Barriers to the Labour Market for Refugees and Persons with leave to remain in Limerick

Helen O’Grady
BARRIERS TO THE LABOUR MARKET
FOR REFUGEES AND PERSONS WITH LEAVE TO REMAIN IN LIMERICK

Helen O’Grady

September 2008
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“I’ve lost my past
The future doesn’t exist
They are killing my present.
What should I expect?
I am just a refugee to them.
But eyes that have seen mountains
Are not frightened by hills”

(Quote from Congolese refugee)
 Acknowledgements

This publication could not have been produced without the support of a number of people and organisations. I wish to extend my thanks to the faculty of Contemporary Migration and Diaspora Studies, in the Department of Geography, University College Cork in particular Piaras MacEinri and also Dr Liam Coakley for their guidance and support.

I would specifically like to thank the interviewees who selflessly shared their experiences of attempting to access education and employment in Limerick and thus giving weight to academic theories on which this report was based. I also very much appreciated the help from caseworkers in Doras Luimni for identifying potential interviewees.

Furthermore my thanks to Vodafone Ireland Foundation and Laura Turkington for responding to the needs identified in the original research and funding the subsequent position of Education and Employment Co-ordinator from July 2008 to July 2009. I am grateful to the Board of Doras Luimni for seeing the relevance of this post by providing it initially and continuing it to date and for bringing the academic thesis to the public domain. I would also like to acknowledge all Doras Luimní funding bodies, including The One Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, ERF and The Sisters of Mercy.

The kindness of Sean O’Gradaigh by giving his time proof-reading the original thesis and to Dieudonne Ymedji for the inspiration and encouragement to address this issue were immeasurable. I wish to acknowledge Dr Siobhan O’Connor, Advocacy and Campaigns Officer, Doras Luimni who provided the opportunity and copy-edited this report and prepare it for publication and Leonie Kerins for proof-reading.

The support of Karen McHugh the CEO, and all staff and volunteers of Doras Luimni has been invaluable to enable me to provide the service highlighted in the thesis and address the needs of migrants in Limerick.

For further information about this or any of the work of Doras Luimni please contact:

Doras Luimní
Mount St Vincent
O’Connell Avenue
Limerick
Tel: 061 310328
Fax: 061 609960
Email: info@dorasluimni.org
Website: www.dorasluimni.org
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Demographic changes in Ireland

“In the modern world, migration is an inevitable aspect of life” and as Fanning et al. (2000:56) point out “the movement of peoples has contributed significantly to social and cultural diversity and is likely to continue to do so.” This is one of the most significant socio-cultural changes to have occurred since the advent of mass industrialisation and urbanisation in the middle of the 19th century. Over the past decade Ireland has become more diverse and the numbers of people coming from Africa, Asia, Eastern and Central Europe have increased considerably resulting in rapid demographic change at both national and regional level. Statistics from the 2006 census show 10.4% of the total population of the Republic of Ireland are foreign born (www.cso.ie). The majority of these come from EU accession states that is the eight states that acceded to the European Union on 1 May 2004. Also included are persons who have been recognised by the Irish government as refugees under the Geneva Convention of which Ireland is a signatory since 1956. Finally a smaller number of persons who have been granted leave to remain in the state by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform are included. While there are misconceptions regarding the numbers of people seeking asylum, it needs to be understood that only 10% of those who seek asylum in Ireland are granted refugee status. MacCormaic and McDonagh (2007) highlight the fact that “there are just over 8,000 recognised refugees living in Ireland, making them one of the State’s smallest categories of immigrant.” In 2005, 16,627 people “were granted leave to remain under a special application process for the parents of Irish-born children put in place after the Supreme Court 2003 Lobe and Osayande cases.” Coakley and MacEinrí (2006:2).

Refugees/Persons with leave to remain

For those who have sought asylum, the decision to leave their country of origin is a traumatic one; they do not choose to leave they are ‘pushed out’ by a number of factors. Prior to being granted refugee status, people who seek refuge are referred to as asylum seekers and go through a process during which time they are prohibited from engaging in paid employment. Ward (2002:77) maintains that “asylum seekers are extremely unsettled and their day to day lives are filled with uncertainty.” She goes on to say they experience feelings of isolation, apathy, helplessness and frustration at not being allowed to work. Their experiences due to lack of English as well as culture shock, and for some, trauma as a result of torture, make
their daily lives difficult (Ward 2002). This is echoed by Ryan et al. (2007:113) who state, “Persons who seek asylum face a range of restrictions on their personal freedoms that are not experienced by resident populations.” For the majority, the asylum process is lengthy, and the psychological impact of this, in addition to uncertainty of outcome, has a detrimental effect on those who eventually get refugee status or leave to remain. The difficulties encountered by those who are forced to seek refuge in another country are referred to in an article written by Liston (2008). He says “it takes enormous courage, strength of character and spirit, personal vision and sheer determination to come through the refugee experience.”

Persons who are granted refugee status have the right to reside in the state with the same entitlement as the indigenous population including access to education and employment, and can also seek permission from the Minister to have their families join them. Those with leave to remain status have some of the same rights as refugees, but they do not have the automatic right to family reunification. Parents of Irish-born children are permitted to remain in the state subject to certain conditions laid down by the Minister, one of these requirements being that they engage in the labour market. Those with leave to remain and Irish Born Child (IBC/05) status do not have the same entitlement to educational funding as refugees.

Refugees/Persons with leave to remain in Limerick

Under the system of direct provision, approximately 100 asylum seekers arrived in Limerick in 2000 and were accommodated in two hostels in the city centre. This number has grown considerably in the last eight years. As per the Reception and Integration Agency website’s September 2008 statistics showed there were 706 asylum seekers in direct provision accommodation in the three Limerick city hostels, one hostel in the county and one Meelick, Co. Clare (near Limerick). The residents of these hostels access service provision from Limerick City. This policy of dispersal according to Fanning et al. (2000:15), subjects asylum seekers “to a form of apartheid whereby there are compelled to live apart from the majority community.” A total of 7,062 of non-Irish residents were recorded as living in Limerick in the 2006 census (Kelly 2007), and while it is impossible to ascertain exact figures for refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick at present time, estimates based on local area data suggest approximately 1,500 people. Anecdotal evidence suggests on being granted permission to remain in the country the majority of people tend to settle in the location where they have resided while in the asylum system and because of this trend Limerick has become the home of many refugees/persons with leave to remain.
A body of up to date research already exists identifying challenges to accessing the labour market for this group at national and regional level (Coakley & MacEnirí 2007; Denayer & O’Túama 2008; Dunbar 2008). Research carried in Limerick by Phelan and Kuol (2005:17) showed “for many asylum seekers finding paid employment is a top priority as soon as they have received status”. Their research from 2004/05 was carried out at a time when the population of refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick was relatively small. The profile of the target group has changed since 2005 when 71% of those who took part in their research were male. Persons granted leave to remain under the IBC/05 scheme, the majority of whom are female, were not included in the 2005 study. For that reason this baseline research by Phelan and Kuol (2005:10) “is best understood as an accurate reflection of the challenges and needs” of refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick at that time. In a more contemporary and gender balanced study eighteen students and former students of Vocational Training opportunities Scheme (VTOS) at Limerick Adult Education College were invited to share their employment and “not surprisingly, the two greatest problems encountered are centred around language and work” (Kennedy et al. undated:3).

**Research rationale**

Prior to undertaking this study a review of the literature was carried out to identify the challenges and issues for refugees/persons with leave to remain. While racism was mentioned, predominant issues of concern appear to centre on education and employment. These inter-related issues are regularly highlighted in debates around integration of immigrants. In this regard Devine (2008) calling for the coherent development of policies states “we have much to learn from the mistakes that have been made internationally as well as what is being identified as best practice.” Also referring to the experiences of refugees in other countries, Conlon et al (2003) cited in (WRS 2003:21) note “that refugees have higher levels of unemployment than the general population in host countries.” This has also been the conclusion drawn from research at national level (Dunbar 2008).

The latest statistics from the CSO Quarterly National Household Survey for the second quarter 2008 give a figure of 24,800 unemployed non-Irish nationals (www.cso.ie). Almost everything in post-industrial society comes from the ability to pay your way and without an opportunity to engage in the labour market immigrants will become economically excluded...
and thus unable to integrate with the host community on equal standing. Ni Mhurchú (2007:31) notes that “procedures which hamper immigrants entering the workplace […] directly contravene the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016” the aim of which is to integrate newcomers into Irish society. Economic exclusion is not confined to gaining entry to the labour market. Denayer and Ó’Túama (2008:9), referring to labour market segmentation based on qualifications, suggest among the more marginalised in this situation are “immigrants, who are still culturally ill-equipped to enter the new, growing and flexible job market in any other way than from below.” They also found that some refugees have extra layers of exclusion “because of the ordeals they suffered, experience a wide range of problems which can impact on their ability to commit to training or work” (ibid p. 68).

In an effort to ascertain the current economic status of refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick, the author of this study carried out a micro telephone survey of thirty persons with refugee status in the city. The results showed approximately one third were in employment, the majority working as general operators in a multinational computer manufacturer, one third were unemployed, and the remainder said they were undertaking language tuition, despite having received permission to remain in the country a number of years previously. Previous writers have stressed the need for research to inform our understanding of trends (Watt and McGaughey 2006; Ni Mhurchú 2007). The central focus of this study therefore is to gain an insight into the specific experiences of refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick particularly in relation to their current economic status.

**Aims and Objectives**

The key objectives are to:

- Engage with refugees and persons with leave to remain in Limerick who are directly affected by barriers to participation in the labour market in order to understand the depth and nature of the problems they encounter.
- Empower the target group by allowing them to describe their experiences of accessing the labour market in Limerick.
- Inform our understanding of the need that exists among this population.
- Up-date previous research carried out in Limerick.
- Inform evidence-based policy and encourage policy makers to review current restrictive policies and procedures that create obstacles to accessing the labour market for
refugees/persons with leave to remain, so that they can implement change.

**Outline of the study**

Chapter one contains some background information on the demographic changes in Ireland, the asylum seeker/refugee experience and previous research carried out in Limerick. It also explains the rationale for the present study. The aims, objectives, and focus of the study are introduced in this section also. A review of the literature to establish what is already known was carried out and will be presented in chapter two. This will focus on current trends nationally and internationally in relation to immigrants and challenges that prohibit them from economic independence. Chapter three will explain the methodology adopted in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the research. In chapter four a profile of the target group will be given. Chapter five will share the findings from interviews with the target group in relation to education and emerging issues. Economic inclusion of the target group through employment will be explored in chapter six. Social and family issues that present challenges to accessing the labour market will be presented in chapter seven. Strategies adopted by the target group to counteract these challenges will be included in this section also. The concluding chapter will look at what has been learned from this study and reflect on future outcomes of current trends.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

An examination of the literature shows a wealth of data exists on issues relating to refugees/persons with leave to remain in Ireland much of which focuses on specific issues such as language, non-recognition of qualifications, integration, and racism. There are, albeit to a lesser extent, some studies that examined the educational and employment experiences of this group, and these show that the relationship between protection policy, individual experience, and employment, cannot be ignored. Some of the variables associated with having gone through the asylum process and the relationship between this and future prospects of successful integration in the labour market are referred to in existing literature.

Effects of the Asylum Process
Coakley and Healy (2007) refer to the destructive nature of life whilst accommodated in direct provision. Many have echoed this and state that former asylum seekers seeking employment encounter substantial difficulties (McLoughlin 2003; Dooley 2004; Constant and Zimmermann 2005; Coakley and MacEinrí 2007; and Dunbar, 2008). In research by Coakley and MacEinri (2007:13), one participant stated, “The length of time he spent waiting for permission to work eventually became a de-motivating factor in itself.” Similar issues were referred to in research by Coghlan et al. (2005:23) in which participants said “while they had useful skills now, the longer the delay in being able to utilise them, the more likely the skills were to be lost.”

Monks (2007:17) makes reference to “the economic costs of the under utilisation of migrants’ skills and knowledge.” In relation to refugees Ni Mhurchú (2007:36) believes, “there is an onus on the Irish State to understand the specific manner in which their professional futures will be secured as they have most likely fled persecution and will therefore encounter barriers to the labour market which are different than those experienced typically by economic migrants who have made a conscious decision to move abroad and seek employment in Ireland.” In their research Coakley and MacEinri (2007:13) found that “people’s hopes for a better life can be tied up with the idea of paid employment and work is therefore of fundamental importance to a person’s own feelings of worth and happiness.”

There appears to be a correlation between formal educational attainment and employability and findings from the literature showed this to be particularly relevant in relation to
immigrants. The literature reviewed highlighted language as a primary factor in relation to a person’s ability to access any type of service, and in particular, when seeking entry to the labour market. This was considered to be the greatest obstacle initially for refugees/persons with leave to remain when they attempt to secure employment.

**English language**

“The role of language as a barrier is a significant one and perhaps the most quoted one when it comes to questions of access and barriers to access” according to Fagan (2007:7). Media focus on this issue was also noted, for example O’Brien (2006) highlights the fact that there are now more than 167 languages used in Ireland. Previous studies have shown that many asylum seekers have no English language education prior to arriving in Ireland. “The acquisition of the language of the host country is identified” by Furnham and Bochner (1986) “as the most significant factor influencing the ability of the immigrant to adapt successfully to a new culture” (cited in Smith and Mutwarasibo 2000:22). This cannot be ignored as a reasonable knowledge of English is required to successfully navigate through Irish culture and society. Difficulties in acquiring language skills are compounded by the fact that asylum seekers are restricted to accessing limited language training whilst in the asylum process. These part-time courses according to Fanning et al (2000:51) “are unlikely in themselves to be sufficient to enable asylum seekers to achieve sufficient levels of oral and written fluency to enable them to undertake work at levels to which they were qualified in their countries of origin.”

In addition to language requirements, immigrants’ prior education is a key factor in enabling them to engage in the waged labour market in host societies.

