing an active role in many of these.

However, this lack of engagement with the ballot box, leads to a lack of influence upon the democratic process and thus an absence from the consciousness of political parties and civic leaders. It also helps to fix in the minds of the public that migrants are not 'here to stay' but are merely disengaged economic sojourners.

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[10] Haynes, A, Power, M & Devereux, E (2010) *How Irish politicians construct transnational EU migrants.* University of Limerick
[11] This has been particularly remarked upon by the Irish Integration Centre
http://www.integrationcentre.ie/Media/Press-Releases/2012/Political-Participation--Under-Representation--(1).aspx?feed=news

Whilst there is ample evidence of civic participation by minorities in Limerick it seems this is not translating into political participation at present, and we saw few indications to suggest this is likely to change in the foreseeable future.

Civil society and public life

In recent Irish academic research conducted into potential spaces of interaction and integration[12], it was concluded that whilst the workplace provided very fruitful possibilities, many migrant respondents complained that the Irish family home was a place to which few received an invitation. The study therefore turned to 'third spaces', between home and work, which might offer opportunities for people to engage. In this regards one Polish respondent described his perception of the difference between his culture and that of the Irish:

> *Polish people, when I am making the friends, the first thing they are going to do is they are going to invite you to the house. Irish people are going to invite you to the pub.* (op cit p8)

Another migrant of Italian origin summed up a related theme of the researchers that the oft-cited idea of Irish openness and friendliness was felt by many to be superficial:

> *I found quite all the times that it is very easy to hang on with Irish people but then it's not easy to become real friends. To know really who they are, what they want. At some stage you can't be closer to them.* (op cit p7)

Superficial observations of the city centre of Limerick confirm that it is well-stocked with pubs and cafes, many of which appear attractive and welcoming. There may be value in researching whether they are currently offering an effective space for social encounter between strangers of different background and whether more might be achieved through closer co-operation between proprietors, NGOs and local authorities.

During the focus group meetings we asked people what places or events in Limerick had a particularly intercultural flavour. They mentioned the Riverfest BBQ and the Great Limerick Run both held annually in May. They also mentioned the St Patrick's Day Parade in March, in which many minorities actively participate – although it was mentioned by one person that when the media covered the event they somehow managed to omit any visible minorities from their pictures.

Limerick is extremely proud of its sporting traditions and prowess and this would appear to be a promising arena for interaction and relationship-building. The Great Run, for example, includes 12,000 participants and is said to be one of the best ways in which asylum seekers in particular can play a part in the public life of the city without feeling stigmatised by their status. The Limerick Sports Partnership has thought deeply about where best to invest its resources and has concluded that mass participation activities work best. In the countryside there are signs that minorities are joining local Gaelic Athletic Association activities. Also the city's sporting scene is being enriched by overseas games which have been introduced by foreign students.

Meanwhile the Limerick Youth Service acknowledges the need to address cultural diversity. Its explanation is that youth work in Limerick has allowed itself to be portrayed as something which is only aimed at the 2 or 3% of 'difficult' youngsters in the city rather than working across the board. Its strategy is now to try and communicate with young people directly through the schools. It estimates that it has contact with about 80 youngsters of minority background. It is also planning to make a

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[12] Gilmartin & Migge, *op cit*

film for general circulation in schools which will illustrate the diverse backgrounds and lifestyles of Limerick's youth population.

Limerick has been designated Ireland's first ever City of Culture for 2014. Unfortunately the short presentation we received about the programme seemed more concerned to emphasise its value for economic development and strategic positioning than any relevance it might have for building intercultural relations and diversity advantage.

Limerick has a well-developed voluntary sector representing many thematic and sectional interests. The Integration Working Group provides an institutional framework for these and Doras Luimni provides a valuable co-ordinating and advocacy role. What appears to be missing according to several respondents is spatial coherence. The city seems to lack adequate facilities in the right places to cater for the growing activity and ambition of the sector. Christchurch does provide accommodation and meeting space for some but is not sufficient. Perhaps the city also needs a dedicated space in a highly visible and prominent place which clearly reminds the whole population that Limerick is a city of diversity.

Security and Policing

An Garda Síochána is Ireland's National Police Service and is responsible for policing in Limerick. Nationally it has produced a statement of its principles and its role in the document 'Your Police Service in Intercultural Ireland'.[13]

In general the police have a good reputation but the force has come under scrutiny in recent months for its practices regarding the reporting of racist crime. The NGO, the Immigrant Council of Ireland has expressed concern that the service is not doing enough to facilitate the reporting, and thus the investigation of such crimes, and cites as its evidence a recent comparative study with Northern Ireland. In one year the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) recorded 1,038 incidents compared to just 128 by the Gardai, and such reports to the Gardai have been falling steadily in Ireland. Because of this there have been calls for a reporting system which is independent of the police.[14]

It was voiced in the focus groups that some people felt that the police were merely responding to what they perceived as a general public mood in Ireland that hate crime was not a legitimate classification. This in turn led to a perception in the minds of victims that there was no point in trying to report a crime as having a racist element, which contributed to the low levels of reporting to the Gardai.

The police are now engaging in a recruitment drive to attract minorities and are creating new reserve positions which are aimed at them. Also there are officers in each local department with specific responsibility and training for Ethnic Liaison duties. The police spokesman we met was at pains to emphasise that the service does recognise it has a job to do to regain public trust around the issue of crime reporting.

Media and public opinion

A separate report on the Limerick's membership of the 'C4i – Communication for Integration' project covers these issues.

