

*Trinity Immigration Initiative  
Children, Youth and Community Relations Project  
&  
Integrating Ireland*

**In the Front Line of Integration:  
Young people managing migration to  
Ireland**

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Yeah, she surprised us because she just woke us up early in the morning one Sunday morning and she was like, she had packed our boxes and everything and 'get up we are going to meet your dad'....I thought she was messing, and we got in a taxi. All of a sudden I saw people waving, I was like, yeah I'm coming back. I was at the airport and I was like, are you serious? She was.

*- P64, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

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### **Note on the report**

This report is targeted at a wide general audience including policy makers, academics, teachers, principals, parents, immigrant organisations, the general public, and most importantly of all young people themselves. Therefore we have aimed to make it as accessible as possible while still retaining all the rigour of professional, high quality research.

As the aim of the study was to document the voices of migrant young people in their own words we have given priority to this voice by placing the results of the research as prominently as possible near the start of the report, right after a short introduction. We then discuss these findings in the light of a selection of national and international literature which we feel is relevant and insightful.

The details of how the study was conducted are very important to document accurately but in our experience they do not make the most entertaining reading for a general audience. For the interested reader, we have put a full account of the methodology and the issues that arose in carrying out the study at the end of the report in an appendix.

## **Executive Summary**

- This research aimed to find out what life is like for young people aged 15 to 18 who have migrated to Ireland.
- 169 migrant young people from sites purposefully selected across the county took part in open-ended focus group discussions. Although not formally representative, the results give us a flavour of the views that may be found among migrant youth living in Ireland today. It is the first national study of its kind.
- The young people we spoke to faced many challenges dealing with differences between life in Ireland and the life they had known prior to migration. These differences existed in many areas such as how older and younger generations are expected to relate, rules and expectations for students in school and how people interact with one another socially. Each young person had to find their own way, day in day out, of adjusting to these challenges.

## **Educational values**

- The participants generally placed a high value on education. They were highly motivated and ambitious. Typically, they had strong support from their families for their studies.
- Many of the participants came from cultures that greatly valued deference to authority at home, in school or elsewhere. They found a less deferential attitude to authority among young people here in Ireland. For some of them, encountering this difference was quite a shock and a challenge.
- Throughout the research and across a wide range of issues, we gained a strong sense of the maturity and breadth of horizon of the participants. They were very pro-active in trying to meet the challenges that migration has brought into their lives.

## **Schools in Ireland**

- Many participants came from educational systems that placed a high value on traditional models of learning, discipline and authority. The more relaxed atmosphere they perceived in Irish schools surprised them.
- Many participants felt that school was 'easier' in Ireland than in their country of origin. This perception cannot be definitively explained in the context of this research but it may be related to different educational styles in Ireland and their country of origin (which on the other hand some participants noted and embraced). It may also be due to young migrants finding themselves in schools

and classes where norms of achievement were different to those in schools they had attended previously.

- The system of streaming classes and examinations in Ireland was a source of frustration to some young migrants who were unfamiliar with such a system. Some also believed that they had been put into streams below their ability level.

### **Living conditions and leisure time**

- Most participants reported being happy with their housing conditions, but many reported living in what they regarded as 'rough' neighbourhoods.
- Leisure activities outside of school were reported to be limited, especially in rural areas and for girls.

### **Friendships**

- Friendships with local Irish young people were valued. These were also a useful means of acquiring language and accent. However experiences were mixed with some finding it easy to make friends locally, others finding it difficult, and others not particularly wanting it.
- Barriers to friendships with local Irish young people included perceived differences in cultural background, language and accent, differences in educational and life experience, racism and differences in attitude towards education, authority, religion and alcohol.
- Many migrant young people are unfamiliar with the 'slagging' (mostly friendly trading in insults) which is common currency among local Irish young people and some struggle to understand and adjust to it. 'Slagging' is often harmless, but at times it can be a vehicle for more genuine hostility.

### **Part-time work**

- Word of mouth was believed to be by far the most effective way to get a job.
- Perceived barriers to finding work were discrimination, limited opportunities in rural areas and visa restrictions.



## **Racism**

- Racism emerged spontaneously as an issue in almost all of the focus groups. Many participants talked about how they encountered racism on the street from strangers (including adults), peers in school, at work and in the search for work.
- From classmates there were some overtly racist remarks but more commonly misunderstandings and misrepresentations which caused annoyance and frustration.
- The reactions of some school teachers to racism were raised. In some cases, young people thought that some teachers may misunderstand or fail to deal with racism. Occasionally teachers could create awkward situations through ill-judged attempts to help.

## **Cultural heritage**

- The ability of young people to hold on to their cultural heritage when they migrate is thought to have significant implications for their mental well being. Most of our participants appeared to attach great importance to the cultural heritage of their country of origin.
- Most participants found ways to maintain links with their cultural heritage which suited them individually. Yet they were also open to influences from Irish society.
- Developments in transport and communication technology greatly facilitated contact with cultural heritage.
- Many participants eagerly watched TV from their country of origin via satellite though some had lost interest and felt they watched because their parents did.
- Although most participants attached importance to their cultural heritage and found ways to stay in contact with it, a recurring concern was a sense of 'slippage', a feeling that language, culture and connection to friends and family could be lost through preoccupation with other things, even before one realised it.

## **Family**

- Most migrant young people came to share the 'family mission' of wishing to improve the family's circumstances. They were sympathetic to the challenges their parents face in migrating.
- Young migrants were often asked to translate and interpret for their families, a role which they sometimes found very burdensome.

- Parents were often seen to be too strict and over-protective, especially towards girls and those who arrived in Ireland at a later age.

### **Age of arrival**

- Young people who migrated to Ireland at an older age tended to face a number of challenges which those who have arrived earlier do not.
- They tended to have more difficulty learning the language and accent, have parents who were less comfortable in Irish society and were therefore more controlling, and have fewer friends as a result of missing out on the more stable and friendly experience of Primary school.

### **Policy implications**

- *The need to recognise and harness the enormous potential of the maturity, responsibility, and ambition which many young migrants possess.*
- *The need to be responsive to the difficulties that some young people have in adjusting to the demands of the Irish education system*
- *The need to assist young people in accessing leisure activities organised for young people.*
- *The need to develop more effective, evidence-based strategies for countering racism and promoting diversity in schools, workplaces and communities.*
- *Further research to explore the experiences of migrant young people over time, in particular as they move through crucial transitions such as the end of formal schooling.*
- *The need to develop specific supports to assist those who arrive at later ages in adjusting to the particular challenges they face.*

# 1. The front line of Integration

The primary aim of this research is to document and explore the experiences of a range of young people aged 15 to 18 who have migrated to Ireland. The experience of teenagers is particularly important for understanding integration issues. Compared to either younger children or parents, teenagers will often have greater levels of contact with Irish society, especially contact of an open and unstructured kind.

At school, teenagers will interact regularly with peers in and out of class, in situations which are usually less norm-bound than most work settings. In school, migrant young people are also learning a lot about Irish society and their English language skill tends to quickly outstrip that of their parents. Outside of school, teenagers will tend to have more unsupervised time than younger children. They may also be coming into contact with Irish society through work and the media.

The outcome of such exposure is important not only in terms of the impact it has on the young people themselves. There are also effects on those with whom they come in contact. Beyond the immediate participants in a particular interaction, there are also outcomes associated with 'indirect contact' - ways in which knowing somebody who has friends or interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds may create knowledge, attitudes and greater or lesser prejudice (Wright et al., 1997; Pettigrew et al., 2007). The experience of migrant young people tells us much about how we are doing nationally and where we are likely to go, in terms of processes surrounding migration and integration.

From 1994 until very recently, Ireland experienced a massive increase in inward migration. The total net migration figure increased steadily every year from 8,000 in 1996 to 67,300 in 2007 (Quinn et al., 2008). These figures reflect the net total which represents the total inward migration minus the total outward which means that the actual numbers of people moving to, and staying in the country rising in each successive year in the period. This trend has continued until very recently when, for the first time since 1995, we have seen a return to net outward migration (CSO, 2009). One easily forgotten aspect of this phenomenal growth in the number of migrants resident in Ireland has been a corresponding increase in the number of young people that have migrated here. Between 2002 and 2006, the number of *non-Irish national* children in the state increased by 57.6%. By 2006, there were 62,800 *non-Irish national* children (under 18s) resident in the State, representing 6.1% of the total child population. Of this group, 10,300 were in the 15 to 17 age group<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Further statistical information about migrant young people in Ireland is available in Appendix B.

In the Irish context, there has been some research on the experiences of primary school children (for example, Devine, 2005; McGorman and Sugrue 2007; Ni Laoire, Bushin, Carpena-Mendez and White, 2009) but a more limited amount on the experiences of migrant teenagers. The single largest study to date has been an ESRI study which as part of a wider research programme looked at the experiences of primary and secondary school migrants specifically in relation to educational issues, but also to some extent at social life within the school (Smith, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne, 2009).

The aim of the present study was to fill a gap in documenting the experiences of migrant young people all over Ireland in relation a wide range of issues affecting their lives. The objective was to give migrant young people an opportunity to talk about the issues that were important to them in the way that they wanted to talk about them. We provided minimal guidance and always tried to leave the possibility open for participants to introduce material that was significant for them. The broad research questions were:

- What is life like for migrant young people between the ages of 15 and 18?
- What challenges do they face?
- What are their dreams and aspirations for the future?

The research sought to:

- Provide a richly illustrative, accurate and broad-ranging account of the experiences of a sample of migrant youth living in Ireland
- Contribute to public understanding of the experiences of young migrants in Ireland, an important and too-often neglected aspect of public debate on immigration.
- Help identify key issues in promoting the integration and well-being of migrant youth in Ireland.

The basis of this report is 19 focus group interviews conducted at different sites all around Ireland. The exact sites were chosen on the basis of the Census 2006 data in such a way that we could ensure the participation of:

- Young men and women
- Young migrants from different parts of the globe
- Young people who were living in different cities, small towns and rural areas

The basic aim was to take a broad brush picture of the lives of migrant young people living in Ireland and to ensure that we obtained the maximum range of experience possible. We spent some time trying out different strategies to recruit participants and found in the end that working through schools was the best approach. Thus

almost all of the focus groups took place in schools although we were not specifically looking at school issues<sup>2</sup>.

In total, 169 migrant young people took part in these discussions. A focus group is basically an open discussion between anything from four to twelve young people and two researchers. The researchers bring a set of questions, but also aim to allow the discussion to develop naturally as each group dictates. The people who took part in the research were generally very eager to do so and a huge volume of interesting and insightful material was generated. Focus group discussions were recorded, transcribed and analyzed to identify recurring themes. There was a huge diversity of opinion and experience among the participants. In our analysis, we aim to represent that diversity as accurately as possible but of course there is a limit to our ability to present the richness and range of individual experience if we wish to produce a readable report.

In the next chapter we discuss one of the key themes of the whole report, the way in which young migrants are active agents in their own lives, how they pro-actively try to negotiate the challenges they meet, whether it be the expectations of their parents, relations with their peers, an accent regarded as difficult or racism on the street corner. In subsequent chapters we will look at the main findings which cover such areas as school and education, making friends, living in communities, leisure time, work, general impressions of Irish society, cultural heritage, family and the future.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for further discussion of the rationale and implementation of this procedure.

## 2. Migration, Maturity and Agency

The decision to migrate is often taken by parents, with little serious consultation with younger members of the family. The immediate prospect of migration is frequently an established fact that younger people have to come to terms with. Prior to migration here, young people may have few or confused ideas about what Ireland will be like. On arrival, they may then encounter and have to manage a very different reality.

### The decision to migrate

Young migrants generally report that the decision to migrate was based on their parents' desire to take advantage of opportunities for a better life in Ireland. However, participants often felt that this decision had been a forgone conclusion in which they had been given very little say:

...it's not usually the child that wants to come but like if they come, they just want to go to school and like they want a life like they would at home. But I think usually it's the parents that want to come over to earn money.

*- P131, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

I came here because my mum got transferred like, she got a job here. So that's why, like she was here for three years like I was in India, like I didn't really want to come here.

*- P96, Female, South Asia, Group 10*

Moving to Ireland often involved mixed emotions. On the one hand, it meant leaving behind family, friends and the country they loved:

I think it's difficult because I didn't want to move to Europe. I wanted to stay because I was little as well so you don't really you know you're just thinking you're going to miss your grandmothers, your family because I don't really have a lot of uncles or aunties here in Europe.

*- Unassigned, Group 9*

I think it's difficult because it's different mentality. It's totally different culture and I was, whenever I was in Lithuania I was really patriotic about my country so it was really hard to move.