**Educational attainment in country of origin**

Coakley and Healy (2007:1) state “the desire to be gainfully employed fulfils the most basic of human needs in that it allows for immigrants to hope for a life in Ireland that is better than the one they were used to in their country of origin.” Monks (2007:17) found that “about half of the immigrants have a third-level education qualification, compared to only 27 per cent of Irish nationals, but are not necessarily employed at a level that reflects their education status.” This is an interesting statistic in relation to one group of migrants who have come to Ireland in the “last number of years”, that is, migrant workers. In relation to migrants from non-EEA countries such as those who participated in research by Coghlan et al. (2005:8) there is a
distinct “failure to recognise education attainment, qualifications, or work experience gained in a non-EU country” hence they have problems accessing employment.

Difficulties in having qualifications and skills from country of origin accepted clearly constitute a significant challenge for immigrants in to-day’s knowledge based society.

**Recognition of qualifications**

It is a well-documented fact that many immigrants experience difficulties in securing employment with their qualifications from home and as a result are employed in jobs for which they are over qualified. Referring to a “15% wage gap for immigrants,” MacCormaic (2007) notes that “the wage disadvantage is concentrated among third-level graduates.” A review of the literature found two relatively recent studies focusing on the recognition of professional qualifications, Coghlan et al (2005) and Ni Mhurchu (2007). While Coghlan et al (2005:17) acknowledge that there are mechanisms in place to verify non-Irish qualifications they found “only two participants had heard of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.” This may be according to Ni Mhurchu (2007), because the service is not customer focused. She goes on to state that “it lacks transparency and consistency; both with regard to the recognition of qualifications and with regard to procedures for registration and accreditation” (2002:74). Participants in research by Coghlan et al (2005) felt that it was harder to get “African qualification” (sic) recognised by the Irish authorities but no distinction made between different African countries.

An additional barrier is highlighted by Dooley (2004) who states the long gaps in CV’s because of time spent in the asylum system results in some having to accept employment at a level that does not reflect their skills or qualifications. In addition to creating a situation of ‘brain waste’ and loss of skills to the labour market, it appears based on Dooley’s findings that some highly skilled refugees are forced to re-train causing unnecessary expenditure on the state. For this reason as evident in the literature many immigrants return to further/higher education to enhance their employability.

**Further/Higher Education**

The most up to date report on accessing further/higher education for non-Irish nationals is Warner’s (2006). In it she highlights the fact that “education is expensive for the state to provide, and that third level education is particularly so” (Warner 2006:8). It appears that
faced with language barriers and non-recognition of prior learning many refugees/persons with leave to remain attempt to address these issues through participation in education in Ireland. There are however many barriers to be surmounted in accessing education, in particular in relation to fees for third level education. Tanya Ward (2003) produced a report to assist educational providers in assessing the eligibility of non-Irish nationals for education. There have however been changes since then. For example Warner’s (2006:22) points out that the “Irish government took positive steps under the Equality Act 2004 to allow for grants at third level to be restricted to Irish and EU citizens.” Other barriers to education identified in the literature were admission systems which Coghlan et al. (2005:12) state “can be problematic for non-EU applicants.” There are a number of factors to explain this; for example the residency status of non-Irish students determines eligibility to access, as well as fees.

While re-training and education are seen as mechanisms to overcome barriers created by language and non-recognition of qualifications, the literature shows that past work experience and verification of references are equally important (Dunbar 2008).

**No Irish work experience/references**

In a study that explored the experiences of African women and their attempts to access the labour market in Ireland, Hegarty (2007) found that lack of Irish work experience and lack of Irish references constitute barriers to employment for African women. Dunbar (2008) referring to this situation from an employer’s perspective, found in addition to language proficiency employers stated that verifications of qualifications and past work experience of immigrants presents major obstacles for them. At an Employment Roundtable Workshop bringing employers and representatives of migrant groups together, the Director of the Refugee Information Service Josephine Ahern said, “it is the first time stakeholders will collaborate on practical solutions to the problem of employing professional migrants” (RIS). In addition to the difficulties for employers cited by Dunbar (2008), employers at the RIS workshop added ‘understanding and managing cultural differences’ to their list of concerns when employing migrants. The RIS (2008) “called on employers in public and private sectors of the economy to harness the professional skills [...] that migrants have to offer.” A similar recommendation was made by Dunbar (2008:73) who refers to the need to “address the under-representation of migrants within the public and civil service institutions.” A more
inclusive representative of immigrants in the public and civil service institutions may also serve to counteract perceived racism and discrimination.

**Racism and Discrimination**

In previous research by Coakley and MacEinrí (2007) they found that “Africans” in particular were finding it difficult to access the labour market. Such evidence indicates that those from sub-Saharan Africa find it most difficult to access the labour market. Dunbar (2008) made reference to the perceived discriminatory recruitment practice of employers and states that Africans believe they are discriminated against when attempting to access the labour market, but this he says, “is difficult to prove”. Hegarty (2007:9) referring to barriers to the labour market for African women states that “black African women experience a double burden of gender and racial discrimination”. Referring to discrimination experienced by Africans, Hegarty (2007) goes on to point out that “according to the ESRI (Nov 2006)” black Africans suffer more compared to Eastern Europeans and Asians. It appears from the foregoing literature that measures to counteract this type of racism and discrimination is lacking at policy level. It is noted that the Employment Equality Act indirectly affords protection to refugees and that the Government through its National Action Plan Against Racism Planning for Diversity 2005/2008 is committed to combating racism (D/JELR). However the question remains as to whether these measures alone will influence the mindset of employers. Reference to mindset of employers is made by Coghlan et al (2005) cited in Cotter and Dunbar (2008:41) who state “it’s not a question of changing a few rules, or of tweaking the existing system”, they say it is “a question of changing a mindset.” It appears from the literature that employers and authorities have not accepted that many immigrants are here to stay and there is a need for political vision to determine how immigrants will fit into Irish society in the coming years.

In addition to the forgone, the literature highlights other mitigating circumstances that contribute to economic exclusion, one of these being the loss of welfare on taking up employment.

**Taking up employment/loss of secondary benefits**

The literature suggests the withdrawal of welfare payments on taking up employment contributes to high levels of unemployment of migrants. It appears to be extremely difficult for those on low incomes to move away from welfare dependency. The literature showed that
refugees whose qualifications and previous experience are not recognised by employers are only offered low-paid work creating “a serious poverty trap that prevents refugees/asylum seekers with the right, from taking up employment” according to Brady (2002:27). Low paid work does not compensate for loss of benefits such as rent allowance and a medical card. There appears to be a real fear of loss of entitlements on taking up employment. This fear may arise from poor dissemination of information about rights and entitlements rather than lack of information. Coghlan et al. (2005:26) noted “what exists in practice […] is often the dissemination of contradictory and misleading information, resulting in the construction of unnecessary institutional barriers and obstacles.” In their research Coakley and MacEinri (2007:13) found the majority of participants would prefer not to have to rely on welfare and “find it extremely difficult to move beyond welfare dependency.” The research highlights “a bridging situation is required to help those who are willing to move off social welfare and into the realm of waged work” (2007:13).

Furthermore, it appears from the literature that immigrant women seeking to enter the labour market are faced with additional barriers due to the high cost of childcare.

**Childcare**

Little (2000) cited in Warner (2006:23) stresses “the importance of taking childcare needs into consideration when trying to ensure access to education for minority ethnic women.” Focusing on the ancillary costs associated with accessing employment Kennedy (2006:11) calls for the “removal of barriers to employment with strategies to promote childcare.” Likewise the NWCI (2006:4) draws attention to the fact that “despite recent progress in developing childcare policy and facilities, Ireland continues to trail behind its EU counterparts, particularly in terms of accessibility to affordable childcare.” Childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in Europe and parents here receive the lowest supports to cover these costs. Migrant parent could be particularly affected by this issue if they do not qualify for the child benefit payment and early childcare supplement.

However, Coughlan et al (2005) suggest that some migrants, including refugees, are fairly resilient people and previous studies have shown that more develop strategies to overcome barriers to accessing the labour market, for example ethnic entrepreneurship (Denayer and O Túama 2008).
Overcoming barriers to the labour market

There is visible evidence of the diverse economic strategies adopted by immigrants; the number of ethnic retail outlets in cities and towns around the country is just one example. Cotter and Dunbar (2008:27) found some “ethnic minorities tend to be more entrepreneurial than the rest of society”. Referring to the Equal/Emerge Programme “established to encourage and develop this entrepreneurial capacity” Dunbar (2008:66) states that “many of the migrants who participated” showed motivation and ability to succeed”. While Meehan (2007) suggests that ethnic minorities are motivated by necessity as well as opportunity, Cotter and Dunbar (2008:28) state they “switch to self-employment activities as a safety measure” to counteract discrimination and other hardships encountered when they attempt to secure employment. This is also the belief of Cooney (2007) cited in MacCormaic (2007) who states that, “many immigrants start businesses due to negative experiences – being unable to find work.” However it could be argued that migrants see niches in the market in Ireland that may not be identified by the indigenous community. In addition, Denayer 2008 (cited in Dunbar 2008) highlights other benefits beyond economic gain such as social status and role models for others in ethnic communities.

A further strategy adopted by those who either because they are prohibited from, or unsuccessful in, engaging in paid employment is to offer their services in a voluntary capacity.

Volunteering

In a study by Coghlan et al (2005:21) they found that “quite a few participants took up voluntary work in order to keep busy or to increase their skills”. Approximately one third of participants in Coakley and MacEinní’s (2006:40) research who were not engaged in paid employment were or had been, engaged in voluntary work. The majority were volunteering in the charitable sector, but also a number of people had “been engaged in volunteering activity with relevant commercial concerns.” The literature also suggests that participation in voluntary work is a strategy adopted to overcome the lack of ‘Irish work experience’. For example, Mbuga (2008:21) of AkiDwa African Women’s Network points out “if you want to get started, you need Irish experience and you need Irish references”, and she said they advise women to do voluntary work to overcome these issues. Fagan (2007:13) concurring with this suggestion saying it shows “the flexibility to move at great private expense towards
Volunteer work undertaken by immigrants is now being acknowledged outside of academic research. It is noted by Lawrence (2008) that “one in three people on the Volunteer Centre Ireland’s 2008 register are non-Irish.” Volunteer work was reported to be “one of the most effective means of counteracting racism and integrating ethnic minorities” (MacCormaic, 2007) as well as adding to the social capital of the immigrants.

While a wide body of research exists on the experiences of immigrants in Ireland over the past decade, it is necessary also to review the experiences of countries with a history of longer inward migration than Ireland. Reference to migrant’s experiences in the UK and other countries can also be found in the literature.

**International Comparison**

The E.U. Commission “has identified education as one of the key areas in EU policy on the integration of immigrants” according to Warner (2006:28). Despite this it appears that migrants within the EU tend to have lower educational qualifications and higher dropout rates than the indigenous populations. Warner (2006) suggests the reasons for this are because of language and cultural differences, as well as the relationship between education and employment and the absence of legislation to monitor discrimination and racism. In a U.K. study Parekh (2000) cited in Warner (2006:28) referring to educational pathways of minority ethnic students found that a greater proportion “entered into higher education after the age of 24 and from the further education sector rather than schools.” Reference was made to the cost of re-training refugees/persons with leave to remain in Great Britain. Pandya (2005) also cited in Warner (2006:29) “calculated the cost of the extra training needed in comparison to the cost of training them from scratch.” Figures quoted were from £1,000 to £12,000 for training as opposed to £250,000 to re-train for example, a refugee doctor (Warner 2006). Ni Mhurchú (2007) citing Brower (1999) referred to the substantial costs to the economy involved in the unnecessary re-training of immigrants with overseas education in Canada. The Australian government has according to Ni Mhurchú (2007), also quantified the loss to their economy due to the non-recognition of qualifications of overseas degrees that are reported to be substantial. It is difficult to make comparisons between the international and the current situation in Ireland because there is no specific reference to ethnic minority students in higher education in reports by the Department of Education and Science.
This review of the literature has offered an insight into some of the issues identified in previous studies that present difficulties for non-Irish national residents of Ireland. It sought to focus in particular on the unique difficulties encountered by those who had come through the asylum process and had been granted refugee status or leave to remain in the country. Emphasis was placed on reviewing research that focused on education and employment experiences for this group. The above reviewed literature shows that refugees/persons with leave to remain face a multitude of barriers when seeking to enter the labour market in Ireland. It appears that those who have succeeded in entering the labour market are predominantly employed in the low-skilled, casual sector due to non-recognition of qualifications and skills. There is ample evidence in the literature to show that Constant and Zimmermann’s (2005:103) suggestion that “immigrants with refugee [...] status have problems integrating into the labour market of the host country and achieve lower earnings during their stay” is in fact a reality for this group in Ireland at the present time. It is acknowledged that the literature reviewed referred to immigrants generally but efforts were made to highlight the specific barriers that impact of the refugees and people with leave to remain.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Having reviewed the literature there was an increasing awareness of the difficulties being encountered by immigrants in accessing education and employment in Ireland. In their research carried out in Cork, Coakley and MacEínrií (2007) found that up to 70% of refugees/persons with leave to remain were unemployed. These findings led to focusing the current research on former asylum seekers to establish whether their time in the asylum system contributed to subsequent difficulties in accessing the labour market. It was also evident from the literature that a need existed for a more up to date and in-depth enquiry into employability issues for the same group in Limerick, and this research aimed to fill the that gap. The experience of those already in employment was also of interest to the researcher and this was explored.

Coakley and MacEínrií (2007:16) suggest that some minorities “will have been over-researched” and draw attention to “the problem of ‘research fatigue’ that goes with it”. In contrast to this, Dunbar (2008:33) found, a number of “interviewees expressed gratitude for being allowed to express their opinions and for the opportunity to contribute to the research”. Participants in the present study appeared pleased to have someone interested in their experiences and a number of participants said “you can be our voice”. Coakley and Healy (2007:32) state that, “in the past, minority ethnic communities in Ireland have been subject to ‘top down’ research focused on the needs of the state, and not their own empowerment”. For this reason this research was framed by the desire to use the actual voices of the target group in as much as possible and to allow them to elaborate on issues that they feel were of importance. The aim as suggested by Floweredew and Martin (1997:74) “is not to be representative, but rather to give the researcher deeper insight into respondents feelings and attitudes”.