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[13] http://www.garda.ie/Documents/User/racial%20and%20intercultural%20english.pdf
[14] http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/700pc-gap-in-reports-of-racism-to-gardai-and-psni-29910052.html

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our two days in Limerick were filled with the greatest variety of people, organisations and opinions and this combined with a generous supply of background documentation and the findings of the Intercultural Index, have given us a vivid and multi-dimensional impression of the city and the county. It speaks well of the long-standing and organically developed nature of the relationships in the city.

Thus far in this report we have avoided the use of the euphemism which most recurred during our conversations: that Limerick faces many 'challenges' – but we will acknowledge it now. Some of these are as a consequence of the global financial crisis and can be seen repeated, to varying degrees, across Europe. However it would be complacent to lay all the blame at the door of the crisis. Some of Limerick's issues are local in origin and need to be addressed through local action.

- Firstly we were deeply impressed by the respectful and practical relationship between Doras Luimni and the local authority, which seemed to lie at the heart of many of the positive things we saw. This kind of relationship is rare in cities of our experience. It should be further developed and, and more work should be done to institutionalise and mainstream some of the progress made by Doras Luimní while it has had independent funding. Doras Luimni's independent funding has ensured its independence of thought and action and it will be important to guarantee its sustainability in the future. It is also important to ensure that the key functions which Doras Luimni has contributed to migrant integration continue into the future.

- Based upon this relationship the Integration Working Group has built up a track record of principled, purposeful and effective work in its two strategies and annual progress reviews. Its meticulous pursuit of detail had led to important improvements to institutions and practices which are now paying dividends on the ground. However, this kind of target-driven approach to policy has its limits and can be a distraction from occasionally taking in the bigger picture. For example the Working Group should occasionally address itself to less tangible but significant issues by asking questions such as 'are we satisfied with the general level of political discourse, leadership and inspiration around diversity and interculturalism in the city?'

- Another such question which should be subject to a widespread debate is what are the factors that will make Limerick 'a good city to live', which ones are we currently falling short on, and which could be addressed (in the current economic context) in ways other than a major financial injection? In the context of this just how much diversity can Limerick manage?

- If Limerick is an intercultural city then its elected politicians and political parties must put themselves outside their own comfort zones and declare it to be so in word and deed. They must also address the very low level of political and civic participation by ethnic minorities. The merging of the two authorities is a rare and special opportunity to break the mould and create a new way of doing things.

- Limerick exists within an environment largely not of its making, with key policies and decisions made at national level. By helping to build an Irish national network (inspired by the very successful Italian and Spanish networks, for instance) of local actors for intercultural action and change, it could aspire– and with the supranational support of the Council of Europe – to exert greater influence upon key areas of national policy.

- Admirable as the relationship between Doras Luimni, the Integration Working Group and the local authority is, it cannot be the well-spring of all energy and imagination for the future. Space and encouragement must be created for more bottom-up initiative from civil society organisations and social entrepreneurs. With resources scarce it will take judgement and excellent risk assessment to ensure the most effective ones are given the chance to thrive.

- We were given a strong impression that there are some in Limerick who believe that the solution to the area's post-financial crisis difficulties lies in an even greater and more single-minded emphasis upon economics and competitiveness. We mean by this that the current policy agenda seems to have been subsumed into one paramount goal of achieving employment - at any cost. This seemed to us as a one-dimensional approach which rather overlooks the fact that it was economic instrumentalisation which probably created the crisis in the first place. When applied to the issue of migration and diversity, such approach leads to a narrow interpretation of migrants as economic units who may be accommodated or disposed according to their immediate financial return. It blinds a society to the deeper and richer rewards that may be achieved when a society truly sets out to discover itself and the many facets of diversity advantage.

- There are many examples elsewhere of migrants bringing new life to neighbourhoods which had appeared to be in terminal decline. If migrants are concentrating in the city centre of Limerick, which has been dying for years, it would be easy for some to portray this as the emergence of a ghetto. But migrants may well be the best people to revive it, investing emotionally, financially and physically and bringing footfall back to streets which are alternatively car-clogged or deserted. Politicians and other opinion-formers have an important role here in changing the discourse, whilst planners and developers have a vital role in creating new spaces and business models, and minimising the exploitative excesses that currently pertain. Limerick as a community does not give the general impression that it considers diversity a threat or a part of the problem (despite a few siren voices) but neither does it yet seem to have either the courage or the clarity of mind to regard diversity as an advantage and a potential solution to its woes, and to put in place the mechanisms to realise this.

- The city should build upon the C4i anti-rumours methodology, which it is already applying, as an anchor to attract the public's and the media's attention and then draw them into discussion about the tricky issues such as the education system.

- The Capital of Culture programme should be used more explicitly for engaging people in imagining the shared city of the future, also making use of successful experiences of other Intercultural cities which have been Capitals of Culture in the past.

- Building upon the relationship between the University and the city and, particularly, trying to overcome the physical separation between the campus and the town centre would create more sharing of resources and more 'buzz'.

- Building upon the good examples of local community councils in enhancing the involvement of minorities in the political process and local decision making is to be encouraged.

- There are many people in Limerick's minority communities who possess qualifications, skills, connections and experience which are far in excess of the demands of the jobs they currently hold. Equally there are many businesses in Limerick who cannot find people with

adequate skills from their traditional recruitment pools. There needs to be found a better way of connecting supply and demand here.

- We noted several city officials and other agencies who expressed an interest in dealing more actively with discrimination and restorative justice. We would recommend taking a look at practices in several other members of the ICC network, notably Neuchatel and Copenhagen.