*- P128, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

On the other hand, being reunited with parents or the anticipation of a new life with new opportunities also meant that migration could be an exciting or happy event:

My mum was like 'we're moving to Ireland' (...) and I was like okay and I had to leave all my friends and school and all. I was so sad but like at the same time happy because my dad was here already.

- *Unassigned, Group 13*

I didn't get to tell my friends anything - I was a young kid, you want to tell your friends where you're going and 'I'm going to miss you' and all that crap and I didn't get to say anything, so I was very disappointed. But when she said I was going to Ireland, I was like yeah, that's going to be a good place, and I was expecting something from a fantasy and all of that.

- *P64, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

While many young migrants feel that the decision to move is out of their control, some said that they had actually either made the decision to move to Ireland for themselves or had been actively involved in making the choice. Often this choice was based on a desire to move away from a difficult home situation:

I am living with my brother, not with parents. My parents are in my country and I was just tired of them and I just asked for them to send me to Ireland.

- *P93, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 10*

I was 7 or 6 when my aunt moved here (...). I saw her pictures of the house and I was like "Oh Cool!" She was telling me that there was loads of opportunities and all (...) So my mum was like - my mum is sick in South Africa so when I came here, my aunty said you'll get better opportunities this side here. (...) So when I thought of Ireland, I thought of loads of opportunities. That's the first thing I thought of when I was coming here.

- *P63, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

Most of the participants shared similarly optimistic expectations of Ireland, usually reflecting parental motivations for migrating. Ireland was imagined as a country that will provide better employment and educational opportunities and an improvement in lifestyle. Many young people expected to have access to better housing and to live in safer areas or more attractive environments than they would have in their home countries:

I thought it would be nice, beautiful environment, clean, go to good schools and good jobs, live in good houses, have good clothes to wear and a better life.

*- P22, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 3*

Maybe a quiet place. Yeah, because we live in the country so, and a wider space. Maybe a better quality of living and maybe quality of education as well.

*- P135, Male, East Asia and Pacific, Group 14*

For many young people the expectations of Ireland as a 'land of opportunity' was based on their perception of Ireland as a wealthy, westernised country:

It was another Western country and a rich country.

*- P146, Male, South Asian, Group 15*

I expected something like, I don't know, America or something. Like in the movies. I don't know why, but so yeah it was like I was happy when I knew that I am going to move.

*- Unassigned, Group 9*

Nicer. Everything totally different than from where I came from.

*- P82, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 9*

Other participants seemed to have no idea what was ahead of them:

I actually didn't know Ireland existed before I came here.

*- P71, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 8*

Since it was called an island I actually visualised that it would be nice and sunny. Now it's called an island. That was obviously a mistake.

*- P25, Male, Unassigned, Group 3*



## Arrival

Many young people, especially those who had settled in smaller cities and towns, expressed surprise that the areas they had moved to did not reflect the urban, 'big city' environment they had imagined:

To be honest I didn't really know what it looked like and it was a really big surprise for me. It's a big difference. In the Philippines like really, like it's really busy and all that. That's why when I came here I was surprised because it was all green and all.

*- P104, Male, East Asian and Pacific, Group 11*

I thought it was going to be a bit more kind of civilised but like Ireland is a big farm to be honest – especially in the country where I come from, it's like Riga, like with all the buildings and everything you know, the people are always in a rush but in here everything seems so Irish.

*- P26, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 4*

Many spoke of the shock involved in the major adjustments they had to make after migrating and the fact that it was 'hard' to begin with:

Learning a different language and especially if you're really young. You don't know what's going on. You leave all your friends behind and change schools; it's a completely different environment like. Different people like, everybody you know. And you just get used to like a totally completely different lifestyle than you did.

*- P157, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 19*

Yeah, at first it was hard - it was kind of hard to adapt because you move into different atmospheres from what you had at home (...) it was hard for me to find friends and kind of talk in the language, because the first thing was to completely learn English, and I didn't have a lot of vocabulary as well, so that was difficult.

*- P123, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

Some people referred to the fact that, despite expectations of a better lifestyle, life in Ireland could actually be difficult and expensive. Taking advantage of opportunities required a great deal of hard work and sacrifice, it was not all as easy as the stories circulated back home might imply:

You would have people who would go off to Europe for say two or three years and they would come back with all these stories of how we were living the life there and blah, blah, (...) but that's what people are told and they leave out the hard work, they don't mention anything about people have to work hard, having to go through troubles.

- *P77, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 17*

It depends on if you work hard for it like, I'm only well off because my parents are working hard for it and like just there are people I know that aren't as well off (...) [People] expect to be well off like for nothing basically, not putting any work in.

- *P79, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

However, most young migrants agreed that the longer they lived in Ireland, the easier life became:

After a while it changed because I met new people and got friends. So it was actually better.

- *P38, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

It gets kind of harder in a way at the start and then easier.

- *Unassigned, Group 9*

## **Maturity and Agency**

Throughout this research we were repeatedly struck by the fact that participants seemed to be both mature beyond their years and to be very actively engaged in meeting the challenges they met, whether it be in dealing with a new educational system or racism. We will return to these themes throughout this report.

For the moment we will just take a couple of examples. Here is a participant talking about how he used to 'mess around' in school in order to fit in with his peers:

...once you start doing that and you start losing focus on school, that's what used to happen to me, you know. And then I just realised, come on what's going on here.

- *P92, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

Here is another talking about why part-time work is good for her even though she doesn't like it:

- I work in a take away, and it's very hard. I don't like it, but it helps me.

- *It helps you?*

- Yeah because when I go out, I always used to go to my own mum, can I have money so I can go out? Now it's better I have my own money, so I can do whatever I want to.

- *P114, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

Of course, there are times when people are less than mature and have great difficulty meeting challenges, but comments like these recur throughout the following report and maturity and agency are key themes running throughout. For that reason we introduce them here but also because we believe they may be intimately related to the experience of migration and the unlooked-for learning that is part of the process. One participant put it like this:

Well I thought have a good life and be happy and all, in school and that. But here I have to be more independent because my parents are more constricted in their work and you have to stand up on your own.

- *P73, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 17*

#### INTERIM SUMMARY # 1 – MIGRATION, MATURITY AND AGENCY

- Often the decision to migrate is made without consultation with children. In a smaller number of cases it is the young person him- or her-self who makes the decision to migrate to escape from a difficult family situation.
- Young people look forward to the prospect of migration with mixed feelings, both a sense of excitement and a longing to stay at home.
- They often migrate with confused or few ideas about what Ireland will be like but most expect a land of opportunity, improved education and wealth.
- The reality however can be a lot harder than expected. Looking back a lot now see stories they were told about Ireland before coming as little more than fairy tales. Opportunities are to be worked for.
- Throughout this research we were struck by the maturity of the young people we met and by the way in which they actively seek to deal with challenges they meet.

### 3. Education

Young migrants often have experience of very different educational systems than the one they meet in Ireland. They may have to adjust to an unfamiliar school ethos, different forms of academic organization, new teachers with different approaches, and sometimes also a new language of instruction.

#### Schooling prior to Ireland

Participants came from all over the world and their experiences of school prior to arriving in Ireland vary hugely. Common themes that arose in their responses about education in their counties of origin, however, were strict discipline, high regard for the value of education and longer hours.

Many of the young migrants reported that they were used to stricter discipline at school, many having experienced corporal punishment:

In Nigeria nobody would do what they do here in class.  
Everybody is disciplined because you get flogged.

*- P33, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

I used to go to school in Pakistan, and the teachers there would just hit you if you don't know your stuff, like with sticks.

*- P149, Female, South Asia, Group 1*

In addition, many participants came from countries where it was necessary to pay for second level education, or where parents felt it necessary to choose private, fee-paying schools in order to secure a quality education. Many such participants felt that this was a factor contributing to strict behaviour and scholarly commitment:

...you're under much more pressure from your parents, because education's there is – you have to pay a lot for it, especially if you want a good education at primary or secondary level it's the same thing.

*- P146, Male, South Asia, Group 15*

I know here we don't pay, we just pay for the books and stuff and like it's easier. But in Africa you pay for each term that you go. So you're more wanting to go, and because your parents probably there is so many kids out there that are unable to go to school, that want to go to school.

*- Unidentified Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

Schools in the country of origin were often reported to be quite demanding in terms of time:

...in Poland you'd be finished at maybe 6.00. You start at 7am, and finish at 6.00 or 7.00 like so the whole day would be gone really.

- *P79, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

...in Russia you have school from Monday to Saturday, yes. So only one day off.

- *P127, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

#### INTERIM SUMMARY #2: SCHOOLING PRIOR TO IRELAND

- Prior to coming to Ireland, many participants have experienced an education system which is very different to the Irish one.
- Corporal punishment is allowed or at least tolerated in many countries of origin.
- There is also generally a very high value placed on education in these countries.
- Some young people reported that they were accustomed to spending a lot of time in school.

## School in Ireland

Starting school in Ireland was often a particularly stressful and disorientating time for young migrants. In many cases, participants arrived in the later years of secondary school or even in the middle of an academic year. They had to learn their way around their new school, come to terms with a new curriculum and figure out a different set of school rules. Starting at a new school also involves meeting a lot of new people, both teachers and students. Looking back, most young people remember a period of great difficulty when they first started:

I think it was the longest day I had in Ireland because when I got to school I don't know the language, I don't know anybody here and I was like, I just want to go home. Like, what's the time to finish school? And I didn't know the rules because the rules in school was really different compared to my country. You have to go there to the classroom around the school but in my country the teacher has to meet you in class.

*- P31, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

The principal she made me meet an Irish girl so that she can make me see around the school and all that, but then after a while I lost her and then I was like I don't know where she went, I didn't see her at all. (...) She just disappeared. And I was like 'Oh my God I'm lost' because I didn't have any directions. Where my class was, or my teacher. I didn't have anything.

*- P7, Female, Unassigned, Group 1*

It was different at first, the subjects were different, teachers different and I basically just - people just knew people.

*- P151, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 16*

Once settled, a number of features of their educational experience in Ireland consistently stood out for participants. They reported that they found a much less deferential attitude to authority among local Irish young people than they were used to. Many found what they believed to be lower academic standards. They also commented on different forms of school organisation, such as streaming of students by ability, and the helpful or less than helpful behaviour of teachers.

Some participants described how surprised or even shocked they were to discover what they perceived as a general lack of respect and decorum in Irish schools:

Yeah, they were, they're very mean, they're very rude towards the teachers and like in Poland it's impossible.

You can't even say a bad word about the teacher because the teacher is here for you, to help you and you have to show respect and like here I don't really see that Irish people, especially Irish because that's the culture. They don't really have respect for the teachers. That's the worst thing.

- *P30, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 4*

Comments like this were very common, but in considering them, it may be worth bearing in mind that many students were attending schools in economically deprived areas and that schools may have had to deal with related social problems.

The following account is striking as, almost incidentally, it reveals the way in which lack of respect is a common, well-worn topic of conversation among groups of migrant pupils. The incident involves a group of Nigerian students trying to convince a new arrived compatriot that he will need to get used to disrespectful attitudes towards teachers:

He came into the school...on lunchtime one day we were talking and he was like, he doesn't like this school. We were asking him why and there was no respect in the school, and we were laughing because we already knew, we were used to it, we were like "you have got a long way to go". And we were laughing at him like. You can't expect them to have respect you know?...you could go to other schools, you're most likely to find the same sort of behaviour.

- *P64, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

In this case, the newly arrived student had in fact subsequently left the school. Some participants believed that a lack of discipline amongst the young migrants' Irish peers related not to a lack of rules, but to a failure to enforce the rules:

I think they let everybody away with more here than they would in South Africa. Like, it's not that they'd be real strict, but they'd be saying things that you definitely would not be allowed do like. Like here, like talking back to the teachers and all, but there you just wouldn't like. You'd know your place, like not to say anything back.

- *P71, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 8*

In Nigeria, a rule is a rule. If you can't follow it, leave. That is the rule. You must abide by the rules.

- *P12, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

Some participants felt that the systems of corporal punishment used in their countries of origin resulted in more disciplined children, who were better equipped to learn:

Over here, they do teach you but they don't really discipline you and they let you work freely, like you do anything you want. And then that kind of ruins you, you don't think you have to do anything. So I suppose primary education in Pakistan is better off because they make you learn and study harder.

*- P150, Male, South Asia, Group 10*

It's not always good, but sometimes it's good because you know what you have to do right, you just behave yourself in a right way, you respect the teachers, you don't talk back to them, you don't call them names and all that.

*- P66, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

However opinion was far more divided on this subject and some participants felt more positive about the absence of corporal punishment in Irish schools:

I think the discipline is more ok than in Nigeria. Because the whipping doesn't get you through learning anything, just whipping and whipping. But here you get detention or write lines, I think that's ok.

*- P69, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

...I think the school is excellent because I used to go to school in Pakistan, and the teachers there would just hit you if you didn't know your stuff, like with sticks.