The analysis of the barriers to accessing the labour market for refugees/persons with leave to remain was of central concern to the research. Ni Mhurchú (2007:37) highlights the need to “dismantle barriers that are preventing migrant workers from gaining access to the Irish employment market”. Consideration was given to adopting a structured approach for the proposed research that would have produced easily analysed data. However in seeking to gain meaningful insights into the explanations for the high rate of unemployment among the target group in Limerick, the reliance on a questionnaire type survey would not produce the desired
result. Mindful of the fact that in seeking explanations for trends, theorists such as Kumar (2005) recommend adopting a qualitative methodology that allows for the production of nuanced data that would answer questions. It was understood that the use of unstructured interviews would allow the target group to “discuss the nature of the barriers to employment which they encountered in ways which could not be captured by quantitative methods” as recommended by Fanning et al. (2000:75). Having considered this method, operating within the time frame of the research this type of inquiry was not possible. In addition, analysis of data collected through the use of unstructured interviews was beyond the capacity of this study. As the aim was to produce empirical evidence gathered from participant’s lived experiences of their attempts to access the labour market, and in seeking a balance between what was desirable and what was the following method was adopted. A decision was made to use structured interviews with a set question-schedule. This would ensure that all participants were asked the same base-line questions while at the same time allowing them to voice their experiences that could be recorded and reproduced verbatim.

**Research Design**

Having decided on this method, a schedule of questions with sub-themes was prepared. This was influenced by survey design used in similar research in Cork by Coakley & MacEinní (2006, 2007). The survey was administered by the researcher on a one-to-one basis. To ensure that all participants are asked the same questions, the schedule comprised of a number of factual questions to get quantifiable data relating to the current employability status of the target group. In addition a number of open-ended questions were included and these allowed participants to expand on issues of particular relevance to their individual experiences.

The first set of themes put to interviewees focused on personal information. These included questions on nationality, length of time in Ireland, and current immigration status and produced a quantitative profile of the target group. The second set of questions sought information on education and qualifications of the interviewees. This section included questions on ability to understand/speak the English language. In the third section information on previous/current employment experiences including voluntary work were sought. The purpose of this section was to get an understanding of the skills/skills deficits of the target group. The final section was designed to elicit information on the extent of contact with local training/employment services.
Administration

According to Etter-Lewis (1996) the aim of an interview is to establish cooperation rather than dominance over the interviewee being central to the process, and this was borne in mind. Eyles (1988) cited in Valentine (1997:111) “describes an interview as ‘a conversation with a purpose’”. Interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview, anonymity was assured and for this reason all names have been changed. Permission was sought to tape the conversations; this allowed greater attention to be paid to subtleties as well as giving attention to how and what is being said and as recommended by Coakley and Healy (2007:30) allowed “for a nuanced analysis of the data to be carried out”.

However, it was noted, as cautioned by Valentine (1997:125) “in some cultures people do not like their voices to be recorded”. One potential interviewee appeared suspicious of the purpose of the study and declined to participate when she learned that interviews were taped. During the interviews one person requested that the tape be switched off while she explained a particular incident. A research diary was used to keep notes of key points raised in interviews and to document reflections on how each interview went. Questions were asked in a manner that did not appear to be of an inquisitional nature but rather in keeping with the purpose of this research, an opportunity for interviewees to explain, in their own words, their experiences of seeking employment in Ireland. The question schedule facilitated this approach while at the same time kept the conversation focused. It also allowed interviewees to raise issues that had not been considered by the interviewer. Mid-way through the field work it became evident that a greater wealth of information was shared when participants were asked to explain their experiences from the time they were given leave to remain rather than staying rigidly with the question schedule after some basic quantitative data had been obtained.

Intercultural difference between the interviewees and interviewer can lead to misunderstandings and it was necessary at times to re-phrase questions and also to seek clarification of terminology used, for example the expression ‘they kicked me’ (I was let go), ‘he expired’ (he went out of business), ‘working with’ (helping me to get work), and the Department of Family and Social Affairs was referred to as ‘social’. Many participants used terms such as ‘nationality’ and ‘colour’ rather than the word ‘racism’. It was also noticed that Africans referred to their ‘feelings’ while non-African interviewees were less forthcoming.
about emotional or psychological issues. This may be because with the exception of one, the interviewees from continents other than Africa, English language ability was limited. Language ability was a factor taken into account when selecting participants for this study as it was felt that participants might be more forthcoming about their experiences if there was no intermediary (interpreter). All interviewees had communicative English language skills.

It was expected that some interviewees might only say what they believed were the expectations of the researcher rather than the reality of their experiences, or be reluctant to divulge their particular status in the country. It did appear on two occasions that interviewees wanted to impress the researcher with what they saw as their successes to date, despite lack of evidence of any success. Contrary to expectations, there was no reluctance to give information about their individual status but the researcher had not considered that persons who now have Irish citizenship might object to being referred to as ‘refugees’. As all but one explained they are now Irish, and it was stated that public service employees regularly make this mistake.

Valentine (1997:124) referring to the need for sensitivity to cultural difference, and perceived power imbalance also highlights the fact that “gender, age and marital status are all aspects of a researcher’s identity that can limit access to information.” Mindful of this, the approach adopted during interviews was heavily influenced by previous interaction by the researcher with people from different cultural backgrounds. For example, Valentine’s hypotheses were evident to the researcher on a number of occasions when African men in particular, appeared surprised when asked about their age.

There was concern that interviewees might later be affected by having spoken about sensitive issues such as their families at home or their inability to secure employment despite having gained a third level qualification in Ireland. For this reason time was taken at the end of these interviews to seek re-assurance from participants that there were comfortable about what they had reflected on.

Recordings were transcribed daily, this allowed for perceived nuances that had been picked up through observation to be confirmed which may otherwise have been forgotten when analysing material later. In keeping with recommended practice from previous studies e.g. Dunbar’s 2008 interviews did not last more than one hour.
Sampling
The sampling method adopted was also influenced by previous research e.g. by Coakley and MacEinrí 2007 with the aim of identifying and engaging with as diverse population in the Limerick area as possible. The lack of a clear sample frame on the population under study rendered it impossible to engage in an adequate rigorous pattern of random selection. In their research Coakley and MacEinrí (2007) refer to the lack of accurate data on immigrants at regional level, and data protection restrictions that prevented them from constructing a reliable sample frame. Previous researchers had attempted to overcome this data issue by operating in conjunction with statutory organisations such as Ward in 2002 and non-statutory organisations as was the case for Phelan and Kuol in 2005. The present researcher was subject to similar restrictions as those of Coakley and MacEinrí (2007) with no precise information available on the numbers of persons in the target group in the Limerick area. In addition the sample from records of refugees kept by Doras Luimni, were not available to the present researcher due to data protection restrictions. It was however noted that Coakley and MacEinrí (2007:14) in their research choose ‘not to use’ sampling based on data held by statutory organisations which they suggest, would limit the scope of the research to a self selecting target group that could eliminate “those who do not seek out such services.” It appeared practical therefore to adopt a similar sampling method of the target population to that used in the Cork study to get what could be said to be a ‘typical’, rather than a ‘representative’ sample, of the overall population of refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick.

The fieldwork commenced towards the end of May 2008 and was completed within six weeks. Initial efforts to access members of the target group through language classes at Vocational Training Opportunity Scheme Adult Education College, as well as those studying at the two Post Leaving Certificate institutions in the city, proved un-successful, because the fieldwork coincided with academic year-end. One man who was sourced through this avenue contributed greatly to the insights of persons who having already been engaged in the labour market found it necessary to return to education because of inadequate language skills.

An attempt was made to access parents of non-Irish pupils in two city centre primary schools with a high concentrate of non-Irish pupils (Christian Brothers School and Presentation). A note was distributed through the school authorities to all non-Irish pupils inviting their
parents to participate in the study. This method elicited a small number of responses but when the researcher attempted to make contact with the parents by phone, it transpired that their levels of English language were insufficient to comprehend the purpose of the request (they thought they were being offered English classes), or to contribute in a meaningful way to the present study. The failure to access participants through this mechanism did serve to highlight an isolated group, e.g. parents of school going children who were unable to communicate in the language of their adopted country or it may have been that the wording of the note was beyond their comprehension.

A further avenue of access through faith-based organisations was considered in the expectation that this would have facilitated access to a diverse range of nationalities. Attendance by the researcher at religious ceremonies frequented by large numbers of non-Irish nationals did confirm that a large population of people from sub-Sahara Africa resided in Limerick. However, on further consideration it appeared unethical to approach total strangers attending religious ceremonies with a presumption based on their skin colour or complexions that they might fall within the target group sought.

Where to go from there? Preliminary attempts having proved unfruitful, contact was made with a number of refugees already know to the researcher. These contacts were anxious to offer their points of view on education and employment issues. There was also an element of trust because this cohort of participants not only understood the purpose of the research, but also realised that the researcher had a good understanding of the process they had gone through to get to a stage where they were allowed to remain in the country and engage in the labour market. This was in accordance with the theories of Valentine (1997:116) who states, “The strength of this technique is that it helps researchers to overcome one of the main obstacles to recruiting interviewees, gaining their trust”.

**Snowballing**

Through these initial contacts snowball sampling was used to gain access to a wider population. As absolute representation was not central to the design of the research, this method of contact opened access to otherwise ‘inaccessible’ people, and as Coakley and MacEinrí (2006:22) state is “a pattern of sound theoretical respondent selection”. However it became evident after some time that the majority of those recruited through this venue all had refugee status yet the researcher sought to access people with different levels of status.
Contact was then made by phone, with representatives from ethnic organisations in the Limerick branch of the New Communities Partnership (a national network of minority ethnic-led groups). While the literature states there are eleven ethnic-led groups in Limerick, the researcher found they are not all active. Through active members in some organisations, Nigerian, Cameroonian and Guinean for example, it was possible to access participants though stratified sampling. The limitations of relying on gatekeepers was taken into account, for this reason the researcher also attended two celebration for Africa Day on 24th May, through which other contacts were made in an informal setting.

Mid way through the fieldwork while there was obvious gender balance it was noted that the majority of participants to date came from sub-Sahara Africa. While this is reflective of the target population in Limerick, the need to include a cross-section of people from the target group was accepted. For this purpose the assistance of the local support organisation in Limerick Doras Luimni was sought. It was suggested that a note explaining the research purpose and invitation to partake be left in their reception area. There was only one response to this method of access but when this was brought to the attention of individual staff members in Doras Luimni, they were willing to recommend a number of clients whom they considered might be willing to participate in the study. This opened doors to a more diverse population, particularly from outside sub-Sahara Africa.

Analysis
Crang (1997:184) stresses that, “analysis should not be an after-thought, but needs to be included in early research plans”. While the research comprised mainly of qualitative material, there was also quantitative data to be analysed. The latter was categorisation and counting using spreadsheets that created a picture of the population and the issues of concern.

Interpretation of qualitative material was broadly based on grounded theory. The research method adopted produced an extensive amount of quotes and it was necessary for the writer to internalise their meanings and be selective in deciding what was practical to reproduce. Nuance data identifying where people saw themselves was sorted thematically using a colour coding system. This also facilitated the recording of themes and meanings. The researchers’ own thoughts and feelings from recordings in the research diary were added to the findings. It is acknowledged that findings can be influenced by the knowledge already acquired on the
research topic but as Crang (1997:185) points out this need not necessarily “say you ‘biased’ the material but to become aware of how it was produced.” In analysing the date is was acknowledged, as suggested by Valentine (1997:14), that researchers bring their own values and bias to the research and the need to “maintain objectivity in terms of both the research process itself and the conclusions drawn” were noted. Finally, having analysed the data and reproduced the findings the need to ‘do no harm’ was referred to by Ryan (1997) cited in (Warner 2006) was acknowledged. This chapter has outlined the methodology adopted for the present study and explained the reasons for the chosen method of research. The next chapter will give a profile of the research participants for the benefit of the reader.
CHAPTER 4: PROFILE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Sixty people participated in this research. The focus of the present research was to evaluate the various barriers and routes to education and employment for refugees and persons with leave to remain living in Limerick City. Having acknowledged that the target group themselves are in the best position to speak about these issues, a lot of consideration was given to the selection of the target group in order to get as illustrative as possible profile of the sample population. It was initially proposed to draw from a sample size of one hundred; however the parameters of this research deemed sixty as statistically sufficient to give a profile of the broad issues relating to education and employment that arise for the target population.

Immigration Status

The information contained in this report was taken only from people who have permanent residency based on having obtained refugee status (35 people), being the spouse of a refugee through family reunification (2 people) or leave to remain based on marriage to an Irish/ EU citizen (4 people). Also included in the research are persons who have been granted indefinite leave to remain in Ireland either by virtue of being granted humanitarian leave to remain (4 people) and parents of an Irish Born Child (15 people) (See figure 1).

Immigration Status of target group

![Immigration Status Pie Chart]

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Figure 1

Age and gender

In contrast to patterns in previous studies (Phelan and Kuol 2005; Coakley and MacEinirí
2006) the average age group of participants in this research was between 36 and 50 years (50% of the sample). When two people aged between 51 and 65 years were added, it showed that 53% of those who participated in the research were over the age of 36 years. Only four people who took part in the research were under 25 years, of the remainder, twenty-four fell within the 26 to 35 year age group. (See figure 2).

**Percentage of target group by age**

![Percentage of target group by age](image)

**Figure 2**

The gender difference in this study was almost insignificant with 32 males (53%) slightly outnumbering the 28 females (47%). This is similar to gender balance in research carried out by Coakley and MacEinrí (2006) in Cork, and in stark contrast to Phelan and Kuol’s (2005) study in Limerick where 71% of their sample were males.

**Country/Continent of Origin**

Participants who took part in this research came from 22 different countries of origin the largest number being from countries in West Africa (37) (see Table 1). People from other parts of the African continent formed the next largest (14) while the remaining nine came from Asia (3), Middle East (6), Eastern Europe (1), and the West Indies (1) (See Table 1).

