



WORKERS ON THE MOVE: PAST LESSONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES ON IRELAND'S LABOUR MIGRATION

**NERI Labour Market Conference 2016
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CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

- Carried-out for the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland to inform policy position in the area of economic integration of migrants.
- Report published in December 2015. Available on www.mrci.ie => Publications.
- Within a broader context of doctoral research being carried out under the IRC Employment-based programme. MRCI being the employment partner and Department of Sociology in Maynooth University, the Academic Partner.



METHODOLOGY

○ **A literature review**

- Policy
- Academic literature

○ **Stakeholder Interviews**

- INIS -DJEI -ICOS
- ICTU -IBEC -SOLAS

○ **Findings from MRCI Research Projects 2014/2015**

- Au Pairs in Ireland
- Ireland is Home
- Childcare in the Domestic Work Sector
- Migrant Workers in the Home Care Sector
- All Work and Low Pay

○ **Interviews with 9 Research Participants**

- Employed under Ireland's employment permit system
- In Ireland between 12 and 15 years.



IRISH IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

- The Irish Immigration system developed largely within a legal and policy vacuum.
- Dichotomous approach: Economic vs non-Economic.
- Two implementing bodies – DJEI and DoJ.
- No structure overseeing issues of economic integration.



GAPS, DEMANDS AND PROJECTIONS

- Issues in the identification of labour and skills shortages.
- Demand in certain sectors of the economy are not being formally met.
- There are issues with attraction and retention of migrant workers
- Lack of progression results in a cycle of *brain gain, waste and drain*.



ISSUES AFFECTING WORKERS IN IRELAND

○ The Low-Pay Trap

- *“You should consider yourself lucky that you earn this and not less.”* - I. - Asking for a pay rise from €9.50 after six years in service.

○ Exploitation

- *“...during those years I was dead inside. Who knows? Maybe If I didn’t experience exploitation I would have studied something or I would have worked in my profession. Maybe I would have brought my family over. Now I just want quietness.”* V. - On her experience of exploitation.

○ Irregularity

- *“One day I rang the Department, I told them my permit was about to expire and my employer was not making efforts to renew it despite promises. I was told ‘Is your employer there? We can’t talk to you. We have to talk to your employer’. At that time I knew I was in prison, my employer was everything.”* E. - On becoming undocumented.

○ Progression

- *“I knew I was an educated person. I knew I could do better jobs which required more skills, better-paid jobs. I felt trapped [in the work permit system], I couldn’t go anywhere. I felt like a slave.”* I. - on the impact of the work permit system on progression.

○ Family Strategies

- *“Once the child goes into pre-school we can think about her going back to work. At the same time we are trying to apply for my mom or her mom to come over to help, as I am working non-stop because I am the only income and she is always alone. But once he (the child) grows up, she could do a course, maybe find a secretarial job.”* V.K. - On his spouse’s inactivity.



A TEN POINT STRATEGY FOR IRELAND'S LABOUR MIGRATION

- A legislative framework which recognises the right to permanent residency and family reunification
- Tackling discrimination and exploitation in the labour market
- Improving childcare, health and education



- **Reforming Ireland's employment permit system.**
- **Retaining talent by putting in place transitional measures in the labour market**
- **Implementing a regularisation scheme**



- **Recognising skills.**
- **Developing skills.**
- **Activating skills.**
- **Engaging our second generation.**



Thank You!

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