*- P6, Female, South Asia, Group 1*

Many participants believed that academic standards had been higher in their country of origin than in Ireland, a typical comment being that school was 'harder' outside of Ireland:

Maths over in Poland is much harder to do. Like every other subject for example geography, it's much harder in Poland as well.

*- P101, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 11*

But in Nigeria they are very strict and that makes a very good thing on the student because the Irish, the best student here cannot compete with us in Nigeria.

*P12, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*



...it's even more harder for us there. Education is like ten times harder than higher level. We don't have higher level or ordinary level, or foundation, it's just hard level and it's ten times harder.

*P94, Female, South Asia, Group 10*

On the basis of the present research it is hard to evaluate the accuracy of statements such as these as the participants are reflecting on educational systems with very different aims and values. However there are a few revealing comments about what the 'hardness' of schools in other countries consists of which are a little worrying from this point of view, comments which suggest that 'hardness' consist of tasks such as mental arithmetic that at third level would be considered relatively menial:

And talking about education, like it is really harder. Calculators were not used. No-one like, we don't use calculators for maths. So, like and it's even more harder for us there.

*- P94, Female, South Asia, Group 10*

...when I was in like middle school we weren't allowed to use calculators or anything like that and I got the maths but when I got here I started using calculators and I don't think I am good at maths any more.

*- P97, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 10*

There was also some dissent among the participants on the issue of the 'hardness' of education in Ireland:

I don't think that education here is easier, it's just that it's more focused on what you want to do. Because for example in Latvia, you'd have to learn pretty much all subjects in last year it's tough to learn astronomy and stuff like that, but you don't really need it, here it more you choose your subjects and you work towards them.

*- P1, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

Opinions on the organisation of Irish schools were mixed, and seemed in some part to be shaped by the time elapsed since the young person arrived in Ireland.

The practice of exam class streaming was new to many participants. A source of stress for some participants was their feeling that they had been streamed into an exam class which was below their ability level:

When I came into Ireland I was asked to do foundation maths. I was like, 'Miss, foundation maths?' That sounds so off to me because even my younger sister of 10 years

would do it without no problem, without even using the calculator. So I was like 'Sorry Miss, I am not going to stay in this class'.

*- P17, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

I got put down to foundation maths and foundation maths is just too easy for me. I do everything. I did the first test, and I got the highest mark, and I went up to do the ordinary because the foundation was too easy for me.

*- P15, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 2*

On the positive side, the provision of English language supports for students for whom English is not a first language was highly valued by many participants:

The language is like very difficult to people who come from other countries to learn. I mean, their school is very nice, they have, I mean we had extra English class, so...yeah, so I like that. They help foreign students to learn the English.

*- P166, Female, South Asia, Group 19*

Many of the young people commented on the fact that they find teachers in the Irish system to be kind and helpful:

...you know like I think the teachers here are really nice, good, friendly. They want to help, they want you to know things...

*- P95, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 10*

I love my school. I really love my school. I love all the people in my school. I love all my teachers, they're really nice.

*- P127, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

I mean in Russia they were horrible. Strict as, I don't know, nobody could be as stricter then and here in Ireland, well they are strict also but they're not as strict. They're, I mean and they don't get as angry or something, you know, if we mess up. And they're really nice.

*- P127, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

The teaching approach used in Ireland was also found by some new migrants to compare favourably with that in their country of origin:

...like over in Ireland it's easier to like see the way they teach you stuff and the way they explain stuff it's easier to learn here than in Nigeria, because like you see in classes you're up to like 30 something [pupils] but you can create like smaller groups and you can learn, it's easier to learn over here than back in Nigeria.

*- P89, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

Over here you get more help in school, whereas in Mauritius like in class, the teachers kind of they don't really help you that much. So over here it would be kind of like taken for extra classes and you'd be given more help.

*- P168, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 19*

Other young migrants had a different experience of teachers, with some reporting that they feel that teachers in Ireland expect too little of their students:

And here it's like, the level the teachers, at least to me the teachers seem to behave as if everyone – they expect you to be dumb, as in the expect you not to want to learn, they expect you to not like, they expect you to do badly.

*- P136, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 15*

Another negative feature of teacher behaviour mentioned by some participants was what they perceived as discrimination:

And like in my year the best students, they're all black. Like most of them are black, like we get more blacks through than Ireland or English and Polish, rather than Irish people. But like the teacher recognizes the Irish people more in class.

*- P17, Female, Unassigned, Group 12*

...They're always trying to put their own people first and put them in the class before us, and which is not really nice, because if they do that to them they won't like it. It's like first of all I think they should think before they do things because like if they're in our shoes they wouldn't really like it or accept that.

*- P16, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

I remember I was messing with friends and he [*the teacher*] goes to me, 'I want none of that foreign stuff in this school' or something like that.

- P25, Unassigned, Group 3

Some attempts by teachers to be helpful can cause also embarrassment:

...we had a free class and I was reading a big book of Maeve Binchy or something like that and the teacher asked me do I need a dictionary. And I felt like that is, I felt really hurt because if I needed a dictionary I could get one myself. I don't need someone to tell me that.

- P21, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 3

Say it's in a class right, the teacher goes on about racism and maybe there's one child like or one kid in the class that's probably black or Chinese or something, it puts that person on the spot.

- P159, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 19

In addition, the failure of teachers to address the racist behaviour of classmates was an issue for some participants:

Because sometimes when you report stuff they don't take it that serious, but it's actually serious to you, and it means a lot.

- P21, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 3

### **INTERIM SUMMARY #3: SCHOOLS IN IRELAND**

- Many participants were surprised by what they perceived as a lack of discipline and respect for teachers in Irish schools.
- Many participants believed that academic standards in Irish schools are lower than in their country of origin.
- The streamed exam system in Ireland can be a source of irritation to young migrants who are unfamiliar with such a system and sometimes believe they are being put in streams below their ability level.
- Young migrants for whom English is not a first language place great value on English language supports
- Many participants spoke with great warmth about their schools and their teachers.
- Participants also report some teachers as showing favouritism towards local Irish pupils and some on occasion as making them feel uncomfortable by ill-judged efforts to help.

## 4. Friends, Peers and Partners

Relating to peers and developing friendships are vital and potentially enjoyable activities for most young migrants. However, sometimes, peers are perceived to be hostile and cross cultural friendships can be a challenge.

### **Friendship and Romance**

Experiences of friendship with Irish peers varied widely. Some had a significant number of Irish friends. Others had to put a lot of effort into developing friendships with local Irish people while others had been unable to develop any meaningful friendships with local Irish young people.

Some participants report very positive experiences making Irish friends:

I think they are nice like, not everybody is talking the rubbish. I think lots of people are nice in general. I like Irish people.

- *P19, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 2*

...I made so many friends here and like my best friends are obviously Irish as well, and like I'd be talking to them forever like, and be always at their house, and they'd be at my house and like, I'd share everything with them because like we're so close and they'd do the same with me like.

- *P131, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

A special talent or hobby could prove very useful for developing friendships:

...but when they saw me dancing in the talent show, they all got really friendly and everything.

- *P33, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

I just show off some moves in basketball. People come and tell you, 'Oh I want you to play for our basketball team.' 'Oh really?' So something like that. So it's easy for me to have friends. So it's easy in terms of school to have friends.

- *P135, Male, East Asia and Pacific, Group 14*

Participants had arrived to Ireland at different points in their school careers and it was generally understood that capacity to make friends with Irish people correlated strongly with arriving to Ireland during primary school:

...I have got loads of Irish mates so you know when you have sleepovers and stuff, and since I got started school when I was here, I started when I was in 4<sup>th</sup> class and so during that time I grew up with these girls and went to the same secondary school.

- *Unidentified, Group 9*

Yeah, like when you come over here and you join a primary school. Like the one in the towns, that's much better for your mixing up with Irish people, because you're small at that time.

- *P6, Female, South Asia, Group 1*

Well it's kind of hard, because like the people like in the secondary, they have known their class mates since primary...

- *P74, Female, East Asia and Pacific, Group 17*

Language was an important factor in terms of the development of friendships with Irish young people:

...when I came to Ireland I found it hard because of the language, first of all I couldn't really get friends, I couldn't really adapt, so it was quite hard and I think most people have the same difficulty at the start.

- *P24, Female, Unassigned, 12*

It was hard here, it was really hard, because you know, even though that I knew English, but the accent gets harder at the beginning, you don't know what exactly they are asking you, what they are saying, you know...but you get used to it and it gets better every day.

- *P81, Male, Sub-Saharan, Group 18*

As a person picked up English, maintaining friendships with Irish young people was deemed to be very useful for developing language proficiency:

But the thing is, when you have Irish friends, you just get to know the language much better. And you know, you stop being afraid to talk to people, because that's what happened in my case, when I came to Ireland. I was afraid to say a word, because I knew it would be wrong. And I was just always afraid, and Irish people made me feel more confident and even I make mistakes, I don't mind because I know I'll fix them next time...

*- P 124, Female, Unassigned, Group 12*

Given the focus group format of this research, we decided against asking direct questions about dating and romantic relationships. However it is obviously an important part of the social life of young people and it emerged naturally in a number of focus groups.

Many participants talked about having local Irish boyfriends or girlfriends and when it came up others said that they were open to the possibility:

- I like the Irish girls. Brilliant girls.

- I second that.

*- P33 and P38, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

However some differences and difficulties were noted. Firstly, many migrant young people have a different attitude to alcohol and smoking than local Irish young people and this has implications for their personal relationships:

But I hate because, they [*Irish girls*] love to smoke a lot and drink.

*- P33, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

A small number of participants also talked about differences in attitude to sex and romantic relationships in particular that local Irish young people were more willing to talk about sex and publicize their relationships:

Like, seriously like any time you're not at school or anything like that, anything they ever talk about is just sex...

*- P98, Europe and Central Asia, Group 10*

A reluctance to talk about sex and relationships can even be used to bully some migrant young people:

Yeah recently there's a girl behind me, she pulls my hair, she annoys me a lot when I'm in computer class and she pulls my hair, and like there's one guy he was my friend but after because in our country when we



have some boy as our friend, they don't make it as an affair. They don't publicise it as oh my gosh, she's going out with that boy. But here if you talk to someone then your friends are like, oh are you going out with him? Or something. So I just kept quiet, and this girl is like, and that guy and this girl are both in my class, so this girl goes, oh are you going out with him, and she says dirty, dirty stuff to me and I just hate it. And then one day I decided to go to the principal, but then I just gave up at the last warning, and if she doesn't take up I'm going to the principal.

*- P7, Female, Unassigned, Group 1*

A frequent comment made in relation to relationships was annoyance with single sex schools, a system with which many young migrants are unfamiliar:

*P102* - I don't like just boys in school.

*Facilitator* - Okay, so a mixed school would be better?

*All* - Yeah.

.....

*Facilitator* - ... Anyone else think a mixed school would be better?

*All* - Yeah.

*Facilitator* - Yeah, everybody. All right, fair enough.

*- Group 11*

And then like yeah and just because you keep away, how are you supposed to socialise if like say you go to the school for 6 years or even 12 if like the boy's school is like a separate school as well and then you go to same school girl's or a boy's school for 12 years and then you move onto college and colleges are usually mixed and then work and the like there's men and women and like you find it a really big change.

*- P131, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 13*

Given that romantic relationships were not a focus of the research it can be hard to determine the importance of isolated findings. In one case, however, parental racism appeared to be having a negative impact on the relationship of two young people:

- I have a big problem at home because like my parents are kind of like racist against black people and like I'm with a black girl so like.

*Facilitator* - Right.

- And like most of my friends are black so like it kind of tends - like my mom is dead used to it now but my dad

- you will not change my dad. My dad is a very - but then my own dad he just lives by his rule.

- *P79, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

Interestingly, the father of the girl in question appeared to have similar objections to the relationship:

*Facilitator* - So he wouldn't accept that she would go out with a...

- ... white boy.

*Facilitator* - ... with any boy or with a white boy?

Any boy like, but like her mother knows about me so like it's okay

- *P79, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

#### INTERIM SUMMARY # 4 - FRIENDSHIP AND ROMANCE

- Many participants found it easy to make friends with Irish peers, while some have found it difficult or undesirable.
- Having a special talent or hobby makes it easier to make friends while poor English makes it more difficult.
- Friendships with Irish people were valued as supporting the development of English language skills.
- Some participants were eager to talk about romantic relationships. They often had local Irish boys or girlfriends (or were open to the possibility).
- Differences and difficulties in cross-cultural relationships were noted: different attitudes to alcohol, smoking, talking about sex and publicizing relationships.
- A number of participants were irritated by the single sex schools they attended, a system with which they were unfamiliar.