**Participants Interviewed by Nationality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo Kinshasa</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1

Although ten people (17%) in the research had naturalised as Irish citizens the issues and barriers they encountered in accessing education and employment were influenced by their prior status of Refugee or having leave to remain. This table reflects the diversity of the target group in Limerick with people from West African countries dominating.

Length of Residency in Ireland

The length of residency in the country varied from ten years to two years with the vast majority living in Ireland for over five years. Of interest to the present study is the fact that fifty people (83%) have resided in Limerick since their arrival in the country while ten others (17%) moved to Limerick after being granted status. Of particular relevance to this research is the length of time that participants have had permanent residency or leave to remain as this brings with it the right to partake in education/employment. (See figure 3).
The relatively high percentage shown to have received residency three years ago can be explained by the fact that fourteen (66%) of the twenty-one people who received residency in 2005 were granted leave to remain under the Irish Born Child/05 scheme. Only one person in the target group had been granted leave to remain prior to 2005 on becoming the parent of an Irish born child in 2003.

Having introduced the research participants the next chapter will focus on the experiences of the target group in relation to access to education in Ireland.
CHAPTER 5: EDUCATION

The Refugee Act (1996) guarantees people with refugee status the same rights to access education in Ireland as Irish-born citizens (Phelan and Kuol 2005). Although it has been suggested in previous research (Ni Mhurchú (2007), Healy (2006), Coakley and MacEinrí (2006) and (2007) that immigrants generally tend to be a highly educated group the findings in this particular study showed a number of participants had commenced third level education, but not all had completed their studies prior to leaving their country of origin.-The profile of the target group shows that those who have high levels of education from their country of origin are not employed in occupations that reflect their educational attainment. Interviewees expressed the opinion that it is necessary to have skills or qualifications to gain entry to the labour market in Ireland. One of the participants, Thomas, illustrates this by stating; “you have to go to university in Ireland to get into jobs but he said many are not willing to pay that price”.

The data in this section is presented under the following headings:

- Education in country of origin.
- Recognition of qualifications.
- Participation in education in Ireland.
- English language.
- Further/higher education.
- Obstacles to education access.
- Overcoming obstacles to accessing education.

Education in Country of Origin

The majority of participants had completed second level education in their country of origin: twenty individuals (33%) had attended university; sixteen had completed their studies to diploma, degree, or in two cases, master’s level. Four people did not complete their university courses. A further nine (15%) had undertaken post-secondary education; six completed their studies at this level. Of the twenty-eight people (47%) who had gone to second level, two did not complete their studies, and three (5%) had received primary education only. Nine people (15%) said they had to leave their country before completing their studies, it is no surprise therefore that the aspirations of this group were to complete their education upon receipt of refugee status/leave to remain in Ireland. (See Figure 4)
However there are obstacles for refugees/persons with leave to remain when they attempt to exercise their right to education in Ireland. One deterrent is the three-year residency rule requiring refugees to pay international student fees until they have been resident in this country for three years (Warner 2006). Other difficulties highlighted by Warner (2006) are restrictions based on status e.g. refugee/leave to remain, high fees, access to information, and lack of English language. Despite these obstacles and contrary to the findings of a study carried out by Coakley and MacEinrí (2006) in Cork, the present research found a high engagement amongst the target group in further/higher education in Limerick.

Recognition of Qualifications

The non-recognition of qualifications from countries outside Ireland is well documented (Ni Mhurchú (2007) Coghlan et al (2005)). Refugees who flee their countries are unlikely to have documentary evidence of their educational attainment and therefore encounter difficulties in proving prior learning. Difficulties abound as a result. The National Qualifications Authority Ireland offers some assistance here. However, even this is imperfect. The present study found participants who had received status in 2002, were unaware at the time of the NQAI and cited “lack of information about procedures to have qualifications recognised”. Furthermore many of those who had their qualifications recognised by the NQAI found their degrees were downgraded. Martin and Martha, a person with refugee status and a person with IBC/05
Barriers to the Labour Market for Refugees and Persons with leave to remain in Limerick

Helen O’Grady

Doras Luimni

status respectively illustrated this common experience:

“I sent there my degree from home but we have not the same system. I have a degree, I stay 5 years at college and I did Rural Development, but here they said no, in Ireland system it is a diploma.” Martin.

“I send my certificate from home to NQAI and they said your qualification compares to level 6 in Ireland and to get a diploma I would have to do two years at UL.” Martha.

This experience can be unsettling, especially when contrasted with the more benign regimes in place in other countries. Having encountered difficulties in registering his Nigerian qualification with the Institute of Engineers in Ireland, Tom explained, “it was easier for me to get registered in the UK, I am a member of the Institute of Engineers in the UK.” He went on to explain that he sought registration while he was studying “because it was easier to get in as a student.”

In this light, it is unsurprising that Dunbar’s (2008:52) research found that “employers appeared to favour qualifications gained in Ireland more so than those obtained abroad”. This might explain why many immigrants choose to repeat their education in Ireland. Mary from Nigeria, currently studying at third level in Limerick explained the rationale behind this when she states:

“Being a refugee, to have a good job you need very good qualification, so Africans have to be skilled to get work. When you have an Irish qualification there is no way someone will stop you.”

Even then, difficulties can be encountered. Eric from Syria, despite having an Irish qualification found it impossible to secure meaningful employment in Limerick. He blames this on his potential employers’ perception his heritage.

“The Irish Government is spending €25,000 per year on students in each college, if I study for four years they spent €100,000 to educate me in addition to the grants I receive.—So why are they not using me, they spent over €100,000 for me to be a
Carmel whose degree from home was recognised for the purpose of studying found that she was not entitled to financial support to study at post-graduate level because of her status. She is caught in a situation whereby her degree from home is not recognised for employment purposes, but it prevents her being funded to get an Irish qualification. Unable to have their qualifications from home accepted here participants are unable to enter the labour market in positions that takes full advantage of their prior learning and find it necessary to return to education in Ireland.

**Participation in Education in Ireland**

Only seven people (12%) of those who took part in this study had not pursued any form of education in Ireland. At the time the field work was carried out, twenty three people (43%) who had taken the education route had either recently completed third level education (5 people), are currently registered as full time students (15 people), or were awaiting acceptance to third level colleges in September this year (3 people). The majority were graduates of, or are currently studying at Limerick Institute of Technology, (11 people), while (8 people) were graduates of, or studying at, University of Limerick, all at under graduate level. In addition one person had just completed a post-graduate course while another is currently pursuing a Master’s research programme. Twenty people were attending or had attended VTOS and or PLC colleges; another six had undertaken part time courses at fee-paying colleges in addition to engaging in paid employment while four people had completed FÁS courses (See Figure 5).
Barriers to the Labour Market for Refugees and Persons with leave to remain in Limerick

*Participation in Education in Ireland*

For many of the target group the route to education commenced with their need for language acquisition.

**English Language**

Language barriers emerged repeatedly as being the greatest obstacle initially for immigrants attempting to access any type of service, in particular to compete in the labour market on an equal footing with the indigenous population. From an employer’s perspective, according to two studies carried out in 2000 and 2001 by the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), the main barrier to employment for immigrants was deemed to be language barriers (Guerin 2002).

Twenty-nine people (48%) cited English as their daily spoken language, twenty having come from countries were English is the official language. The principle most commonly spoken languages among the target group in this study are English (20) and French (11). Seventeen other languages are spoken daily by the participants: Arabic (5), Ibo (3) Ewe (2), Lingala (2), Kiluba (2), Twi (2), Urdu (2), Yoruba (2), Farsi (1), Kirundi (1), Ndebele (1), Pashto Dari (1), Persian (1), Rwandan (1), Russian (1), Somali (1) and Swahili (1).
Four separate bodies in Limerick offer free English language training. The Adult Education College through VTOS provide full-time courses for refugees and twenty of the thirty-one (52%) who needed language tuition, had availed of this service. The VEC also offer part-time accredited language classes for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Doras Luimni who cater for the largest numbers rely on volunteers to provide training, are unable to offer accredited language tuition. English language classes are offered to parents in a number of primary schools in the city through Community Education programmes. The Community education classes are unaccredited and offer one hour to one and a half hours language tuition per week. Doras clients are informed about their language classes through their drop-in centre and out-reach work. Language tuition at VTOS and VEC according to participants are either sourced through word of mouth [from friends], or through information provided by Doras. There is no co-ordination between these organisations and this creates a situation whereby some learners avail of classes in more than one organisation whilst other learners are not enrolled in classes that best suited to their needs in relation to future careers or aspirations.

Explaining his decision to acquire English language skills rather than seek employment on being granted refugee status, Arthur, a law graduate from Cameroon, states:

“I am interested to go school because when I came to Ireland for me it was a very, very difficult period. For the first time when I have interview [for refugee status] my English was better than the translator they gave to me.”

This is a serious issue because as Watt and McGaughey (2006:156) pointed out “people have the right to equality in service delivery and interpreters are an important tool in allowing people who do not speak English well to achieve that right”.

There was a general perception that without English language it was difficult to get work, even in factories. For example, Nina from Sierra Leone explaining why she herself got a job and her French speaker friend did not states “they didn’t take her because she cannot really express herself, in her country they do not speak English.” Ben and Herbert both work in different factories and they consider English proficiency is not essential because according to Ben “in factories people don’t speak to one another so you don’t need good language.” Supporting this Herbert explained that it is not necessary to have good English “because we have people who speak French and they help out.” Others cited language as being a problem
only when one sought skilled employment. Referring to language difficulties, Joyce made the following point “it shouldn’t be such a very big issue” because she states, “there are so many free English classes available.

Difficulties can also arise when people try to access full time language training. Three participants with refugee status explained that they were refused entry to full time language classes because they did not meet the criteria for entry to VTOS. John from Afghanistan explains

“I went to see if I can get full time English but they told me I can’t because I have to be 21. I was really sad because they said there is nothing they can do for me, I have to wait two years.”

The security of the social supports and the reality on the ground which prevents a person accessing employment with limited language ability endorses Warner’s (2006:51) study which acknowledged that this cohort of people, those aged between 18 and 21 encounter many difficulties one being they “are never eligible for VTOS and rarely for BTEA.” (Back to Education Allowance).

Adam encountered difficulties when he attempted to enter the University of Limerick as a mature student. He was refused on the grounds that his level of English language was insufficient. Expressing his anger he explains:

“The problem was not because I am from Africa that I couldn’t get into UL but because I do not come from an English speaking country. I was angry because the criteria for entry says when you are over 23 you can apply as a mature student but they don’t tell you that if you are over 23 and your English is bad – that should be written to make everything clear.”

Interestingly several participants from English speaking African countries having studied at PLC level also encountered language difficulties they had not foreseen such as difficulties in completing academic assignments and despite finishing their courses three of them failed to get a qualification. Whereas Lydia who intends to pursue a career in nursing states, “I will go to school in September to top up my English first.”
Formal language training was not everyone’s choice, a number of participants explained they acquired language skills through interaction with native English speakers and/or through employment. Theo from Afghanistan for example states:

“I learned English from people in Ireland, not from school, and from the people in the hostels. I try to live with different people that do not speak my language so that I can learn from them.”

Others said they wanted to learn English and earn money at the same time. A number of those who had gone directly into employment on receipt of being granted refugee status/LTR later re-assessed their positions. Due to their lack of adequate linguistic ability and in some instances securing only low paid employment on a contract basis, they made a decision to return to education when their contracts ended in the hope of becoming more employable.

**Further/higher education**

This study found a high level of attendance at VTOS and PLC colleges. Participants referred to the value of these courses as a mechanism of obtaining an Irish qualification, albeit at certificate or diploma level. Explaining the decision to return to education Mary, and Joyce respectively illustrate this common experience when they state:

“When my three-month contract wasn’t renewed I felt disheartened and I decided to get myself an Irish education.” Mary.

“I was working but the pay was small, with those little jobs, you cannot survive.” Joyce.

Successful completion of PLC courses enhances the possibility of access to third level education and also helps overcome the three-year habitual residency rule to qualify for fee exemptions at third level. The majority of participants in this study have been in the country for over three years so the residency rule was not an issue.

A small number of participants went directly into third level education in Ireland having failed to get work in their own field. Adam from Ghana explained his decision to study at this level. He states:
“I could not find myself going to bury my skills in a factory”. I had a degree in marketing before and the only way I can try to get a good job would be through education”. I noticed there is a lot of young Irish graduates in that area so I thought to myself it would be difficult for a foreign national coming in to a whole new system and I decided to go into something else.”

Emma and Lucy, both from Cameroon choose different paths. The long-term benefits of further education influenced Emma’s decision; she states “what was going on in my mind was its better for me to suffer now than experience difficulty later.” Lucy chose to seek employment rather than education states, “some us were a very big age when we come and we come to do work, not everyone wants to go back to school.”

Obstacles to educational access
For the target group of this study the path to education is paved with obstacles. Firstly, almost all participants referred to the lack of career guidance on getting refugee status/leave to remain on the options available to them relative to their status. Arthur, a refugee and currently studying law at the University of Limerick shared his experience.

“When I got refugee status I didn’t have any advice on how to go to college even though that was what I wanted. I foolishly went working, losing my time, getting very low wages, €260 for 36 hours. In time I found a way to go to college, the frustration that came to me originally was if I had somebody to advise me to go to college, I would be finished with university to-day.”

Education systems differ from country to country and because of this Joyce and Theo encountered difficulties. Joyce who is currently studying at third level now regrets the line of study she choose because she said “you don’t know what the outcome will be if you choose one course over another,” while Theo also a third level student complained that “information is sometimes written in a manner that people either because of their own lack of education or linguistic inadequacies cannot comprehend.” Warner (2006:18) acknowledged that students have difficulties in accessing the relevant information. She states “even where potential students thought they had the correct information, this was very often not the case”. The problems associated with accessing information in relation to third level education were
referred to by a number of participants who cited the need for a single information centre for the three colleges in Limerick: the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College of Education and Limerick Institute of Technology.