## **Barriers to friendship**

A number of issues consistently emerged as barriers to friendships developing; different attitudes to alcohol and religion, racism and unfamiliar forms of social interaction that Irish people engage in. In this context, friendships with other migrants are often very highly valued.

Some young migrants believe that Irish young people are inclined to drink alcohol and smoke from a very young age and would see this as a reason for avoiding friendships with Irish people:

I think it's kind of culture, because like here the 16-year-olds they drink, and in the kinda Asian culture, because I am from Pakistan, like we don't think it's cool, because the Irish people – they don't have a life.

*- P166, Female, South Asia, Group 19*

More generally, culture could act as a barrier to friendship for some migrants:

Yeah, it's been one year I've been in school but I don't mix with Irish people a lot. Because I think my culture and the way I think is really different from them. So I think I won't be able to mix with them so I just stay away.

*- P7, Female, Unassigned, Group 1*

A number of participants placed a very high value on religion. This emerged at times almost incidentally:

- How did you come here?
- Because God ordained it to bring me here.

*- P143, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 15*

A number of participants of Muslim and Pentecostal religious orientation raised the issue of religion in relation to their relationships with Irish young people describing the way in which it could conflict with their more secular outlook:

Yeah I think it's important because the things is like me personally like, I don't listen to what no-one has to say. I believe in what I believe in and like I don't, the Irish lifestyle, culture, the way the teens are, I don't really like it. Because they think smoking and drinking, taking drugs is how to have fun. But to me it's not. Like you can get together with your friends, have a little party, dance all night and that's like fun for me, yeah but like plus my mum like she, I see the way she is. She's like a good

person. She is true to her religion like and everything so I'm just, I think it's important to hold onto that.

*- P97, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 10*

Most things that people do, I don't believe. Like most people say 'we're going drinking, we're going to the club.' Like every Friday there is a place called [*Name omitted*], people go, like Irish students go there and I have never been there. They always invite me and I'm like, 'it's against my religion.' I just don't do it.

*- P134, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 14*

Other participants seemed more successful in accommodating their religious differences with the outlooks of their Irish friends:

Yeah people like the people I know, and I would be like friends with them, they would be explain to them why you don't drink they won't like force you again like, or even bring up the conversation of drinking, so they understand why we don't drink, and if you like explain properly of a religious way of why you don't drink, and don't like turn into mess, I just don't drink because I don't...so if you explain it properly they respect it.

*- P151, Male, South Asia, Group 16*

This participant also showed a very patient attitude in explaining why he never challenged the decision of his school not to allow him time to perform Friday prayers:

No because then it counts as being disrespectful, and the principal is elder and stuff, and then like they'll call home, and like my Dad is extremely religious and he'd be like why are you disrespecting him and stuff. So like if we don't pray we can go home and do it. There is a time, like it has to be done in a specific time. But like there is a rule if you can't do it in that time you must do it afterwards.

*- P151, Male, South Asia, Group 16*

Relationships with Irish peers at school could also be marked by experiences of racism and many incidents of racist behaviour were mentioned. Many had experienced verbal taunts and abuse:

...I don't know, it's just pure horrible. They are absolutely racist in this school. You can just walk in

there and they can just move 'Oh you smell,' I mean I don't smell, excuse me, you're serious like?

*P10, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

Irish people being racist, it's common everywhere, even in the classroom. Like you don't have the courage to talk. Because you be like, if I talk they're going to laugh at me.

*P17, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

The main problem would be racism, that's the main problem. Because people...we always get judged by our colour. They just see you being black, they think you're stupid, they think you're dumb as hell. And when you happen to be smart...they pick on you for anything really. If you're smart they'll pick on you, if you're quiet they'll pick on you, if you're mad or really sound, they'll pick on you. You won't even do anything and they'll just pick on you anyway. Just pick on her because she's black – just have a laugh, just pick on her.

*P66, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

Other participants had experienced acts of physical aggression:

They start throwing papers at you in class like. Throwing papers in class like when the teacher is writing on the board.

*P84, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

When I came here I was bullied, or lads tried to bully me in first year, and it was racist because they used to call me Latvian whatever and they were like, some of them, not all of them, not everyone, but there was a crowd, and I even had to get in fights because just purely self defence. They were just you know, pushing me around, and when I bent down to get my bag they'd just kick me for no reason...

*P1, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

Among local Irish young people there is often a culture of 'slagging' which involves name calling and trading in insults. This can be quite sharp although it is usually intended to be harmless and is often taken as a sign of friendship. In relation to 'slagging' two main points arise. Firstly, most migrant young people appear to be unfamiliar with such a culture and, secondly, it may on occasion be a vehicle for genuine hostility.

Most migrant young people appear to be initially quite struck by the 'slagging' that goes on among their local Irish friends and classmates, often finding it strange or misreading it as genuine. After a period of time most will learn to read it correctly and get used to it:

I think it was very difficult just people messing around with you, and jokes... In my country we are not used to it too much, probably all the time serious. Somebody mess around like this, start fighting, and I was just thinking ok for a few months it was really difficult for me and then I got used to it, ok that's normal for Irish.

*- P9, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 1*

Yeah because in South Africa we don't really slag people, but here, it's like an everyday thing, but you just get used to it, you just go with the flow.

*- P71, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 8*

The difficulty and subtlety of trying to read 'slagging' as a culturally unfamiliar form of interaction was revealed in some discussions, as participants talked about the way in which you have to pay close attention in order to interpret behaviour correctly:

-It's part of the sense of humour but at very eye level, you need to be very careful to understand what is being said because if they slag you – this is not – they don't want to offend you as much but that is provoking you to set up a kind of dialogue ...

*Facilitator -Yeah?*

-... and to test your sense of humour. Sometimes it's just that. Very often it's just that. When they really want to annoy you, you will see it in their body language. You would see it.

*- P80, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

Although most migrant young people will learn to recognize 'slagging', many still find it unpleasant and difficult to accept:

Like they kick each other. 'Ha, ha, fun.' Really stupid things. I just look and 'What is so funny about that?' Or they'd be just pushing someone's head and 'Ha, ha, ha.' It's not funny. It's just they're not giving the other person respect on how they feel. You know sometimes just fight, 'oh we're just having a laugh sir'. It's really stupid. Really.

*- P16, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

Yeah so like I just don't like it. I think it's ridiculous actually.

*- P10, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

'Slagging' can also take a more aggressive and unpleasant tone at which point it begins to shade into racism and bullying. Name calling which is personally directed at some salient feature of an individual such as their name or an aspect of their dress appears to cause particular distress. Persistent slagging can also transcend the barrier of harmless good fun:

P7 - Because some things you don't take as a joke. And then people do take it as a joke but it depends on your personality, if you don't like jokes and someone does it with you, like when I came to school there was one girl who used to ask me do you want to go out with me? And I was like, what the hell? I mean I used to feel really irritated at the start but then I just ignored, that's the best thing to do, just ignore you know, because I know I've come here to study and I have to study. I don't want to get into all these problems and so I just ignore them.

*[Interruption]*

*Facilitator* - And do you think any of it is kind of a racist issue or do you think that she's just like that?

P7 - No she's just messing, but she should understand that I don't like it. When I say that I don't like it, she still does it. So...

*P4* - Maybe she likes you

P7 - She hates me and I hate her too

*- P7, P4, Female, Unassigned, Group 1*

'Slagging' can also be ambiguous and easily confused with more serious forms of insult. In the following extract participants disagree about the meaning of racist name calling. In this case we get a sense that in some situations thinking that it is 'only slagging' may function as a mechanism for young people to minimize what is really more hostile behaviour:

*P81* - Some people like if they are so quiet, you know, they don't like to talk to people and these boys come along they take it like it's a racist thing, you know, and with me if they say "You black cunt, get out of the country" I take it like as a slagging thing, you know.

*P79* - I take that personally.

*P81* - So I don't take it personally like, you know.

*-P81, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa*

*-P79, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 2*

In this context, friendships with other migrant pupils are often very highly valued and in some cases cultivating such friendships has become the main focus in young people's efforts. Friendships with other migrant pupils are based on shared understandings and often a common first language:

...but like I think it's easier with the language, it's easier I think, when you're speaking English you have to think all the words and it's hard.

- *P42, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 5*

Yeah, it's like easier if you meet someone from your country. You can start to speak your language and it's easier, but like if it's an Irish person you first have to figure out with kind of person they are, and what kind of personality they are towards you and each other. But if you go to somewhere and the people are just like you, you will feel more comfortable than meeting a new person and they don't speak your language.

- *P21, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 3*

Beyond language, the shared experience of living outside one's country of origin was also important:

My advice would be to at first, if my friend had to come here, I would advise them to make friends with somebody from a different country as well. Don't isolate yourself from the Irish community, but it would be easier and that friend would understand more.

- *P121, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

Like, you know, people from other cultures won't understand what you've been going through, or whatever, of you got bullied. Like I used to get bullied in primary school because I was from Romania and like, I think they understand you more rather than Irish people if like, if they didn't know what you went through...

- *P159, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 19*



#### INTERIM SUMMARY # 5 – BARRIERS TO FRIENDSHIP

- Barriers to friendship included different attitudes to alcohol / smoking and to religion.
- Many participants reported some racism from peers especially verbal taunting. Some also reported acts of physical aggression.
- Many migrant young people are unfamiliar with the 'slagging' which is common currency among local Irish young people and some struggle to understand and come to terms with it. 'Slagging' is often harmless but at times it can be a vehicle for more genuinely hostile intentions.
- Friendships with other migrants are highly valued and can be easier to maintain, being based on shared language, culture and the experience of migration.

## 5. LIFE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

In addition to the adjustments required in school, young migrants must also come to terms with living in neighbourhoods which are often quite different from those they were used to prior to migration. A further challenge is finding ways to fill their leisure time in this new environment. Some seek work, and a smaller number find it. Through these various experiences in and out of school young people come to hold quite strong views about what are for them the salient features of Irish society, what they find good about it and what they find less positive.

### **Living conditions and leisure time**

In general, most participants spoke positively about their family's housing situation. For some families, there was an element of downsizing involved - what a well educated family can afford, for example, in Romania or Pakistan is very different to what they can afford in Ireland. On the whole, however, most of the young people were happy with the houses they were living in:

...now we have a little house...although it's a county council house it's ours and we can do whatever we want there.

*- P127, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

However many participants talked about living in neighbourhoods in which they found anti-social behaviour and crime to be common:

...the first night we moved in there was a robbed car and it was burnt right outside our house. ....

*- Unidentified, Group 17*

You have all these little kids throwing rocks at this big van that just sits around the corner from my estate, at the windows and these kids are like what? Like the same age as my little brother like 9, 10, 8 and they're like throwing rocks around the place and have the whole hoodies on them and stuff.

*- P91, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

It's kind of scary at night time [*laughter*] because it's like - there's a lot of Irish people that are drug addicts and they walk around at night, alcoholics as well.

*- P80, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

A number of the students told stories of friends or relatives who had been robbed or assaulted in their local area. Here, for example, a female participant describes how her cousin was beaten up in her own neighbourhood:

He had on his expensive jacket and chains and phones and everything on him...and they were on the corner...about 5 of them...I think they were drunk or something and they just attacked him from the back and they literally beat the shit out of him.

*-P64, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

Participants reported developing different strategies to deal with the demands of life in their neighbourhood and incidents that might arise. Some participants spoke about the ways in which they go out of their way to avoid certain areas. In the following extract, a girl talks about how she tries to deal with harassment that she receives regularly on the bus. She seems to rely on humour as her main strategy:

...we were getting on the bus and we had a few cousins of mine and she came from England and we were just talking, we were on the top of the bus and the guy comes in with the hoodie, [*Dublin accent*] 'what's the story with you?' do you know what I mean [*Laughter*]. And you don't want to reply because you know, they're like 'why aren't you talking young one,' you know and they just like and then they come closer and you know you're sitting there and they'll come at the back of you 'I'm talking to you'. Oh it's hilarious though, it's funny.

*-P91, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

The picture is not entirely bleak in relation to such difficulties. Some participants reported having few problems to deal with in their area. Differences on this point may occur even in the same school site as exemplified in the following exchange:

*P165* - See where I live in an apartment like it's dangerous...There used to be a flat in front of my apartment and like in the afternoon and all like all the young fellas they'd be coming into my apartment. And there'd be nobody at home. Like they started a fire on the grass one day and all that and we had to call the brigade to put it out.

*P166* - I live in [*name of area*] and it's a very nice area.

*-P165 / P166, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa / South Asia, Group 19*

In terms of leisure activities outside of school hours, there seemed to be a general consensus among participants that there was not a great deal to do, especially in rural settings:

There's no places to go here, nothing actually. That's why all the people head out into the pubs and drink...because there's nothing to do in this place.

*- P4, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

There's some recreation but not a lot of it...there's not a lot for children our age... it's either for small children or older people. They don't consider the age in the middle.

*- P21, Female, Sub Saharan Africa, Group 3*

There were concerns about the amount of information available on structured facilities for young people, with participants commenting that they only heard about them in school, through word of mouth or through a social worker:

It's not advertised properly...I used to go to this sports centre...far away...I'm just after realising this summer that there's two right beside my house.

*- P75, Male, South Africa, Group 17*

The picture is not wholly negative, however. Many participants reported involvement in activities which are broadly similar to those we might expect for any young person. Pastimes included the cinema, bowling, discos/social events, or going to amusement arcades. Many were also involved in sports clubs such as rugby, soccer and martial arts. A number of students mentioned taking part in GAA teams, which had for the most part few other migrant participants:

It's really Irish. I think there was maybe one person from Slovakia but I think they stopped so it's really me now and Irish people.

*- P25, Male, Unassigned, Group 3*

A small number of female participants were vigorously involved in sports teams, but in general these were male pastimes. Even where girls were eager to take part in sports, there seemed to be fewer opportunities:

I think it's harder for the girls here to play...to find sports to do...in my old school we used to play football, and we did it with the boys, so we used to like play with the boys and kick their butts.

*- P136, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 15*

At best, some female participants benefit from a vicarious interest in sport:

I do interact with a lot of Irish people but my brother plays for the ...Club...on Saturday and Sunday he has

matches. My whole family go with him to watch the match.

*- Unidentified Female, Group 3*

Some participants had become involved in youth clubs and other locally organised groups which could provide the opportunity for girls to become involved in music or dance-related activities. When young people became involved in such local activities, the outcome was generally positive:

I have been in like youth clubs...they do like different courses so you meet different people...when you get close to the people you kind of get a little bit comfortable...and I now try and open up a little bit, you know.

*- P81, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 18*

#### **INTERIM SUMMARY # 6 - LIVING CONDITIONS AND LEISURE TIME**

- Most participants reported being happy with their family's housing conditions, but many reported living in what they regarded as rough neighbourhoods in which anti-social behaviour was common.
- Leisure activities outside of school were reported to be limited especially in rural areas and for girls.
- Boys are generally far more actively involved with sports teams than girls.

### **Part-time work**

Many participants were eager to find a part-time job outside of school. There were different motivations behind this ambition:

In my house the bills are always...worth like 500 euro or something. I just want to work so I could help my mum and dad.

*- P68, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

To work for myself and use my own money and not have to borrow from anybody else for what I need.

*- P66, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

It's good to escape sometimes from school. You always study Monday to Friday and on the weekends you work...it calms you down.

*- P118, Female, East Asia and Pacific, Group 12*

During the fieldwork for this research, the global recession became big news adding another motivation:

When there was no recession I didn't need to work. I got my pocket money and lunch money and all that. But now there's a recession, if there was any way I could work, I would go for it.

*- P64, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

Experiences finding work were mixed. Participants reported two main job seeking strategies: calling into potential employers in person, and word of mouth. The first strategy was seen as the more unreliable but could be very successful sometimes:

I just dropped my CV and got a call within ten minutes.

*- Unidentified, Group 9*

In some cases, the young people had a sense that racism and discrimination might be behind the difficulty getting work:

I needed work experience and I went into the hairdressers place and I asked for work experience, and they asked me straight away, where are you from? And I said Lithuania, and they said right we'll give you a call, but they never did, so I kind of thought that's because I'm from a different country kind of, and people don't like it.

*- P4, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

Interestingly, such beliefs also lead to young people adapting strategies which could easily become self-fulfilling prophecies:

If you want to get jobs, like, when you want to go into the shop and drop in your CV, just look around because you can't find any black persons working in that shop don't bother because your CV is going in the bin.

*- P17, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

Getting jobs through word of mouth or personal recommendations was commonly perceived to have a more successful outcome, and many young people worked with parents or other family members:

If you have a connection you have a possibility of getting a job, if you don't have any connection it's really impossible.

*- P73, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 17*

In many rural areas employment opportunities were reported to be very limited:

In [*name of town*] it's really hard because there's only one shop, that's the only place we can work! [*laughter*]

*- P79, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

In other cases, young people were unable to work because of visa restrictions. In general, young people appeared to have a firm understanding of these:

Because my dad and my brother and I are under a dependent visa, we are dependent on mom. So I can study, my stamp is 2A so I can just study, I can go to school, but I can't work.

*- P65, Male, South Asia, Group 7*

The kind of work that participants did varied, and seemed generally to be in line with the work that any young person would do – babysitting (usually females), working on construction sites (usually males), in factories or fast food outlets. Many worked in retail. Most seemed to enjoy their work:

I work in a shoe shop and I think it's great because you get to meet new people, and you have different nationalities in there...but they all get along really well.

*- P113, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

In general they were very flexible employers and would understand your individual circumstances and would go out of their way to help you if you needed it.

*- P77, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 17*

This last participant worked in a large international retail outlet. Although very few participants said they worked illegally, some mentioned that they knew people who did and felt that they, on the other hand, received quite unfair treatment:

Some of my friends are working illegally but they get low pay...they get 3 euro, 3 and a half euro per hour, and they work like 12 hours more than [cut off]...

*- P2, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 1*

#### **INTERIM SUMMARY # 7 - WORK**

- Participants looked for part-time work to help their families, provide pocket money and just get out of the house. For some, the recession has meant greater pressure to find work.
- Job seeking by cold call / CV dropping was common, but word of mouth was believed to be much more effective.
- Perceived barriers to finding work were discrimination, limited opportunities in rural areas and visa restrictions.



## **Life in Ireland and views of Irish Society**

Most participants seemed to be quite happy living in Ireland and took a broadly positive view of it as a place to live. Many were happy to learn about Irish culture, some enjoying different aspects than others, music coming up in one form or another quite often:

I'm not into football and sports and stuff, so I don't know what the GAA stuff is like, but I'm into music...so I really like the Irish style of music.

*- P65, Male, South Asia, Group 7*

I love the dancing.

*- P19, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 2*

I love Paddy's day.

*- P71, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 8*

However three issues came up frequently as causes of concern and annoyance about Irish society: alcohol, respect for elders and racism. A common observation was a lack of experience or understanding of Irish drinking culture:

I think Irish people drink too much. I mean way too much. I went to a friend's house and his mum was returning with the shopping and there was so much alcohol, I couldn't believe people could drink that much.

*- P80, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

Other participants, however, were more familiar with and understanding of such an ethos:

This doesn't happen just in Ireland, it happens everywhere. It's just different situations...16 year olds drink in Romania as well.

*- P159, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 19*

A lack of respect for elders was another source of concern for many of the participants and in this case there was a lot of uniformity of opinion.

If a parent or an older person asks you something, you don't like them asking all the time, you know, so you have to help and you have to do whatever he or she asks you.

*- P81, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 18*

...like in Poland a young person would not even say a bad word to an older person because they have to respect them but in Ireland young people just like...[*Change of topic*]

- P79, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18

Racism and discrimination emerged, unprompted, as major issues during the research. These issues came up in one form or another in almost all of the groups. In saying this, it is worth bearing in mind these are not things that we explicitly asked about. Our broad strategy was to ask open and general questions such as 'What is it like living in Ireland?' or 'What is it like working in Ireland?' and then to follow up whatever arose. We had planned to bring up the topic of racism if a group did not raise it but the contingency never arose. The aim of this strategy was to ensure that we were not problem-seeking, an accusation which has been levelled at social researchers in the past.

Participants spoke a lot about racism and produced many first and second-hand examples. Some spoke with humour while others spoke with great anger. In the following discussion, we would point out that although a few participants said they had never experienced any racism, the vast majority had encountered it at some level. The examples we use here are a necessarily small selection from a much larger set of relevant comments.

The experiences or incidents described vary. Some involved the young people being confronted in public places with wildly exaggerated stereotypes and behaviour.

I was working at the medical centre...it was a good enough job...this woman she came to the place once and she started shouting at me...the nurse came out and she was why are you shouting?...she goes why did you hire her? She's black and this and that?

- P6, Female, South Asia, Group 1

A guy actually got out of his car and said "nigger" and got back into the car and ran away. He was just afraid.

- P63, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7

In a similar vein, there are some things which young people will overhear or be exposed to when out and about:

On Paddy's day...I went to town...and there was a big incident there because well it was mostly black people around from Tallaght and Navan and all that...it was sort of like a riot...I didn't want to get arrested so...I walked away. So I was like in a shop...this Irish guy who was standing there...there was this lady with a

baby...she goes that there was a girl that was trying to attack her baby...the man goes, oh yeah, don't mind them, they're all black bastards, all fucking monkeys and everything, they should just go away and go to their own country and leave our country alone and leave us in peace and all that.

*- P66, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

This same girl goes on to try to make sense of the incident:

You see from that incident, just because what that girl out there did...he's now like judging every black person out there as a black bastard...and that's not right, it's not like what all of us are...we're all different people.

*- P66, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

The young people reported that on some occasions, verbal racism was also accompanied by physical violence:

The way they slag us...use the word 'N'...I got robbed by three guys...one took a stick...

*Facilitator: So they robbed you and they used that word?*

Mmm. And they asked me to run. They actually stole my handbag and asked me to run.

*- P16, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

Interestingly one participant talked about the way in which he has been the subject of racist abuse when he intervened to help local Irish friends:

Yeah, well I have had one or two altercations, but then again, the majority of my friends would be Irish and I have quite a few here, so whenever we go out, so I have had, probably in the last three years, I have had three or four fights, but in general that's just on a night out and then one comment leads to another and then, sometimes it might have concerned my friend who is Irish and then we step in and get racist comments, but then things like that is kind of unavoidable, really, and so because most of my friends would be Irish and two of us would be kind of big, so I don't have a problem standing up...

*- P78, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 17*

Such dramatic incidents of racism may not be everyday occurrences but they leave a lasting impression on those who experience them. Less striking but more common

were misconceptions about who and what migrants are and what conditions in other countries are like:

When I walk down the corridors, most people see the hairstyles that I'm doing and they're like "yo yo yo yo" at me, just because they see I've got dreadlocks, they'll come to me and start talking like a Jamaican person or like they think I'm 50 Cent...I don't know why!

[*Laughter*]

- P63, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7

I got asked if I know what a pizza is in primary school and I was like, of course! Do you have a McDonalds in Poland?! Yeah!

- P121, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12

A common and frustrating misunderstanding of this kind concerns the issue of legal status:

I was in a bus with one of my friends...she was like...I thought you came here illegally and she thought I came here without papers and all. And she thought that was who I am. She was like, oh that's what every black people do and I got so pissed. And I just stopped the bus and I just walked out. And the next bus I got, there was this guy...and he said exactly the same thing...I was pissed at that moment so I just started, I was literally knocking him out on the bus...the bus driver stopped me and then they rang the guards and the guards took me home...I just went to my room and locked the door.

- P64, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7

Sometimes when I'm walking across, like, on the streets, some people like come over to me and offer me...like money, and I'm like, what's that for? And they think I'm a refugee and I need income or something like that. I'm just looking at them and thinking, I don't need that, thanks very much, I don't need that. I'm here legally...I found that really disrespectful.

- P66, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7

Some students offered explanations for these misconceptions, blaming the media or a lack of education:

Most people here, I wouldn't really think they are racist, they just get a bad impression of people like

international people from the news and media...you know sometimes they watch stuff which is like really poor people there, and when they are here they think we're kind of the same and they kind of look down to us, but then at the end of the day it's not really their fault..

- P150, Male, South Asia, Group 16

One participant made the interesting additional observation that in his experience Irish people who had travelled internationally were generally more likely to be informed about other countries.

Among the participants who had been in Ireland for some time, there were mixed views about whether things were getting better or worse. Some had very positive impressions:

When I came here, I think that was the hardest time for foreign people here, now it's getting better. Because Irish people have now started to think that some foreign people are good as well and they can get on with them no bother.

- Unidentified Male, Group 5

Others had a bleaker outlook:

I don't know if it's going to change, because I think that Irish people will always be Irish people...I have been here for 6 years and I don't even think it has changed one bit. I think it actually got worse. It's true, it got worse, I mean it's just pure horrible.

- P10, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2

Participants evolve different strategies to help them deal with situations they encounter. For most, it is a case of finding ways to shut it out or make sense of it:

Be yourself, you have to be strong and brave, you know?...if you see a situation getting out of control, just walk away from it. Because if you try to fight for it, you'll end up being the one blamed for it.

- P64, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7

I just don't really listen to them, I just don't care what they say because like it's not their own country because like even if they live here, it doesn't matter like, they don't own the country, they can't tell me like move away or something.