For refugees/persons with leave to remain, the decision to partake in full time education is not an easy one. Participants drew attention to the intricacies involved in funding for further/higher education. Coakley and MacEoin (2006:36) note that, “an individual’s eligibility for receipt of educational grants and allowances is likely to define their overall level of access to education.” In the present research Karl illustrates some practical difficulties. He states:

“I really think that one difficulty is that people do not know about entitilements. I consider the Government hasn’t focused on the immigrants concerning education.”

The impact of this affected Ann who states:

“I couldn’t get the work so I just think about going back to college. I went to university for a short while but had to drop out because of financial difficulties. I couldn’t get ‘Back to Education’ to support me.”

A number of people referred to similar situations when they tried to up-grade their skills. BTEA is the main financial support for those wishing to pursue further/higher education in Ireland. There are nuances in entitlement criteria for this funding, e.g. to undertake a PLC course and retain welfare support students must have been in receipt of welfare payments for six months, and be in receipt of welfare payments for twelve months to undertake a third level course, immediately prior to commencing study. Time spent in direct provision “can count toward the qualifying period for BTEA provided an entitlement to a relevant Social Welfare payment is established before the commencement of an approved course of study” (City of Limerick VEC 2008:7). However delays in processing of applications for Back to Education Allowance on receipt of refugee status result in some instances in refugees having to remain on Supplementary Welfare Allowance for long periods during which time they will lose welfare supports if commence their studies. Alphonsus for example who received refugee status in October, too late for entry to academia that year, the current restrictions placed him in a position whereby he had to remain unemployed until the start of the next
academic year in order to avail of further or higher education. Others who, for one reason or another, found themselves unemployed and wanted to up-grade their skills were in the same position. One of these was Michael who states:

“It’s a bit tricky. This waiting system create a lot of problems, it discourages people who are willing to work because when the factory work close they cannot go to college.”

Supporting this, Fred said:

“It’s difficult for me to go for a job while the same time I have to be unemployed to qualify for the course. I don’t like to be on social.”

Referring to another support for students, the Higher Education Grant which includes payment of fees, the criteria for qualifying for this was deemed to be ‘un-fair’ from the perspective of participants. Pamela who is parenting alone said “talking about the grant, it’s not fair because we are all struggling and all trying to contribute in whatever way we can.” Persons with leave to remain, and those with IBC/05 status are ineligible for this grant which they said “is a big problem” for them. Participants explained the inconsistencies regarding payment of the registration fee with some IBC/05 parents having had to pay the entire amount themselves, while others said they learned from friends, that their fees had been subsidised by the Welfare Officers. Highlighting these difficulties Annette said, “if you know your entitlements you can claim them but if you are unaware of your entitlements Welfare won’t bring them to your attention.”

A further nuance in funding criteria was referred to by two single parents. Carmel, a full time student at third level explained that her Welfare Officer informed her if she secured employment during the holidays not only would she “lose her welfare entitlements” for that period, but also there was no guarantee that her Lone Parent Allowance would be reinstated for the following academic year. In Michael’s case having secured employment directly related to his studies for the holiday period, his Welfare Officer told him that he would either “have to cease employment or lose all his entitlements.” In direct contrast to this, students who are funded by BTEA are expected to participate in paid employment during the holidays and can also participate in part-time paid employment during the academic year without
having their allowances cut off.

Participants were asked if they availed of financial supports administered in the various colleges and not for the first time in this study, difficulties in accessing information were referred to here. Some said they obtained this information from friends but this should not be necessary because as Nina points out “it is in the handbook and you have to go through it.” On the other hand Mary said:

“I heard about it at orientation but I didn’t get it the first year, I think if I go they might say ‘oh they come again refugee people’ so I didn’t ask.”

The Mature Student’s office at LIT was praised for its pro-activeness in drawing attention to supplementary sources of funding for mature students.

Some people were unaware of the Millennium Grant administered in Limerick by PAUL Partnership, Limerick’s local partnership company, others pointed out that they were ineligible because of their address. In Limerick, only people who live in particular areas of the city fall within the eligibility range for this funding and not necessarily the most disadvantaged areas/people. Inquiries revealed this is the position in Ennis and in other parts of the country also. However, despite all these barriers there was evidence of resilience and determination by participants who had made the decision to further their education.

**Overcoming the barriers to accessing education**

In their research Coghlan et al (2005:7) state that, “refugees, asylum seekers and migrants tend to be fairly resilient and resourceful people”. Over time and through social networks people have developed a range of strategies to meet the criteria required to qualify for BTEA. Instead of remaining unemployed to qualify for BTEA two people availed of courses offered by FÁS thereby adding to their skills. Warner (2006:13) also highlighted this situation that she says, compels people to do “inappropriate and unwanted FÁS courses” in order to remain eligible for BTEA.

The determination to further their education was evident as several participants explained that having failed to gain entry to higher education through one access point they re-applied via other routes. Mary and Sarah explained how they overcame the barriers to enter third level
“I applied through the CAO for the second time because I didn’t get a place for nursing last year so this year I also applied to do Leaving Certificate with VTOS in case I’m turned down again.” Mary.

Sarah after completing a one-year pre-nursing course failed to secure a place on a degree course for nursing because, according to Sarah:

“They said they had to take Irish students first, then EU students so I decided to do Social Studies at LIT instead.”

Several full-time students explained they work 30-hour shifts in a multinational computer manufacturer at weekends in order to support their families. When asked if they had considered studying part-time participants stated that fees for part-time study are beyond the means of those who are dependent on welfare, and said there are no financial supports for part-time study. In addition the majority of those already in employment are engaged in shift work, thus part-time study is not an option for this group. One participant, Thomas, a single man whose income from full-time employment enables him to pay the fees for a part-time course, works straight days. Having already completed a full time Degree in Electronic Engineering at LIT and failing to get as he put it “a relevant job” because he said “there are fewer and fewer jobs relation to that” switched to “Manufacturing Technology, which I am doing in the evenings just to get something to suit the market.”

On the other hand, in an effort to overcome welfare dependency Annette a nurse from Nigeria who is an IBC parent attempted to up-grade her skills but found it impossible to pay the fee for part-time study (€7,000) for one year. Unable to meet the fees and cover the expenses for her family while reducing her working hours to attend college, Annette abandoned her ambition to work as a nurse in Ireland despite having worked in that profession for ten years in her own country. To-day Annette is unemployed and feels that her skills are being wasted.

**Conclusion**

It is evident from the participation level in further and higher education that refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick place high value on educational attainment. Education is
seen as a mechanism to overcome long term welfare dependency or employment in low skilled, low paid sectors. Having been given a second chance, all participants appeared anxious to move on with their lives and, for a variety of reasons, many sought to avail of opportunities to up-grade their skills through education. Generally this decision was made having failed to get prior educational qualifications accepted by employers, to access the labour market, or looking ahead to the long-term outcome of re-training.

The correlation between language proficiency and labour market participation was acknowledged. The findings show that confusion and uncertainty abounds in respect of eligibility for education funding and entry criteria to the various educational institutions. This, in some way, is perpetuated by the fact that eligibility for entry as well as financial support is ‘status relevant’. The lack of an educational and employment focussed central advice centre or source results in reliance on information sourced through social networks that can be misleading, or misinterpreted and adopted in a manner that suits the recipient. While not exclusive to refugees/leave to remain participants referred to the welfare restrictions imposed on lone parent students that, they said, not only prevent them from gaining valuable work experience, but also from working towards becoming welfare independent. While part time study is one mechanism for up-grading skills, participants considered the cost of part time courses to be prohibitive as many of them are living on welfare which they say only meets their daily needs.
“CSO figures show foreign nationals filling 90% of new jobs in past year” according to Tansey (2008). For those who have come through the asylum process having been denied the right to work while their applications were being processed, once granted Refugee status/leave to remain the possibility of securing employment is prioritised second only to finding accommodation according to Phelan and Kuol (2005). Despite the aspiration of many to join the group Tansey reported on, that was, to get employment immediately, the participants of this research found it was not easy to go directly into the labour market in Ireland.

While many of participants in this study were currently, or had previously completed further education in Limerick, a number of them had also been engaged in the labour market. At the time of this research 20 people (33%) said they were actively engaged in the labour market with only eight people (13%) in full time employment, six in manufacturing industries and two employed in a customer service call centre. The remainder were either working in the ‘care’ area or behind the scenes in retail outlets on a part-time basis. This study found those who were in employment were generally working at a level that did not complement their skills and talents. Referring to these situations, Ni Mhurchú (2007:68) points out “if immigrants are confined to low-paid unskilled jobs they will not fully contribute to Ireland’s economy”.

The data in this section is presented under the following headings:

- Accessing the labour market.
- Racism and discrimination.
- No Irish work experience.
- Participation in the labour market.
- Racism and discrimination in the workplace.
- Friends.

**Accessing the Labour Market**

Kennedy (2006:10) suggested that “those who are out of work are often individuals who
experience multiple forms of disadvantage” for a variety of reasons, including discrimination. While a number of participants in this research felt they were being discriminated against by virtue of their ‘colour’ or ‘race’, Majella from Cameroon referred to the affects of having being in the asylum system. Majella cited the barriers she faced when attempting to secure employment:

“Language, no Irish reference and the third difficulty is when you come into this country and you stay one year, two year in a hostel and it is really very hard to explain in an interview to an employer what you did in those two years because most of them they don’t understand, it really effects you.”

All of those interviewed agreed that for refugees/persons with leave to remain the first job is very hard to get. As Thomas said, “when they give us refugee status that is not enough.”

It was generally felt that language posed the greatest difficulty when attempting to secure employment, in particularly when attending interviews. A number of participants felt that Irish people would not hire Africans because of their ‘accent’. This issue has been noted in previous studies as, E.G. Noonan (2007) states, “despite fluency in language, even a slight accent suggesting that the candidate was from an immigrant community, made it less likely that they would be called for interview according to the findings of an International Labour Organisation”

Two participants from Congo, Josette and Gwen referred to attempts made by them to secure employment in positions that required French language speakers. Josette states:

“I was looking for customer service, sometimes they say looking for a native French speaker, you see not from Congo or Cameroon, but from France. When you call they say we want French person, maybe they want a French native. I have tried for some jobs but you get tired.”

Attempting to overcome a similar situation when Gwen applied for a job as French speaker she did not say on the application form that she was from Congo “because if I said I was African they wouldn’t take me so I say I am French.” This experience can be degrading and many African participants believed that language is used as an excuse for discriminating
Racism and Discrimination

A recurring theme during this study was racism and discrimination because of colour or race. African participants in particular felt they were discriminated against because of their colour. The following statements from Emma, Violet and Peter support this belief.

“In Limerick I think it is because of your colour, your skin, racism that is a big problem here. Sometimes when you go for a job the person they don’t even want to look at you.” Emma.

“When I got into the office you could see from her face that she was looking for excuses that were not there.” Violet.

“It might be easier to get a job in Dublin because you rarely see a black person working in an office or in a bar in Limerick; they seem to be doing only cleaning or factory jobs.” Peter.

Despite these experiences some participants like John were more pragmatic about the perceived discrimination based on colour. For example he states:

“I feel that the companies are not really racist, it could be a part, but put it this way, giving a job to a black or a foreigner, companies are looking at the future of the company thinking how long is this man going to be here for. It is more suitable for an Irish [person] because they will be here for more years, but giving to a foreigner that doubt will be still there.”

On a different level making a comparison with his experience of working in the USA Michael states:

“They don’t care what is your name (sic), how you look like what is your religion, they treat you as a person if you are qualified for the job. In Ireland the reality is who you are is important. When I send my CV I don’t mention what is my status, citizenship, I write Irish. I’m not black. I know they [employers] look at the name, so
why would they choose someone with a different name over an Irish name. I totally agree with the logic of things, why would they choose me over an Irish born person, but what should I do after four/five years of study, accept factory work?

Maurice highlighted some practical difficulties. He states:

“I have applied to so many companies with my qualifications and I have seen a lot of bias. There was a time I was applying to a company they said they only want Irish or EU nationals for that position so in their form there was no space for legally resident migrants. It was through an electronic process but there was no way for anyone outside of the EU to apply. The form also stated that they were an equal opportunity employer.”

Several participants felt they were not competing for entry to the labour market at the same level as others. When asked who the ‘others’ were, James said “students who graduated with me, Irish.” It depends on what you are looking for Mercy said:

“If it is factory it is OK they can train you, but working like ‘carers’ you need a lot of education and training it’s not as if they can train you for a day like the factory.”

There was general agreement that if a person was willing to put aside their previous education and experience, they could get employment in factories. The perception that factories are full of “Africans” was illustrated by Mary who states:

“They don’t care who comes in they just need people to do the job. I don’t know why people who aren’t working don’t work in factories.”

There were strong feelings that competition from EU workers since 2004 exacerbated the situation for participants of this study when seeking employment in Limerick. The following comments from Nelson, Carmel and Barry all of who were at the time attempting to enter the labour market illustrate these feelings.

“I think it’s since the Polish came, it was easy before but now there is [sic] many people from outside the country and when you go to ask for a job they say first Polish
people and when you are black it is very hard.” Nelson.

“There is a lot of immigrants here in Ireland [EU], and you can say some kind of discrimination, you see people they go in for a job and there are Africans who have good qualifications and someone from EU is successful even though their English is not as good but still the ones from EU can get the job.” Carmel.

“Now you have people from Poland working in [smaller company], they need jobs too. It is easier for them to get jobs than Africans but they are not staying they are working here but they go back home and we, we are living here, we cannot go home, that is the difficult we have.” Barry.

A few participants stated that they believed EU workers were willing to accept less than minimum wages and bad working conditions because they said, EU workers do not intend to stay in Ireland permanently, and are only here short-term to make money before returning home. When Margaret, who considered she was discriminated against in favour of EU workers when seeking employment was asked if she had considered taking her complaint to the Equality Authority replied:

“When you are a student with two kids you don’t want problems and you don’t go ahead with those things. I was overburdened with college work at that time, that is why I didn’t take it up with anyone.”