- P42, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 5

Others have taken a more hands-on approach:

For me basically they don't usually back off, they just keep going...that's when I have fights...I'm not necessarily the smallest but I'm not necessarily the biggest either, and like a lot of people are kind of scared now because they do realise that I have a lot of black friends and like black people are usually – they can fight. They don't disrespect me anymore because they are scared.

- P75, Male, South Asia, Group 17

In a separate study with primary school children (*forthcoming*), we have on occasion uncovered signs of serious distress as a consequence of racism. In this study, we did not encounter such distress, but this may be related to the nature of focus groups and the kind of evidence they can elicit. The question of the extent of such distress will have to await further investigation.

#### INTERIM SUMMARY # 8 – LIFE IN IRELAND AND VIEWS OF IRISH SOCIETY

- There was a broadly positive view of living in Ireland and some participants were enthusiastic about different aspects of Irish culture, particularly music and dance.
- Participants were sometimes critical of two aspects of Irish society: Alcohol use and lack of respect for elders.
- Racism emerged as an important issue in almost all of the focus groups.
- Participants reported some very striking public instances of racist name calling and abuse.
- A more common source of annoyance was the misunderstandings which Irish people could hold about migrants and about conditions in other countries.

## 6. FAMILY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

So far we have focused on how young migrants negotiate the challenges of migration and adjust to various aspects of life in Ireland. The young migrant also has to manage links to all that they have known prior to migration, to negotiate their relationship with their wider family and the cultural heritage of their country of origin.

A young migrant's family will usually only partly be resident in Ireland with key family members often still in the country of origin or in a different country of migration. The adult family members who are resident in Ireland will often have a more limited and work-specific exposure to Irish society than the young person, a fact that can create additional tensions and misunderstanding.

The majority of young migrants attach great importance to connections with their country of origin and its culture. However, for most there is work to be done in maintaining these connections and adapting, presenting and sometimes disguising cultural values depending on the context.

### Family

Most young people who migrated with their family come to share the family mission in coming to Ireland. They are aware of their parents' financial situation and feel a responsibility to make the best of their opportunities:

We were taught that we were brought here to make a better life for ourselves, not to make the same mistake that she did...we all understand the point that our mum would go out of her way just for us to be able to live comfortable, but yet again we still understand that she has a lot of responsibilities to take care of, not just us.

*- Male, South Asia, Group 17*

I am not working but I am finding my own money, cos my mum can't keep me, cos she's got loads of things to spend [on].

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 17*

A number of participants were quite concerned about the difficulties which their parents had in adjusting to life in Ireland and some felt that it had been easier for them than for their parents:

We only think about new things and our parents think about how they're going to get on in this country, how

they're going to settle down and how they're going to find a job. Like they have more problems than we do.

- *Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 9*

I think the children can tolerate more.

- *Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

Similarly many participants showed great sympathy for the situation which their parents faced in having to migrate to a new country, often in difficult circumstances:

It's just sometimes it's only that pushes you to come, not because or you wake up one day like 'Oh feel like going to a different country,' like it's just something that makes you move.

- *Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

When they arrived, you know, people couldn't really understand them when they were trying to communicate, and I think it's because we were living in rough areas, so the adults mainly, didn't want to know them or anything like that. Didn't try to help them out or anything. So I think the actual not knowing of English, the accent that you have...people discriminate on the accent.

- *Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

Participants were also often keenly aware of what they perceived to be unfair treatment of their parents at work:

My mum finished university in Armenia, she spent a lot of time studying, and right now she works in a take away, and I'm sure that the person next to her who probably dropped out in third year gets paid more than her.

- *P25, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 3*

My mum, when she came here...she has been working for more than 15 years and when she came here they said she needed experience...when she got a new job they were also paying the student, the intern, more than they were paying her...she started crying on the phone to my granny and my granny told her that she's the one that came here, that she has to bear all the consequences.

- *P21, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 3*



Young migrants recognise that language is a crucial problem for their parents in work, in forming friendships and in day-to-day living. They also see that they as young people in education often have an advantage in this regard:

I think it's very hard for the parents because we come to school and we learn English and they don't and see like if you have to go to the doctor you have to explain like, so it's very difficult.

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

Although there is sympathy for the plight of parents who have little English, there is also quite a lot of frustration at being constantly asked to translate or interpret for parents.:

When my Mam goes to the tax office or anywhere, I have to come with her and translate everything for her.

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 5*

My dad's really annoying because he picks up an English paper and just to annoy me or something he'll just pick out words and says what does that mean, what does that mean. If you can't read it just leave it.

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 19*

In the following extract, the participant complains not only about being asked to translate and interpret but also about the fact that doing so is eating into his call credit:

With time I learnt English, you know, now my mother uses me as a translator all the time, it's kind of annoying, because like she has her own business here and like she'd be saying 'Tell me the text' and I have to translate the text, I have to send the text, I have to write the text, I have to call people and I basically just don't have credit for that and she doesn't give me money for credit so like it's just wasting my money for her thing-her job. And I feel used, I feel used a lot (*laughte*).

*- Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

Quite a number of migrant young people also felt that their parents were too strict and overly protective:

I'm 16 and she treats me like I'm five years old so like she has to realise that I'm not and I can make my own decisions.

*- Male, South Asia, Group 17*

All the parents they always compare you to your friends, that's why I never bring any of my friends home...because I'm really scared...If I bring Anna home they're like, ok fine she's from the Philippines, what do her parents do? So how does Anna do in school? How many friends does she have? Do you think her friends are trustworthy? Where would she go on a weekend? And it's so hard for me to get out of home. We had a party just the other day and I had to sneak out to go to the party.

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

Although young people can often understand their parent's point of view in these matters, they can still find parental control very tiresome:

I think our parents backgrounds also influence. How they are raised, they want their children to follow them. But they should also understand how their children are feeling too. Because my parents are really brought up in a cultural way, they had an arranged marriage and they want me also to have it. But I think in one way it's a good thing, but in other ways they don't let me have fun as others, they restrict me, they say that no you're not to go out...but to see it my way, I really want to go out and have fun too...

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

When I'm out she calls me 10 times and I never answer my phone, so I'm always in trouble when I get home, but I suppose it is how they used to be when they were teenagers.

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

In relation to parental control and discipline two points are worth noting. Firstly female participants complain of this more than male participants:

They're easier on the guys, like my house, my brothers they're allowed to do anything they want...and if I say I want to go into town...I go, can I go with her, and they're like no!...For me it's like you go to school, come home and I have to look after my brother and do some of the housework and school work and that's your day over, you know? It's just unfair!

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

Secondly, migrant young people who are only recently arrived seem to experience more parental control than young people who grew up in Ireland, one of the additional challenges that late arrivals have to face. The following is a typical observation by a late arrival:

It's only been three years since I've come here and I think my parents are still quite protective of me and conservative like, they don't want me to lose my culture and tradition as yet. So I do find it a bit hard, that way.

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

Young people who arrived at an earlier age often noted that their parents had become less traditional since being here:

Where I'm from girls my age get married, right now...and my parents, they don't have that thought, because they wouldn't have that if they were still living there, but since they're living here, they realise education is a better way to go.

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

In general, however, most migrant children felt that children born in Ireland had an easier time of it in relation to parental control:

They ask permission, but it's like, hey mom, I'm going out, see you!

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

For some migrant young people, however, family living arrangements are more complicated and it is the absence of parental contact that is a problem:

My auntie is in Ireland now. When I was born she told me that my mother is dead...back in Nigeria I was living with my grandmother and my granddad...and my auntie just told me that maybe I would just come and stay in Ireland with her...Then I thought okay maybe if I can cope, it will be a better life for me in Ireland. Since that day I was living with my auntie. Then I can't stop thinking about my mum.

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 10*

*Facilitator* - Who do you keep in touch with from home?

- My mum, my stepdad, my sisters...

*Facilitator* - And do you ever go back on holidays then?

- Not yet. I can't go there for five years.

*- Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

### **INTERIM SUMMARY # 9 - FAMILY**

- Most migrant young people come to share the 'family mission' of wishing to improve the family's circumstances.
- They are often quite sympathetic to the challenges their parents face in migrating. They recognise that their parents may often have greater difficulty in adjusting to life in Ireland than they do.
- Young migrants are often asked to translate and interpret for their families, a role which they are sometimes less than happy to fulfil.
- Parents are often seen to be too strict and over-protective, especially towards girls and those who arrive at a later age.

## **Cultural heritage**

Throughout the focus groups, there was a very strong sense that young migrants attach great importance to the cultural heritage of their country of origin. In the following extract there is a chorus of affirmation from a focus group when asked if they think it is important to hold on to the culture of the country you are from:

- It's very important
- Yeah so you can pass it onto your children.
- It is part of who you are
- It's your identity
- There's nothing like home.

*- Group 15*

Similar such comments occur throughout the groups in more or less detail:

I think it's really important that you hold onto your culture and stuff because like you are what you are and you can't change, and you have to be proud of where you come from.

*- Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 13*

I still watch Nigerian channel because I sometimes just miss home and you just want to watch something that will just keep you remembering about Nigeria or something like that. Because you can't just stay in the country and just think "Oh, forget about Nigeria." Nah, it doesn't roll like that. I still speak my language and I still watch Nigerian things so I keep my culture.

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

Culture is very important to our family.

*- Male, South Asia, Group 17*

Participants discussed a wide variety of activities they and their family engage in to maintain the culture and language of their country of origin. Most cooked indigenous food at home and attached importance to this. Many spoke native languages at home. Other activities included reading books in their native language, listening to music and watching TV and movies from the country of origin. Of course, no matter where you are, American media is almost ubiquitous:

- Gossip Girl, Zoe 101
- Scrubs, Americas Next Top Model!
- X-Factor!
- Grey Anatomy, Desperate Housewives!

*- Various participants, Group 12*

I grew up speaking both languages so, whichever one I watch regardless I watch it in the same way, but again, even growing up in Angola you would be quite influenced by American movies.

*- P77, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 17*

However, eagerness to maintain links with the culture of their country of origin is also clearly present with many young migrants eager to talk about the TV that they watch on satellite. Heritage culture also comes through the internet and the music that they have brought to them by family members and friends visiting their native country. In some cases DVDs from the country of origin are also available to rent from national community shops in Ireland. In other cases even the equipment for watching satellite television is brought from the country of origin:

We have a receiver with a big antenna and by satellite and we have got programmes from our own country. I have a receiver bought from Romania actually, from there.

*- Unidentified, Group 9*

Interest in media from the country of origin can be intense and genuine:

You also want to know what the weather is like in your home country. Yeah because you're interested in your own country more sometimes and you want to see what's happening there, what it's going to be.

*- P88, Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 9*

Yeah, there's like, we have the channel, the news channel for Pakistan and there is the channel for Pakistan and they show you literally what happens everyday. So, sometimes when I'm...[ ]When I've like nothing to do, I'll go and watch news, otherwise I won't.

*- P150, Male, South Asia, Group 16*

Although eagerness to consume media from the country of origin is very common, in some cases, it is clear that parents are the ones who are most enthusiastic while children are either losing or have lost interest:

My mum watches it but I'm not really into it now much like.

*- P104, Male, East Asia and Pacific, Group 11*

I would [*watch TV from home country*]/whenever my parents are watching it like you know but other than that I wouldn't really.

P85, Male, *East Asia and Pacific, Group 9*

...there's lots of channels but there's like there is more than 300 languages in India so and then we just watch one channel, my parents watch it, and I watch it the odd time.

- P144, Male, *South Asia, Group 15*

Many participants also discuss watching Irish television for particular programmes or when they want to learn English or get to know more about the country they were living in:

Yeah, I watch the Sky Sports and all the programmes from the Irish programmes because when I came in this country it's like very interesting because you want to see new programmes and new stuff.

- *Unidentified, Group 9*

I watch news and RTE. I think like as Sara said it's important to like watch what's going on in the country you live in. Like it will help you in the school as well like when you know stuff...

- P95, Female, *Europe and Central Asia, Group 10*

I actually learned English from TV.

- P80, Male, *Europe and Central Asia, Group 18*

One participant mentioned that English language television is often on in her house because her older sister is going to college and needs to improve her English as much as possible.

In a small number of cases, participants noted with satisfaction that they had seen items on their heritage culture on Irish television:

I think the Irish culture and media is good because I was looking there just doing another culture as well, just like programmes in another culture, I was looking at RTE and there was like culture about Muslims as well. This is like a programme on Muslims as well, so I think media will be alright.

- P149, Male, *South Asia, Group 16*

Yeah, there was like one Georgian film on the Irish program.

*- P169, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 19*

Of course in some cases, migrant children have little interest in Irish media as do many local Irish children:

I don't watch a lot of Irish programmes. Mainly I watch ones from Asia like Japanese anime and everything. I don't watch the Irish programmes. I don't get them most of the time and I have Irish friends as well and they watch anime just like I do and we can discuss that.

*- Unidentified, Group 9*

As well as contact via the media there was more direct contact with the heritage culture through an active cultural life available in Ireland, especially in Dublin:

The only thing I miss from Romania is my family, because we have like Romanian shops here, Romanian discos, Romanian restaurants...loads of things that we can go to, so like I don't really miss my culture.

*- Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

All the cultural nights that's how like...when I'm out of school I know so many Pakistani people and...I know them all in person and I know them all through the parties and stuff.

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

For some there are also weekend schools and religious services in native languages. Public celebrations of different cultures in Ireland (Independence days, Christmas, national festivals) were also seen very positively. A number of participants talked energetically about school multi-cultural initiatives, sometimes with a sense of being allowed to 'put the record straight':

We got to talk about our country and our flag. It was actually really good because we got to express ourselves and I think the people that were there knew a bit more about us, they were not all...yeah we're not all black bastards and all that.

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

When talking about their country of origin, many participants talked quite emotionally about missing home, family and friends they had left behind:



...it's kinda hard sometimes because you miss your family so much.

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 19*

I believe when I was back at home like I have all my aunts around me to support me morally. I was doing everything you know, they supported me...I needed them and here there is not much of that. I find it very difficult like, my morale is going down. I need them to give me moral support. That is very vital.

*- Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

Many participants talk enthusiastically about visits to their country of origin or visits by family members to Ireland. However, returning home is not always as easy as imagined and friendships in particular can be difficult to resurrect:

...friends in Poland and my really good friends, but when I go there...we have stuff to talk about, but sometimes they talk about stuff that I've got no idea...they've got different friends.

*- Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

I've a few friends...most of the friends just forget about you...I go home every summer for a month usually. So kind of you meet them but it's not the same as it was when we were friends.

*- Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

A similarly pessimistic view emerges of trying to keep in contact with friends by means of letters, the internet or Skype. Most participants appear to feel that these were a poor substitute for actual contact:

I really miss my friends, because it's hard to kind of keep up...you write to her and things...sometimes she's busy and then I can't write to her and then you know, you just don't have as much time and it's not like being, growing up together...I think I'm closer to my friends that I made here than I'm closer to my best friend in Iran. And it's kind of hard, we used to be really good friends and then like the last time I phoned her it was hard for us at the beginning to get talking, because what will I say to her?

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

Well I used to keep up but then I gave up because it was too difficult.

*- Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

I was talking recently on Skype with my neighbour, for the first time in four years, and I found it so hard to speak to him, I was like you're going to have to excuse me but I don't know what's going on! I thought I still remember it but actually no, I forgot so many things. And it's weird.

*- Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 12*

Command of native languages also tends to erode the longer the person stays away from the country of origin, despite the best efforts of the family. A typical experience in this regard is finding that while you can still understand your native language you now have difficulty speaking it and 'gaps' occur – blank spaces in native vocabulary which can only be filled with English:

When I try to talk to my friends in the Philippines and I speak in my own dialect, I kind of forget the words that I need to say and speak it in English and they're like, what are you speaking in English for?...Sometime you feel embarrassed because they don't speak English at all.

*- Female, East Asia and Pacific, Group 12*

English is the main language, now it's been nearly three years I came to Ireland and hardly I ever speak in my own language, so there's so many gaps between my talk and I asked my mum to even translate some words into my language to say, so it's really hard.

*- Female, South Asia, Group 12*

The tendency to lose your native language is associated with the pressure to learn English:

Teachers told me I have to speak English in my house...so I had to speak English with my mum and dad but now, now that I know how to speak English properly, my parents are kinda like telling me not to forget to speak my native tongue because if I go back people will think that I am different...

*- Female, East Asia and Pacific, Group 3*

In general, the picture that emerges is that young people place a lot of value on maintaining the culture of their country of origin and engage in a lot of different strategies to do so. However attrition does occur and distance from the country of origin and its culture can creep in and abruptly surprise the person by its extent.

There was a small amount of variation, but in general most of young people appear to believe that they can retain a strong sense of the importance of their own culture, while being open to others:

...if you forget everything like about culture like, that won't be your country. So I think that you have to respect the way you are. You have to learn more and see what kind of culture of different countries and compare them with your one, but still not forget your own.

- *Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 11*

You have to try out different ways, just examine them and if it doesn't work for you, you drop it.

- *Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 9*

Most participants felt that they could be open to influences from Irish society and successfully balance this with an attachment to their heritage culture. We have seen this reflected in a number of ways. For some, however, there is greater tension and a feeling that they are living in two or more different worlds. Small numbers of participants appear to have opted for one or the other. For example, in the extract below the participant explains that he thinks the best strategy for a migrant is simply to have a clean break from all ties with the country of origin:

I would say try to lose very close connections that you have, if you are a boy try to at least try to break up with your girlfriend or if you're a girl try to break up with your boyfriend because if you are connected with them so closely it will be very hard for you to leave. Your feelings will be very hard, your emotions will be just bumping over the edge.

- *Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 1*

Small numbers of participants echoed this view and were content to let their heritage culture go. On the other hand, there were a small number of participants who expressed a tendency towards an insular attachment to their heritage culture usually on the basis of strong religious feelings:

When I go back to India, if I become like the Irish culture like you know it will be difficult for me to get around the Indian stuff so yeah I like, I like it more than the Irish stuff...and you know it's like at home like we speak my language and the food and everything. It's just ours.

- *Male, South Asia, Group 10*

Just pretend you live in your own country.

- *Male, Europe and Central Asia, Group 11*

## INTERIM SUMMARY # 10 – CULTURAL HERITAGE

- Most young migrants attach great value to the cultural heritage of their country of origin.
- They and their family maintain their heritage culture through language, cooking, books, TV, music and through an active cultural life within Ireland.
- Many migrant young people eagerly consume media from their country of origin through the internet, satellite TV, rented DVDs and materials brought to them by visitors from their native country.
- Interest in media from the country of origin can be intense and genuine although in some cases it appears to be the parents who are enthusiastic while the young people themselves are losing or have lost interest.
- Many participants discuss watching Irish television for particular programmes, when they want to learn English or get to know more about the country they are living in.
- In a small number of cases, participants noted with satisfaction that they had seen items about their heritage culture on Irish television.
- Many young migrants miss their country of origin and friends and family they left there. In practice, however, they have often found returning home a little more challenging than expected, language deteriorates and friendships can be difficult to revive.
- The fact that young people attached value to the culture of the country of origin did not prevent them being very open to and interested in other cultures. However a small number struggle and end up paying little heed to their heritage culture or having an insular attachment to it.

## 7. Future Plans

Most participants were very enthusiastic and optimistic about the future, having definite plans about what they wanted to do. Many had plans to go to college. Quite a few across the different groups mentioned Journalism and most had very specific courses and colleges in mind as in the following exchange:

- Griffith College, law.
- Trinity medicine or dental science.
- I want to do physiotherapy in Trinity or occupational therapy.
- Trinity, Engineering.

*- Group 2*

While most students mentioned attending college in Ireland, a few wanted to study in other Western European countries. Aside from college some participants had specific career plans they wished to follow:

I really want to stay in Ireland because my aim is to be in the Guards.

*- P104, Male, East Asia and Pacific, Group 11*

I got accepted into a pilot course in the UK...I want to fly with the Emirates.

*- P150, Male, South Asia, Group 16*

A desire to return to a country of origin was common;

- I don't think I can live here forever, definitely not.

*Facilitator- Where would you like to go?*

- My country!

*- P10, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 2*

An ambition of mine, I want to change my country....in lots of ways, like in securities and just in everything, just like schools and hospitals, healthcare, everything.

*- Unidentified Male, South Asia, Group 16*

However a larger group of participants were less certain about this, having some desire to return but also having become used to life in Ireland:

- Like I wouldn't go today or tomorrow because I'm used in here like, I've been here like, since I was ten so all my friends and everyone is here. I didn't have any friends back there, just a few relations like.

*Facilitator - Would you have any interest in going back?*

- Yeah, probably in a few years time, but not now.

*- P19, Female, Europe and Central Asia, Group 2*

For others the desire to stay in Ireland had a more definite ring:

I don't see myself in Nigeria going to college...I wouldn't do that, I would never do that...if I go back now, I would be starting over again.

*- P66, Female, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 7*

I would prefer to stay in Ireland and then I could be going on holidays in other places but still staying in Ireland like...we came into this country and we were allowed in, everyone welcomed you...so it would be like bad to just like ignore everything after a few years and just go somewhere else.

*- P27, Male, Sub-Saharan Africa, Group 4*

#### INTERIM SUMMARY # 11 – FUTURE PLANS

- Many participants had very definite and specific plans about what they wanted to do in the future, most planning to go to college in Ireland.
- Some planned to return to their country of origin and some to definitely stay in Ireland. However between these two poles there was a sizeable group who were less certain, having some desire to return to their country of origin but finding that they have become used to life in Ireland.

## 8. Discussion of key findings

This research was designed to be open and non-directive. In response, the participants were eager to talk about a very broad range of topics and issues that were important to them. We have done our best to document these as fully as possible in the preceding chapters. In this section we will focus exclusively on what we consider to be the essential findings with immediate and important policy implications.

### **Educational values and schooling**

Unlike the US and some other European countries, the Irish migration experience is not primarily a low skilled phenomenon. Research has found that adult migrants to Ireland are generally quite well educated. Allowing for some differences between nationalities, they have on average at least the same level of education as their same-age Irish peers (Barrett, Bergin and Duffy, 2006). We believe that the educational background of migrant adults in Ireland is reflected in many ways in the experiences and attitudes of the migrant young people to whom we spoke. They almost uniformly placed a high value on education and had very high educational aspirations, a finding which resonates with those of other Irish studies. In talking to Irish primary and post-primary school teachers, Devine (2005) noted that many of them commented upon the positive attitude to school and high levels of motivation of migrant pupils. Similarly Smith, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne (2009, p.152) report that over half of Irish secondary school principals, when asked to compare newcomer students with other students in their school in terms of motivation in their school work, said that they were above average, while 95% said that they were average or above average.

Many participants felt that school was 'easier' in Ireland than in their country of origin. This perception cannot be definitively explained in the context of a qualitative project like this but a number of points can be made. Pupils in the Irish secondary school system generally perform quite well on international ratings. In the most recent PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study Irish 15 year olds were rated as having a mean score in reading literacy that was well above the OECD average, a mean score in overall science that was just above average and a mean score in mathematics that was average (Eivers, Shiel and Cunningham, 2007). In this context a number of explanations of the perception by migrant young people that the Irish education system is 'easier' may be considered, each of which may represent factors that play a role:

1. The families of many of our participants lived in areas where housing was affordable and children tended to attend local schools. Young migrants may therefore find themselves in schools where norms of achievement are different to those in schools they had attended previously. However it should

- be noted that on the basis of PISA ratings Ireland tends to do quite well (i.e. score quite low) on the level of variation between schools within the country.
2. Some of our participants felt that they had been put in classes below their ability level, in particular because of English language proficiency. Again this may mean that in some cases young migrants may end up being in classes where norms of achievement are lower than they were used to previously.
  3. On the basis of the PISA ratings discussed above it was noted that Ireland's weakest area tends to be mathematics, on which it scores average compared to other OECD countries. Some participants may come from countries which score higher on mathematics and this may form the basis of their perception of the system as easier.
  4. Young migrants may sometimes misread what it is that the Irish education system expects of them. Many participants reported coming from educational systems that relied on very different, more traditional styles of education. Some participants noted and embraced differences that they perceived in the Irish system – the crucial point may in fact be that they noted them, that they registered and appreciated differences in aim and method between educational systems. In other cases, however participants sometimes seem to be responding to the new system very much in terms of the mindset of the old. In some of the focus groups, there appeared definite hints that what might be positively interpreted as 'hardness' in one system would be devalued in another (for example the ability to do mental arithmetic).

At the moment there is still no solid data on how migrant students are performing relative to their Irish peers. Among the participants to whom we spoke there definitely seemed to be the potential for high academic achievement. The issue is the extent to which their abilities and ambitions will be realised. Experience in other countries teaches us that the educational performance of some migrant groups declines over time so the present favourable situation may not continue without commitment and support from all parties involved.

### **Peers and leisure activities**

Although some participants reported quite comfortable peer relationships with local Irish young people, many reported distant or difficult relationships. Non-UK migrant children in Irish schools have been found to be less likely to spend time with friends outside of school, have same-sex friends or report that students in their class accept them as they are (Molcho, Kelly, Gavin and Nic Gabhainn, 2008). One point that emerges with particular clarity in the present research is that there can be many barriers to relationships between local and migrant children over and above cultural differences: attitudes to authority, education, alcohol and religion;



racism; the experience of migration and living in different cultures; and familial attitudes to education and work.