She did agree however that there might have been other issues preventing her from securing employment, for example no Irish work experience.

No Irish work Experience

While those who recently sought employment had attributed their lack of success to competition from EU workers, participants who had been in the country before 2004 spoke about the barriers that always existed. Having no Irish work experience was cited as being the second only to language as the most common barrier to the labour market. Moji expressing his frustrations said:

“When I get my status the Minister send me a letter to tell me I can get any job like
Many participants asked how they were to prove themselves if they were not given an opportunity to do so and were frustrated that their prior work experience or skills were not accepted here. Participants pointed out that while they might not have professional qualifications from home, they have skills and prior work experience. Explaining the difficulties in having these accepted Martin said:

“They expect you to spend four years at college here learning what you have been doing for the last ten years at home. They don’t believe that Africans can do the job.”

Having encountered these difficulties it is unsurprising that a number of participants suggested there should be a mechanism for assessing skills. It is accepted that some skills may not be fully transferable; for example many of the interviewees stated they had been involved in business enterprise but specific to the context of their country of origin for example “market trading”. This might explain why such a high number of participants had to diversify or pursue new careers when they came to Ireland.

A small number of participants had an opportunity to overcome this difficulty because work experience was an integral element of their course of study. UL students do eight months work experience in the third year of their courses. One benefit of this experience highlighted by participants was the possibility of securing an Irish reference, and also the hope that it might lead to employment upon completion of their studies. For this reason studying at UL was seen as preferable to studying at LIT. Three graduates of LIT explained that they are under-employed and all believe had there been a work-experience element to their course of study it would have enhanced their opportunities to secure meaningful employment. It needs to be documented that one course at LIT on five participants were registered, Social Studies in Social Care, also has a work experience requirement as part of the course.

Difficulties can also arise when trying to secure work experience as Majella and Lucy found. Both said they had to seek assistance from contacts in PAUL Partnership who arranged placement for them. Arthur did a nine-month course in Industrial Electronics with FÁS and he also found it difficult to get the work experience required by the course and only succeeded in being placed with the assistance of his course tutor. In an effort to overcome the
lack of Irish work experience, Gemma, a final year student of Social Studies at LIT explained that she has two part-time jobs in the ‘care’ area in addition to studying full-time. This decision Gemma states:

“Is based on the fact that vacancies advertised for this type of work all require at least one year’s experience and my two work placements during the course would not meet these criteria. There was no point in spending four years in college and at the end of the day finding it difficult to get a job because I have never worked before in Ireland.”

The foregoing shows the concerns of the target group in relation to barriers posed by having no Irish work experience and it indicates the necessity to provide immigrants with opportunities to prove their skills and prior work experience so that they can access the labour market.

**Participation in the Labour Market**

Some participants suggested that difficulties only arose when a person tries to enter the labour market at a particular level. Many considered they were over skilled for the jobs they were doing but added they had no choice because they didn’t want to be on welfare. The general feeling was that only doctors and nurses are employed at their own levels and that all other qualified people work in industry. Lucy is one of those who claim to be under-employed and she said “I’m just doing it, at the end of the week I have my money but I could do more.” A number of people claimed inequality in wages with some stating that they had left their employment when they realised they were being paid less the Irish workers. Moji, a qualified nurse from Ghana explained that she was employed as a nurse but she was paid a carer’s rate while Collette from Sierra Leone also found that she was not being paid the same rate as Irish workers in the shop where she worked. When Moji questioned her employer about this she was informed that “is what they pay the nurses”. She went on to say “most of the nurses there are Indian, they bring them on contract and everybody is paid the same”. Colette however changed her job and states:

“Where I am working now they don’t look at colour, it’s better paid, and they treat people all the same, you don’t feel like you don’t belong.”
The detrimental effects on those who feel they had no choice but to remain in low paid unskilled jobs because they have families to support was referred to by Steven, a former government official from Ghana currently employed as a production worker. Steven explained that the shift work required by his present occupation not only contributed to the loss the skills he already possessed but as he explained:

“My skills I am losing day by day because the way I work I don’t have time to keep reading, doing my research, so I am like a robot”.

For people like Steven the possibility of studying even part-time is not an option. Participants were asked about internal promotions within the workplace, none of them saw any opportunity of promotion in their present employment. This is unsurprising as the majority of those in full time employment explained that they are given short-term contracts, very few are in permanent employment. Arthur, Violet, Mary and Thomas work in manufacturing. They illustrate their common experiences of contract work when they state:

“I apply to work in [company] and I got four months. After that I apply to work there again and they said I have to wait in the queue.” Arthur.

“I was there for three months, after three months my contract was not renewed.” Violet.

“Contracts are renewed every six months, very bad. One day in the meetings I ask that question I ask how can you keep people for a long time on 6 month contracts, you are breaking the law, they were shocked. They said the market allow them that is why I am on contract for 6 months. [Company] is a huge company and they give piece-work to [smaller company].”

The repercussions of being employed on contract work or part-time work not only effects
people psychologically, but also there are practical issues such as being unable to secure a mortgage, or as in Mary’s case, bring her family to join her. She explained:

“I need my husband and my children to come and in the document I receive from Justice they say you need to be in a permanent job. I work day and night and one year [sic] they not giving me a contract [sic] for more than three months.”

According to participants a pattern of behaviour emerged and was the practice in Limerick was that multi-nationals were hiring through recruitment agencies. In the following excerpt James explains the impact of this type of employment:

“I am paid by [recruitment agent]. Some days I only get two hours and then after two hours they say go home no more work today, no money then. Sometime they call you say you have to go there to-morrow at 7a.m. when we go there after one hour they say go home. This was happening every week. Then 28 guys were left off just like that.”

James further explained that the recruitment agent paid the workers in the smaller company, whereas in the past the smaller company paid the employees directly after they had worked there for six months. He states:

“[Smaller company] was buying these people from [recruitment agent], but now they don’t do that anymore. My wife she started working in 2005 up to now she is paid by [recruitment agent] at a lesser rate than those who are paid by [smaller company].”

James was strongly of the opinion that there will be no change in this situation. According to him “multinationals [...] l are the power in this country, if the government disturb them, they close with many becoming unemployed and it will be serious case”. The perceived power of multinationals are seen by participants as undervaluing their workforce who are employed to fulfil the demands of the market place with no stability of employment for employees. Furthermore, there was a perception among some participants that when it came to renewal of contracts white people were given preference over coloured people.

**Racism and discrimination in the workplace**

Despite statutory measures to address racism in the workplace participants suggest that
Barriers to the Labour Market for Refugees and Persons with leave to remain in Limerick

Helen O’Grady
Doras Luimni

racism and discrimination does not stop at the work-place door. The general consensus was that [Multinational] is very harsh about discrimination, because there are a lot of black people who work there.” Martin offers an explanation for this, he states “in [multinational] it depends on the Supervisor and colleagues in your department.” Annette who also works in the same multinational felt that she was a victim of racism and when asked if she had complained when she felt her Supervisor was being racist when she replied:

“I was new and I would not have the courage or the strength at that time, or the confidence to go forward and stand up for myself and do something, but if it was today I would do something. The people who was doing the supervision and managerial work they weren’t that much educated and sometimes you see someone educated they are open minded and accept difference and diversity.”

Mark also wanted an opportunity to express his opinion of supervisors:

“I want to say the people [supervisors] who you are working with, they don’t know much about inclusion or equality so there needs for more training for employers.”

Other participants said they were willing to put up with racism because they were using their current job as a stepping-stone just to get an Irish reference and because as Mary said “sometimes you have to swallow your pride because you need the money to pay bills.” However such arbitrary practices were not exclusive to the research participants from the sub-Saharan African communities. Paul who is from Iraq and an Irish graduate with an honours degree shared his experience:

“ I was working in a company that they have a department exactly the same as the course that I have done, they give me a job like factory work and they give, I don’t want to say that it is discrimination but it is, first year students the particular job that I am qualified for. I studied that area for four years, I know it by heart, they didn’t give that job to me, they give the job to the first year students.”

Some participants work in areas other than manufacturing, for example Mathew works in a warehouse and Nina who was employed on a community development programme also said they experienced racism and discrimination. Feeling isolated from fellow workers Mathew
“It is OK in multinational companies because there are many foreigners but if you are the only person who is a foreign there is discrimination and isolation. Even if you get in you can feel isolated.”

“I was the only foreigner, they try to steal, they try to take my bag, they are insulting with my colour so I stop the work.” Nina.

Michael was very pragmatic about the whole issue of racism and discrimination, and offers a different viewpoint when he states, “if you are working you must know why you are there, you are not there to be loved by someone, you are there to do a job.”

Difficulties that occur in the workplace were at times perceived as racism or discrimination. For example Anne, who works in retail sales, was treated unfairly by a staff member and she thought that management might favour the Irish worker if she complained. Anne explained that she sought advice from the facilitator at FÁS who had helped her secure the position and was advised to bring her complaint to management where, to her surprise, she found the issue was amicably addressed.

**Friends**

When asked if they had formed friendships with colleagues at work almost all participants stated that friendships were confined to within the workplace. The majority said their colleagues at work were friendly towards them but there was no interaction between them outside of the workplace. When asked why she thought this was the situation, Margaret sums up what others said “I feel I would be isolated that’s one thing, secondly I don’t normally drink alcohol. I wouldn’t be comfortable.”

The economic inclusion of refugees/persons with leave to remain is vitally important if they are to integrate within Irish society, as there can be no integration without participation. Some of the difficulties that are encountered by the target group of this study in accessing the labour market were outlined. Participants face significant barriers because of perceived racism, discrimination and lack of Irish work experience when attempting to secure employment. The levels at which the majority of the target group are employed is well below
their actual educational attainment and while many of them are willing to endure these conditions in the short term it is a wasted opportunity. Their prior skills could be better utilised rather than using resources to retrain or re-educate them, as this would be beneficial for the Irish economy in the long term. The uncertain nature of their contracts in addition to conditions in the workplace for some participants has consequences that go beyond the individual and creates a segregated workforce. Similarities exist to conditions for this same group in Cork and elsewhere where according to Coakley and MacEainrí (2006:39) “a difficult labour market exists for this client group.”
CHAPTER 7: PERSONAL/FAMILY ISSUES AND STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

On achieving status the majority of the participants of this research expected to engage in the work-force. Having been denied the right to work while in the asylum system they appeared determined to become self-supporting and to contribute to the economy when this restriction was removed. The relief of having been granted refugee/leave to remain status can, however, be overshadowed by other concerns. Emma states “one day you are an asylum seeker with all the concerns and anxieties that goes with it and then suddenly you get refugee status.” Participation in the labour market remains an aspiration for some who, for a variety of reasons, have been unable to take up employment. The majority of the target group, who were willing to share their stories and anxieties, highlighted a number of additional challenges that preclude them from participation in the labour market, and from integrating in Irish society in general. Personal and family issues were cited as well as economic issues. Evidence of their willingness to engage in the labour market was seen from the strategies adopted by participants to counteract the difficulties they faced. They also referred to their interactions with statutory and non-statutory agencies in relation to their quests for employment.

The data in this section is presented under the following headings:

- Health
- Psychological barriers/trans-national issues
- Childcare
- Housing
- Voluntary work
- Enterprise
- Pre-employment programme
- Agencies

Health
Surprisingly a small number of participants, referred to health related issues as impediments
to participation in the labour market. Based on their country of origin trauma, the experience of flight and exile, follow by stressful living conditions while in the asylum process, it was expected that a greater number would have cited health related issues. The Government has acknowledged that asylum seekers and refugees may have specific health care needs and is committed to developing strategies to address their needs (Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), 2005). This study found that health issues were not gender specific with a small number having conditions that precluded them from full participation the labour market. Nina, Karl, John and Violet all spoke of their health problems that are illustrated in the following statements:

“*When I got my status I had problems with my health, I was in denial, I said to myself no I’ll be fine and things got so bad that I had to be admitted [to hospital] and then things went downhill from there.*” Nina.

“*After receiving my papers, I said to myself ‘the sky is the limit, nothing can stop me now’. But I didn’t know what was around the corner, if it had not been for health problem….*” Karl.

“I had to leave before I finish contract I had a heart problem and then the contract was finished. I am not looking for factory work now because I have a heart problem but I can do easy work like security or an assembly job.” John.

“My ill health came into play and I was in and out of hospital and I could not take up employment.” Violet.

The health related issues of the target group were not confined to physical issues. Barriers resulting from dislocation and separation from family and loved ones also appear to prevent some participants from moving on with their lives. Raper and Valcarcel (2000:77) for example, state that “one of the greatest sufferings of displaced people is losing contact with their loved ones.”

**Psychological barriers/trans-national issues**

A number of participants spoke about concerns for their families back home and how this impacts on their daily lives. Anne from Sudan believes her inability to secure employment is
directly linked to her “worry about my family and the situation at home. I get depression,” she said. When Peter who is from Afghanistan got refugee status he explained the first thing he did was to visit his family who are living in a refugee camp in Pakistan. As Peter explains:

“My mother was very sick and I had to go to Pakistan [where the remainder of his family have taken refuge]. I don’t have anyone to look after the family, my brother and sister they are too young the oldest is 13 years old.”

Family support by way of ‘remittances’ was mentioned by a number of people who explain that they try to support the family at home as well as their families here in Ireland. Sarah from Albania, Andrew from South Africa and Mary from Burundi are three of the participants who referred to this issue. They state:

“If my work stops how will I pay my bills and send money for my children. These are my problems.” Sarah.

“I had pressure from Africa and they say you have to do something for us we are very poor. I try from year to year to get work but I didn’t get something good.” Andrew.

“Most of the Africans try to get a job where they will manage to keep both families. If they go to a manufacturing job it will be very hard for them to provide for the family back home as well.” Mary.

Furthermore, the psychological impact of the long wait for family reunification appears to adversely affect some of the target group in a way that they are unable to move forward. Mary illustrates this when she states:

“They [the Government] don’t look at people’s feelings. There are many people like me who have been in this country more than five years now and I don’t even know where to start to bring my children, it is very difficult for me and moreover the money I send for them, if they were here I wouldn’t spend that much, and what I send maybe it is not used for them.”

The long wait for family reunification in Ireland not only poses psychological barriers for the
target group but also practical barriers for those who are parenting alone with young children. The lack of effective childcare was cited as the most significant barrier to employment by lone parents.

**Childcare**

Many of the women and a small number of men who took part in this study face additional barriers to employment, the high cost of childcare was said to be “*a big problem.*” This issue is not unique to immigrants, but for the target group the lack of familial support, parenting alone and the expense involved in childcare was said to prohibit some people from taking up employment. Participants generally were motivated to work but many could not justify going off welfare. One family said they had calculated the cost of taking up employment. Michael states:

> “If you look at the social welfare payment, sometimes if you work you are getting less. If you put everything down on paper, and pay for childcare, the salary doesn’t compensate for the loss of welfare and the pressure with the children.”

In an effort to overcome childcare costs Carmel explained that she accepted part-time employment but was unable to continue, because while this solved her childcare problems, the pay for part-time work did not compensate for the loss of rent allowance and medical card. Once again the type of work was referred to here, as Margaret explained:

> “It is difficult to get a job outside of the factory job this makes it particularly difficult for mothers. They don’t know how to take care of their children if they take a job from 8-4.”

A small number of participants had overcome childcare difficulties as Joyce explained. When Joyce started working in a multinational company three days a week she availed of Family Income Supplement, this helped with childcare expenses. Information about this scheme for low-income families, administered through the Health Service Executive, appeared to be transmitted through social networks rather than through the relevant authorities Mark said, “*If you know something they will give it to you but they won’t tell you if you don’t know.*”

Some participants who are parenting alone explained that childcare costs prevented them
from engaging in employment but facilitated participation in education. Pamela an IBC/05 parent states:

“I really want to work but because of the children it is easier to go to school. One child is in the crèche and another finishes school at 1 o clock and I have to leave school and collect my daughter from school, drop her at the crèche until I finish. The other one is finishing at 3 o’ clock the same time as me so that’s OK”. Also you get help with childcare expenses.”

This does not eliminate the problem entirely as many rely on informal childcare arrangements. Gwen another IBC parent who relies on friends to help explained, “I attended college on and off because I have problems with childcare.” Some single parents appear willing to make many sacrifices to overcome the barriers they face. Evidence of this is illustrated by Lucy’s comment:

“The maximum I work is four days a week because of childcare. I work from 4.30 in the evening until the next morning, on those days I only get one hour with the kids when they come from school”.

There was also anger amongst some participants who were parenting alone. Expressing this anger Mercy states:

“The Minister for Justice tries to stop us and doesn’t make things easy for us. He doesn’t encourage foreigners he deliberately blocks everything to make it difficult. If you want to study and you have children, the fees for college are high and when you are alone it is a struggle. If I try to work part time it would be a struggle because of what I would have to pay for childcare. Even if their father wants to come he cannot come because my residency is based on my Irish born child”.

The lack of affordable childcare has serious consequences for some of the target group; not only does it create a dependency on welfare but also means that many immigrant women, in particular those parenting alone, lack opportunities to improve their language skills or integrate with the host community through education or employment. In addition to childcare costs, another issue external to the labour force for this group is the cost of private rented
accommodation.

**Housing**

Phelan and Kuol (2005) and Coakley and Healy (2007) note that securing accommodation is the first goal of refugees/persons with leave to remain on being granted status. Efforts to get accommodation were referred to by Mark who states, “I was looking for a job, it took a while to get sorted out, but it took me months to get accommodation”. All of the participants, apart from those in full time employment, were dependent on rent allowance subsidies from the Health Service Executive. It appears from comments made by participants that the high cost of accommodation in Limerick militates against those who try to manage without it. The experiences of participants are articulated in the following comments:

“It’s OK for people who have no family and are sharing a house and sharing the bills but for families they lose everything when they go to work, it is one of the big issues.” Colette

“When I started the work the income wasn’t enough to pay all the bills and the rent, I decided to get a second job.” Majella

“If you earn €50 a week your rent allowance is reduced, you have to do two jobs to compensate for that. If you are working in [multinational company] and bringing home €250 a week or working in Dunne’s Stores is would be impossible to pay your bills and rent.” Lucy.

Participants are not happy about having to rely on rent allowance and many said they are willing to take up employment if they could retain some benefits, albeit on a scaled down basis. The present position is seen as a de-motivating factor and suggestions were made that the Government should do more to assist those who are trying to enter the labour market for the first time. Both Michael and John had strong feelings on this topic and state:

“The Government should be helping me, for example if I am getting €200 every week at work, Social should be helping me at least €70 to €80 that would encourage me to work.” Michael
“If you are relieved from paying high rent you can work. For us in Limerick it is very difficult. People who are living in other places are doing great, they have their own house on Rent Accommodation Scheme, they are not on social any more, if your rent is small you can drop welfare.” John.

Furthermore there was a real concern by the target group that if they accepted employment they would not qualify for a council house. Figures from the Department of the Environment show the demand for council housing in Limerick city is greater than Dublin, Cork, Galway and Waterford combined, with over 2,000 people on the waiting list in 2005 (Sheridan 2008). Concerns of the target group in relation to social housing are illustrated by comments from Martin, James and Fred, who state:

“Our application wouldn’t be accepted, they are not giving council house to those who are working and have small wages” Martin.

“The problem is that the Government prefer to help those who are on welfare”. James

“We are paying €850 a month for rent. When I went to get information about a council house I was told it wasn’t possible for us to have a council house because we are both working. I know many people who are not working and they are living in council houses here.” Fred

Home ownership is an aspiration for many as those interviewed. One couple, both of who were working, were pleased to explain that they succeeded in getting a mortgage earlier this year. Paying a mortgage they said is difficult “but you have to make sacrifices.” However, another couple explained that they were refused a mortgage because of their low incomes and refused a council house because they are both working.

The accommodation needs of immigrants is referred to in the Government’s National Action Plan Against Racism, (DJELR, 2005) and cited as one of the initiatives that needed to be addressed. This study did not find evidence of these needs have been addressed in any meaningful way to date, only that lack of affordable accommodation goes beyond the realm of shelter, and impinges on the daily lives of the target group, including participation in the labour market. While immigrants have little control over institutional and structural barriers
this study found them to be active agents in attempting to overcome the barriers that exclude them from economic inclusion.

Voluntary work
Participation in voluntary work was seen as enhancing employability, providing an opportunity to add to CVs, a way of obtaining a reference, facilitating integration with the indigenous community and making contacts that participants, all of these were seen as valuable assets. There was a general consensus that ‘contacts’ are important. Lucy speaks for many when she states:

“Is not the degree, it’s about knowing people, employers they give jobs to people they know, it all about contacts. If you don’t connect with Irish people how do you get information, integrate, or make contacts?”

A number of people cited examples of how volunteering subsequently help them in their education and employment. Mercy said that her volunteering later helped with her academic work, Josette explained that when she went for an interview for employment she was asked to talk about how she interacted with people and she spoke about her involvement in the community. Participants also referred to volunteering as an opportunity to give something back to the community. For example, the social aspect of volunteering was referred to, both from the perspective of the volunteer as well as those they were helping. Janette states:

“I do volunteer work with ‘Mothers in the Community’, sometimes the mothers are very lonely at home, they just need someone to talk to.”

People were generally open to the idea of doing voluntary work; some said it had not occurred to them to do this while others said given the opportunity they were willing to offer their services but they did not know where to go to volunteer. The limited outlets for this type of work were referred to, as well as issues with insurance that prohibit some organisations from recruiting volunteers. Surprisingly, two participants did not realise the value of the voluntary work they had engaged in and said it had not occurred to them to include this on their CV’s or use it for reference purposes.

Self-employment
Another mechanism to overcome barriers to the labour market referred to by participants was self-employment. Six people, five males and one female, four of whom are graduates of Irish colleges, shared their plans to start their own businesses. Martin from Congo referred to this as the way forward for immigrants, and states that “people from other countries are a pool of resources and ideas”. All six participants had tried unsuccessfully to secure employment at their own level and already had their business plans prepared having received support from PAUL Partnership and/or the Enterprise Board. Some said they had venture capitalists willing to fund their projects while two people when asked if they were encountering any difficulties said, “Yes, securing finance.” Martin states “it’s like the hen and the egg situation; if you don’t have money to invest you can’t make money.” Thomas said he is hoping by giving example that others will follow and states “I want to be a role model for them; I can coach and help others if they decide to start up”. On the subject of entrepreneurs Denayer and O’Túama (2008:21) point out that ethnic minority groups are willing to take risks and have “the advantage of having social networks both within and beyond the immediate locality”.

Pre-employment programmes

Participants were asked if they thought pre-employments programmes similar to the EPIC programme in Dublin (funded by DJELR) were offered at regional level, would enhance their employability. It was generally agreed that there is a need for pre-employment programmes at regional level; however Nelson highlighted what he considered to be the inadequacies of these programmes. He states:

“The problem is they are designed in a way that doesn’t work. For example take a programme for people seeking employment that was run by SPIRASI. They show people how to do a CV, fill in an application form, write a letter and things like. That’s for certain group of immigrants. The problem is there are conclusions wrongly made that these people don’t have even the basics. They are just trying to put in place basic programmes, not everyone needs these basis skills”.

This perceived problem was acknowledged by Denayer and O’Túama (2008:70) who stress the “need to distinguish between high skilled and low skilled immigrants” when it comes to developing programmes to meet their needs.
Agencies

The final question put to participants was to ascertain the level of contact they had with service provision in the city. Refugees in particular because of their past experiences often lack confidence and trust in governmental institutions. For this reason support groups tend to be favoured by refugees and immigrants in general when seeking out information. The findings of this study showed this to be the case in Limerick.

Doras Luimní

This NGO offers support to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Limerick. There was evidence of a high regard for their drop-in service. Over ninety percent of participants said they had contact with Doras at some time since coming to Limerick. However, several people referred to the limitations of NGO’s like Doras. They stated that Doras failed to assist them in their efforts to secure employment. Martin giving a lengthy explanation of what he perceived to be the limitations of Doras states:

“Doras stands for ‘development organisation for refugees and asylum seekers’ but they fail on ‘development’. Our first need was to acquire language, second was to get our status, third was to get family reunification, and fourth was to get a job. Most of these have been met by Doras. People got the language, status, family, but after that they are kind of lost. Ten percent of people who look for asylum get refugee status, of those 90% who get status are lost because there is not a proper organisation that can take them from where they are to get work.”

Situations like this were noted by Phillimore et al (2007) cited in Denayer and O’Túama (2008:68) who commented on the employment needs of recent immigrants state “one common barrier is that immigrants will find themselves ‘left on their own’, when it comes to finding employers and managing training-to-work transitions”.

When it was put to participants that there are organisation such as FÁS and Local Employment Service that offer assistance to persons seeking employment Martin states:

“Yes but still if they [Doras] are concerned with the development of people they have now to see even though the LES and FÁS are there, what are the results. These other organisations are not concerned. If Doras have to do the job of FÁS they would do it
with another perspective, culturally relevant. LES and FÁS treat everyone the same whereas Doras would be treating people special. If you were to take that ‘development’ part and develop it, it would be good.”

FÁS
All but one participant said they had registered with FÁS, which is a conditions attached to qualifying for ‘job seeker’s allowance’ from the Department of Family and Social Affairs. The general views expressed about FÁS services were that FÁS offer courses but not jobs. People spoke of receiving letters advising them of vacancies but few, if any, had positive outcomes when they sent their CVs as Margaret and Nina state:

“FÁS tell me to forwarded my CV, a few hours after I got a phone call to say I am very sorry the job is gone. Why did they ask me to send in my CV if the job was gone?”

“The first time when FÁS said to send your CV I was very happy I think I get job but when I called them they said they will call me for interview. I called to remind them and I didn’t get interview”.

A number of people had participated in FÁS courses with mixed outcomes. One participant who had spent two academic years doing FÁS courses and to-date has not been successful in getting employment said “they give me a course but not a job”. While two participants attributed their success in securing employment to the services of FÁS, those with high qualifications felt that FÁS had nothing to offer them.

Local Employment Service
A number of people explained that FÁS referred to them to the ‘Jobs Club’ at the LES for interview skills and/or CV preparation. About fifty percent of participants said they had availed of this service where support was deemed to be very helpful. For example Colette states “I have one friend [an employee] there she helped me to prepare for interview.”

Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA)
All of those interviewed stated that the DSFA put pressure on them to secure employment. A number of people were anxious to have their experiences with the DSFA documented and the
following quotes illustrate the feelings of many:

“They [welfare officers] don’t understand Africans, sometimes they treat you bad. One day they said to my friend ‘why you come to this country Ireland, you have to go back home’. We don’t know the culture here because if I complain that person might lose job, we don’t want to be involved or for them to be sacked from job, so we don’t complain.” Barry.

“The manner in which they treat the situation I decided not to go back to them again. All the other Africans say I am crazy, I should go back again, I don’t know my rights, but I just leave it.” Karl.

Participants stated that they do not like having to ‘sign-on’ at the social welfare local office. Joyce spoke of her ‘feelings’ at having to go there.

“Most people, especially people who come from Somalia want to work and be the breadwinner for yourself and you feel like down and like somebody who is not capable to work if you are on welfare, it is very embarrassing. I think nobody wants to be on social welfare if they can get a job, I feel so ashamed when I am going to sign, I am so embarrassed I cannot express it.”

The foregoing comments on the services of the different agencies were not in any way meant to be an assessment of the services provided by these agencies but an acknowledgment of the service used by those seeking employment in Limerick and a reflection of their thoughts.

The personal and family issues, particularly in relation to childcare needs referred to in this section, pose very real barriers for the target group that affects their ability to move on with their lives and secure employment. The strategies adopted to improve employability are evidence of their willingness to contribute to the economy. There was also evidence of the need for extra support to enable some people to do so. Of real concern are the structural barriers caused by lack of affordable accommodation in Limerick. Accepting the wide-ranging needs of immigrants in other countries such as Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland to name but a few, their governments have taken a holistic approach to the needs of immigrants with permanent residency, immigrants are supported in addressing all their needs for up to...
three years, to enable them to prepare for entry into the labour market (Healy 2007).

In Ireland, in addition to the removal of structural barriers that prevent people from taking up employment, services and initiatives to facilitate participation in the labour market should focus on the specific challenges for this cohort of people whose needs and requirements differ from those of the indigenous community. In relation to interaction between statutory agencies and the target group, this study has shown that a need exists in Limerick for more training directed at front-line staffs that deals on a daily basis with the target group so that common points of conflict can be avoided.
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This study found that for refugees/persons with leave to remain starting life in a new country is not easy. The need to integrate these newcomers into Irish society is well documented and previous studies have shown that to achieve this, economic inclusion is essential. Equally national research (Brady 2002, Coakley and MacEinrí 2006, Coakley and Healy 2007, Dunbar 2008) as well as Noonan (2007) referring to the Norwegian experience, show that immigrants face many obstacles when attempting to access the labour market. Commenting on the Irish situation, Coakley and MacEinrí (2007:61) suggest, “the labour market in Ireland is not yet open to these groups.”

For the past eight years Limerick has become home to many asylum seekers. On achieving status many refugees and those with leave to remain chose to stay in the same location where they spent years in direct provision. The findings of this study show that some of the challenges for refugees/persons with leave to remain in Limerick are similar to those identified for the same cohort in other regions. However a number of issues arose that had not been identified as challenges in previous studies. The researcher sought to ascertain whether having lived in direct provision subsequently affected the lives of the target group, and found that while few people made direct reference to having lived in direct provision, many of the experiences shared with the researcher point directly to the consequences of having had limited access to language provision and being denied the right to work.

The main difficulties identified by the target group in Limerick were:

- Language barriers
- Non-recognition of prior learning/skills
- Access to further/higher education
- Accessing meaningful employment
- Loss of secondary benefits on taking up employment
- Personal issues
- Programmes for un-employed
Language
As more than half of the target group came from non-English speaking countries, it is not surprising then that participants cited language as being the biggest obstacle to economic participation. This study found that despite language tuition being offered a number of locations in the city, many people leave the asylum process without an adequate command of the English language. There are two reasons for this; firstly denying or not compelling asylum seekers to attend full time language training results in some having to spend up to two years language training when they leave the asylum process. Secondly, the non-coordination of language provision within the city means that there were potential students who do not have access the language training appropriate to their level of need. There are long- term consequences for both the immigrant and the Government of this practice. International studies have shown that language proficiency is vital to economic participation (Healy 2007). In Finland for example asylum seekers are required to attend compulsory language training each week.

In addition, this study found there is no provision for accredited language training for refugees between the ages of 18 and 21. Warner (2006) had noted that this particular cohort have difficulties accessing education, but the present findings are more alarming in that they highlight the fact that this group are without access to adequate English language tuition. At best they can access two and a half hours training weekly at the VEC or four hours training provided by volunteers at Doras Luimni. These findings highlight the cost to the economy as a result of policies whereby having provided for asylum seekers’ basic needs for up to five years, further unnecessary expense is incurred in the provision of language training when this could have been done in tandem with the asylum procedure.

Non-recognition of prior learning/skills
One third of the participants in this study have third level education from their countries of origin and almost all have skills and prior work experience from home. Many participants expressed frustration at the fact that Irish employers do not accept skills gained outside Ireland. The few whose educational qualifications were assessed by the NQAI had found they were downgraded. This appears to have sent out a message to participants of this study that there is no point in attempting to have prior qualifications assessed; this in addition to the perception that employers favour Irish qualifications are but two of the explanations given for the high participation in further/higher education of the target group in Limerick (See
Access to further/higher education

Participants consider an Irish qualification a means of enhancing access to meaningful employment. Despite the difficulties that abound in accessing education such as having to remain unemployed in order to become eligible for funding support or because access and funding entitlements are ‘status’ related, it was found that some of the participants had succeeded in gaining entry to courses that would give them an Irish qualification. There is evidence from the feelings expressed by participants of this study for the need of a service to assist with career planning prior to entering education/employment. Furthermore the requirement to remain unemployed for up to a year to qualify for Back to Education Allowance in addition to the three-year habitual residency criteria for eligibility to free fees was referred to. Refugees and people with leave to remain need to have short term access to welfare in order to secure the capacity to enter education and thus be independent of welfare in the long term. Some participants explained that they have undertaken unnecessary FÁS courses rather than remain ‘at home doing nothing’ in order to qualify for educational funding. An argument has be elucidated by various government officials that people with leave to remain should consider part-time education rather than seeking financial support for full-time study. However as highlighted earlier the nature of employment available, contractual and shift related, as well as the high cost of such courses makes them prohibitive and inaccessible to this status type. This is another reflection of Government policies that place further expenditure on the economy with people feeling compelled to take places on courses that are irrelevant to their careers while at the same time preventing those who may be in actual need of the training from accessing them.

Accessing meaningful employment

Only a relatively small number of participants were engaged in the labour market in Limerick, the majority of these working at levels below their stated skills. A number of participants explained that they had been engaged in the labour market previously and cited several reasons for their changed circumstances. For some their contracts had not been renewed, others found they were unable to meet their daily needs on taking up employment in low paid sectors. Participants from African countries in particular had a perception that they are discriminated against because of their ‘colour’ or ‘race’. Participants who had obtained an Irish qualification also stated that they failed to secure meaningful employment and this
they put down to having a ‘foreign name’. These issues that contribute to further costs for the economy through the loss of skills, as well as the subsequent welfare expenditure, show the need for Government action.

Loss of secondary benefits on taking up employment

Participants raised the issue of welfare dependency and it was evident that they do not want to be welfare dependent in the long term but as a result of current Government policy many are trapped in this situation. One of the issues highlighted by participants was the prohibitive cost of childcare that for persons engaging in low paid work makes taking up employment unsustainable. Participants referred to the lack of familial support with childcare, which the present study found was not gender specific. Two male participants are parenting alone and it was also found that other male participants were the caregivers because their spouses had found it easier to access employment. The welfare regulations that prohibit all lone parent from engaging in employment during the holiday period is in direct contravention with the Government’s plan to bringing lone parents into the labour market (O’Brien 2008) this impacts on those with refugee status and persons with leave to remain as much as other sectors of society.

An issue that was referred to but had not appeared in the literature reviewed prior to undertaking this study is the barrier created by accommodation costs. Apart from the small number of participants in employment, all participants were living in private rented accommodation that is subsidised by the Health Service Executive through the provision of rent allowance. A number of people explained that they were forced to leave their employment because their wages did not compensate for the loss of this allowance. One participant was aware of the ‘family income supplement’ allowance to assist those working in low paid employment; however this was stated to be insufficient to cover the high cost of private rented accommodation. Participants made reference to the lack of social or affordable housing in Limerick, and there appeared to be a real fear that persons in employment would not be considered for local authority housing. This study found that this alone prevents some people from actively attempting to access employment. There appeared to be confusion about eligibility criteria for social and affordable housing with some participants relying on hearsay for their information. One couple stated that they were turned down for mortgage because of contract work only and they were under the impression that they would not qualify for local authority house because they were in employment.
Barriers to the Labour Market for Refugees and Persons with leave to remain in Limerick

Personal issues
Additional factors that were found to affect the target group were concerns about their families back home, some of who are also displaced persons. The need to transmit remittances to families at home in addition to supporting their family in Ireland results in some people having no choice but to continue working in un-skilled sectors despite the loss to their own careers. What appears to have been overlooked in much of the previous studies is the human element of these issues. During the course of interviews many people spoke about their ‘feelings’ that they said are not considered by service providers and policy makers. In this regard the long wait for family reunification was referred to by a number of people while others, for example those parenting alone, spoke of the policy whereby their spouses are prevented for joining them because of their IBC/05 status.

Programmes for the unemployed
In discussing their needs, participants identified issues that should be addressed to enhance their participation in the labour market. Having overcome language barriers, a number of participants pointed out that not everyone wants to go back to education. As in other studies the need for mechanisms to address skills deficits was highlighted. It was, however, suggested by participants that where programmes are offered they should be tailored to meet the needs of individuals, rather than assuming that all refugees/persons with leave to remain will benefit from the same type of programme, as was stated to be the current practice by one participant of this research.

This final chapter has only briefly referred to some of the issues highlighted by participants as constituting barriers to education and employment for them. Mbugua (2007) cited in O’Halloran and O’Regan (2007) said, “Immigrants should not be looked on as victims but as people who, if given the opportunity could fulfil their potential.” While failure to address the real concerns of the target group of this study goes against the Government’s proposals for integration of immigrants, present policies are placing huge expenditure on the exchequer. This study has shown participants to have a wealth of knowledge and skills that if properly utilised it could bring new wealth to the economy in the current uncertain climate.

As is evident from the experiences of other countries, failure to integrate immigrants into the host society can have serious consequences not only for the present generation but also for
second and subsequent generations. The concluding quote illustrates one participant’s concerns for the next generation. He said

“We call them the ‘Bounty Bar’ with black skin and white inside. I call them the lost generation. They are rejected from the white society and not find themselves (sic) well fitted in African society, they are in the middle and society is not yet prepared to take care of these people who are struggling with their father’s and their parents’, parents’ heritage.”

Finally, the literature reviewed suggests that research is needed to inform policy, and this study found there is no shortage of research on the current topic. In reviewing the literature for this research there is little evidence of research by persons who themselves have direct experience of seeking protection. They are predominantly the subjects rather than the authors. Mbugua (2008) is cited in this research and is but one example of the migrant voice and lived experience in Ireland. Further understandings of the impact of being a refugee or having leave to remain in Ireland can only be really ascertained when research is conducted by people with these statuses.
AFTERWORD

This research project was carried out as part of a Master Programme in Contemporary Migration and Diaspora Studies at National College of Ireland, Cork in the summer of 2008. In response to the needs expressed by research participants for support in accessing education and employment, funding was secured from Vodafone Ireland Foundation to create a new role of Education and Employment Coordinator with Doras Luimní, for a period of one year in July 2008. Acknowledging the need to continue this service for their clients, the Board of Doras have continued to support this role which they see as vital particularly in the current economic climate where there is increasing demand for places on education/training programmes and less opportunities for employment. Doras Luimní is aware that the negative consequences of a lesser educated immigrant community will result in inequality of opportunity in the labour market. Riots in Paris in recent years have left a lasting impressing on those working with immigrants of the consequences of failing to address these challenges. The Board of Doras are also mindful of situations that have emerged in other countries in times of recession where the anger and frustration of the indigenous populations has been vented against immigrants.

To meet the needs of clients as highlighted by the research, the Education and Employment Coordinator liaises with statutory and other relevant agencies, and a number of initiatives have already been embarked on. Language needs were highlighted in this and previous research as being a fundamental barrier to accessing the labour market and to full integration by participants. The non-coordination of language provision throughout the city has resulted in long waiting lists being created by some providers whilst it’s been suggested that other learners may be accessing language provision in a number of centres. To address this Doras Luimní, Limerick City and County VECs, together with Clare VEC, have come together with the Integrating Working Group to create a strategic plan that will coordinate language provision to ensure that all learners have access to the language provision relevant to their needs, and their status.

The difficulty in accessing relevant information for study opportunities at third level, and the inconsistency and confusing information regarding fees pertinent to individuals’ status referred to in the research is now being addressed through the dissemination of comprehensive information around these issues through the drop-in service Doras offers to...
clients. While clients are informed of their options/entitlements they are encouraged to avail of statutory provision to access services.

To address some of the concerns expressed by participants in relation to perceived barriers to employment an *Information Evening* was arranged in May 2009. Representatives of the Limerick City Housing Department, Department of Social and Family Affairs, and FÁS Training Authority were in attendance to respond to queries, and provided information to clients of Doras. This event enabled clients to have some of their fears/myths around loss of benefits on taking up employment, as well as mis-information about eligibility for local and affordable housing addressed. Clients were also informed about opportunities for training towards employment with FÁS.

In conjunction with the Refugee Information Service (Dublin), Doras facilitated an *Employability Workshop* in December 2009 where clients with Refugee status and persons with leave to remain had an opportunity to share their experiences/difficulties of job seeking in Limerick with members of the local business community and statutory agencies. In addition the workshop provided an occasion for employers to share experiences and express their concerns of employing persons who have come through the asylum process. This platform allowed representatives of statutory agencies to hear first-hand the issues of concern both from the perspective of this immigrant group and from employers in Limerick.

Whilst attempting to respond to some the issues raised in the research conducted in 2008, the downturn in the economy, in particular the closure of *Dell* has seen an increase in the numbers of immigrant seeing the support of Doras.

New issues of concern for client of Doras in relation to education continue to emerge, e.g. the cut backs in language provision at second level schools. In the past year Doras has been approached by a number of second level schools seeking support on behalf of their non English speaking students. In response to this request Doras is organising a one week *English Language Summer Programme* for students from secondary schools in the city in the summer of 2010.

Through liaising with school personnel it has also come to light that Career Guidance Teachers in some secondary schools are unaware that immigrant students’ eligibility for free
fees at third level colleges is based on their own/their parents’ residency status. For this reason students from this group may not be in a position to continue their education past second level despite in some instances them being high achievers. The absence of concise information on eligibility for this group of students has led to an increase in requests for direction/guidance from Doras. To address this Doras has included in its Training Calendar for Autumn 2010 a programme to educate Career Guidance Teachers on issues of access to third level for non-Irish students transferring from second to third level education. School leavers who themselves have been granted refugee status can take up offers of college places. However they find it extremely difficult to continue their education because they lack family and financial support, more pertinent in the current climate where part-time jobs are less available than in the past. To address this issue efforts are made by the Education and Employment Coordinator to source and disseminate information on a wide range of education funding supports that may enable this client group to accept/retain college places. Through the role of Education and Employment Coordinator, Doras Luimni continues to supports all their clients, including refugees and persons with leave to remain, in their attempts to challenge the ‘Barriers to Education and Employment in Limerick‘.
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