Leisure activities for adolescents can be a difficult thing to provide but it seems clear that many migrant young people, especially girls and those in rural areas, feel that they have little to do with their leisure time. A number of studies have reported similar findings in Irish settings. Ni Laoire, Bushin, Carpena-Mendez and White (2009) in a qualitative study with migrant children and youth (under 18) found that sport was particularly important for boys and that informal leisure activities played a bigger role in the lives of the young people they interviewed than formal ones. In an extensive case study of Dublin 15, McGorman and Sugrue (2007) noted the positive impact of such activities for primary school children while recognising the general shortage of such activities in many areas.

## **Racism**

Racism came up again and again as a theme in the focus groups. It surfaced in many forms and in many aspects of the young people's lives, at school, on the street, in looking for work. It is worth pointing out again that this is a topic which we did not raise until young people raised it themselves. The research captured reports of racism across a wide range of domains. Rather than present one section on racism we felt it was useful to retain reports of encounters with racism in the original contexts in which they arose. Firstly, this reproduces a sense of the potential ever-presence of racism, the wearisome way in which it can appear and reappear in the daily lives of young people. Secondly, for victims of racism there seem to be important differences between types of racist experience, accounts and reactions to random hostile racism in the street often having a very different tone to accounts of the unsatisfactory behaviour of teachers perceived as racist.

Broadly speaking we can see two major strands of racism. Firstly, there is a virulent and overt racism involving name calling and possible physical attack. Secondly, there is a strand of naïve stereotyping and misunderstanding about other countries and who and what migrants are.

Some quite dramatic examples of harassment in public places were reported which to some extent is something we might expect from available evidence. A national survey of just over 1,000 adult migrants found that harassment in public places and on public transport was the most common form of discrimination in Ireland, having been reported by 35% of participants (McGinnity, O'Connell, Quinn and Williams, 2006). What we see in the present study is that teenagers are also targets for such harassment. Although it is hard to quantify on the basis of a qualitative study, such experiences do seem to be sufficiently common to be a cause of concern, most especially because they involve young people being targeted by Irish adults.

Within the school, racism is reported in many forms. From classmates there are occasional overtly racist remarks and, more commonly, misunderstandings and misrepresentations which cause annoyance and frustration. The major thrust from classmates tends to be indirect rather than direct. In a useful qualitative study, Meade and O'Connell (2008) report that Irish teenagers often have complex representations of who and what migrants are but that many such representations are ill-informed, contradictory, negative and self-justifying. On the basis of their work we might not expect crude and overt racist attacks to be the norm but rather slightly more subtle forms of condescension and misunderstanding, which is what we see reflected here.

A recent, large-scale study by the ESRI (Smith, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne, 2009) involved a national survey of 1,200 primary and secondary school principals as well as intensive qualitative case study work in 6 primary and 6 secondary schools (involving a total of 258 Irish and newcomer students in group discussions). The focus of the study was on the education system and "on issues at the school level regarding provision for new comers". However the study also covered many aspects of the educational and school experience of newcomer children and young people. Although principals often took quite a benign view of the level of bullying and racism which newcomer children experience, participants in a number of schools reported being bullied or witnessing their classmates being bullied on the basis of nationality. The authors conclude that school principals and teachers may be unaware of much of the racism that really goes on in their schools. This is borne out by the current research in so far as racism definitely does appear to be an issue at school for many migrant young people.

The reactions of school teachers were also raised, in particular a perceived tendency to misunderstand, fail to deal with racism or occasionally to create awkward situations through ill-judged attempts to help. As mentioned above, Smith, Darmody, McGinnity and Byrne (2009) reported that, in general, teachers and principals tend to have quite a positive view of the level of bullying and racism which newcomers experience. For example 75% of school principals thought that newcomer pupils had the same risk of experiencing bullying as Irish pupils. However, some teachers noted that bullying and racism were present and that there may be reluctance on the part of newcomer students to approach a teacher. In part, this may be due to a reluctance by students to raise peer issues with a teacher. However, in the present study, we also see that even when students raise such issues with teachers they often feel that teachers do not react appropriately. On the basis of interviews with Irish primary and secondary school teachers, Devine (2005) reported that many teachers feel confusion, uncertainty and insecurity about how to cope with issues surrounding race and migration.

Although we would argue that far better supports could be available for young people confronting racism, it is important to emphasise that they are rarely passive targets of racist abuse. Many will adopt strategies to make sense of racism and to deal with it, some ways being more successful and adaptive than others. Such

strategies have been documented in the international literature. Tizard and Phoenix (1993) offer a nice, simple classification of such strategies in their seminal work on young people of mixed-parentage in Britain:

1. *Mentally defusing the threat*– Not modifying the situation itself, but modifying how we think about it in order to reduce its painful impact. For example we might ‘not notice’ the threat, ignore it or reinterpreting it to ourselves by treating it as a joke, degrading the user or reinterpret their negative as a positive.
2. *Avoiding or escaping* the threatening situation
3. *Tackling the situation directly* by means of verbal or physical attack, humour or enlisting the help of some authority.
4. *Taking steps to prevent or reduce the effects* of the threat in particular by means of personal achievement.

We encountered examples of young people variously adapting all of these strategies in the current research. Two strategies for dealing with racism particularly worth noting are the strategy of ‘not noticing’ or ‘minimising’ and that of tackling the situation through physical attack. Both of these are recognised as being potentially problematic in the long term, either to the individual themselves or to inter-group relations more generally.

### **Cultural maintenance**

Acculturation psychology outlines four major strategies which migrants can use in how they relate their heritage culture to that of the larger society in which they find themselves (Berry, 2001):

1. Integration: Individuals have an interest in both maintaining their original culture and engaging in daily interaction with other groups.
2. Assimilation: Individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural heritage and seek daily interaction with other groups.
3. Separation: Individuals wish to hold on to their cultural heritage while avoiding interaction with other groups.
4. Marginalisation: Individuals have little possibility of or interest in cultural maintenance and have little interest in having relations with other groups.

On the whole, most of our participants seemed to adapt an Integration strategy, being open to Irish society while at the same time having a confident attachment to the cultural heritage of their country of origin. Most found ways of maintaining those cultural ties that suited them, this process being greatly facilitated by satellite television, the internet, cheap travel and ethnic faith communities and other groups. We encountered little sense of cultural threat; some might feel that Irish people and institutions had little understanding of their culture and background, but very few seemed to feel that Irish society in any way expected them to suppress or lose their

cultural identity. Coakley and Mac Einri (2007) in their study of African parents in Ireland noted a similar commitment to their African heritage alongside a recognition that you cannot live in Ireland and be untouched by the experience.

Cultural maintenance does take time and energy however, and what emerged as an issue for some of our participants was 'slippage': a sense that their language and other cultural skills had deteriorated without them realising it. This comes across as a very natural and slow moving process, though in the long term it may have profound implications for the likelihood of the young person returning permanently to the country from which they migrated.

In a small number of cases there was some evidence of young people adopting a strategy of separation which seemed to be largely related to religious beliefs.

### **Arriving late**

Late arrivals appear to face a number of challenges which those who have arrived earlier do not and may thus be defined as a group needing particular support. They tend to face greater difficulty learning new languages and accents, have parents who are less comfortable in Irish society and are therefore more controlling, and have fewer friends as a result of missing out on the more stable and friendly experience of Primary school.

### **Future research**

This research produced a very striking picture of the young participants as active, ambitious and energetic. One pertinent line of enquiry for future research will be to determine how these young people fare and how their views change as they leave school and enter the world of adulthood. That transition has the potential to reveal much about the Irish multi-cultural experience.

In the next chapter we discuss policy implications arising from this research. Of these implications, racism stands out as something which requires urgent research attention, both to understand it more fully and to develop strong, evidence-based ways to tackle it.

### **Conclusion**

Life in Ireland will change these young people and they too will help to change the Ireland to which they have come. How much change in either direction will depend on many points, not least how long the individual young person may spend in Ireland. This is linked to perceptions and expectations of, and ambitions for, life in Ireland. How the young people see life here is inevitably shaped by their own

previous life experience and expectations before they come to Ireland, by their experience and expectations of family members who may come with them, or have been in Ireland before them, by the messages they have received or continue to receive from family members in their home country or elsewhere, by the cultural features of the community and society they have left behind and by those people they meet in Ireland who share key aspects of their cultural or religious background. It is also shaped by the specifics of their encounter with Irish society – whether in the micro detail of the daily life that unfolds or in the larger influences of the urban or rural, large or small, rich or poor community in which they find themselves. Life in Ireland will be influenced by barriers and opportunities they may encounter. A key initial barrier may be language or accent. Another may be learning the ropes of managing cultural difference. Another may be coping with differences in social class that may arise in life in their new neighbourhood or school. Another may be finding a way of dealing with racism in the forms in which they may encounter it, in the subtle or crude or crass ways in which it may find expression. Racism may be naked in isolated or sustained acts of insults or abuse. But it may also arise more subtly in the witting or unwitting practices of teachers or other public officials who behave in discriminatory ways.

While they may encounter barriers, they may also find new opportunities in life here in Ireland. Such opportunities may lie in the education system, in friendships, in work, or in the support of those Irish people who forms bonds with the young person. The young people may also have experiences which are somewhat ambiguous, for example in the case of strong links to their family which may sometimes be both supportive but also constraining in terms of their fuller engagement with the world of peers and wider Irish society. The challenge facing every young migrant, like those in this study, is striking their own personal balance between the new world of the society they have joined and the old world and culture from which they and their family have come.

## 9. Policy implications

The future of these young migrants to Ireland depends on actions and attitudes on their own part, on the part of their families and communities, on the part of Irish society and Irish institutions. Successful integration necessarily has personal and policy dimensions. In terms of policy implications from our study we would note the following points:

- The need to recognise and harness the enormous potential of the maturity, responsibility, and ambition which many young migrants possess.
- The need to be responsive to the difficulties that some young people have in adjusting to the demands of the Irish education system
- The need to assist young people in accessing leisure activities organised for young people.
- The need to develop more effective, evidence-based strategies for countering racism and promoting diversity in schools, workplaces and communities.
- Further research to explore the experiences of migrant young people over time, in particular as they move through crucial transitions such as the end of formal schooling.
- The need to develop specific supports to assist those who arrive at later ages in adjusting to the particular challenges they face.

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## **Appendix A: Recruitment and Methodology**

### Selecting locations in which to conduct focus groups

The aim of this research was to talk to as wide a range of migrant young people as possible. In the pilot stages of the project we consulted a range of experts and youth services about the best way to recruit participants. Schools seemed an obvious choice but we wished to remain open to recruitment through other channels. We explored a wide range of these and made genuine efforts to engage with:

- General and specifically migrant youth services
- FÁS
- Employers
- Mosques
- Polish schools

The typical pattern we experienced in these sites was initial enthusiasm and willingness to participate but growing reluctance as the difficulties of bringing groups together emerged and when the time came very few participants attended. Schools on the other hand could reliably produce a diverse range of migrant young people and could provide excellent facilities for running focus groups. Given the cost and logistical challenges of bringing groups together, we ultimately decided to conduct all of our focus groups in school settings.

### Selecting sites nationally to conduct focus groups

In order to be as impartial as possible we selected focus group sites on the basis of the most recent (2006) Census data. We were interested in migrant young people between the ages of 15 and 18 so we requested the CSO to provide us with detailed demographic information on young migrants aged 13 to 16 years. We recognised that this data may be slightly out of date but it represented the fullest data available for the whole of the Republic of Ireland.

Using this data we selected sites around the country that would have feasible numbers to run a focus group and be as diverse as possible on the basis of the following criteria:

- Overall number of migrant young people in the location (minimum 35 per Census area).
- The number of migrant young people as a proportion of the total number of people of this age in the area.
- Reasonable geographical spread.
- Reasonable number from each type of area<sup>3</sup>.
- The breakdown of migrant young people from different parts of the world.

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<sup>3</sup> The Census data breaks down sites into Cities; Towns over 10,000; Towns 5,000 to 9,999; Towns 3,000 to 4,999; and Towns 1,500 to 2,999.

## Procedure

After securing agreement from the school, potential participants were identified by the Principal. Information packs were distributed to each potential participant. These contained detailed information about the project and parental and participant consent forms. All documentation was provided in English, Romanian, Russian, Polish, French and Mandarin Chinese.

Participants returned the consent forms before focus groups began. The focus groups were held on school premises during normal school hours and were facilitated by two researchers. In the early stages of the project we hoped to always include a migrant young person as a facilitator but this proved to be impractical due to:

- Schools' expectations of researchers (i.e. a certain age and air of authority)
- Very limited time windows schools offer for the scheduling of research
- The mixed membership of groups tended to limit the value of a co-facilitator from any single background (young migrants from different backgrounds may not see themselves having a shared experience)
- Garda clearance, necessary for the ethical conduct of research with young people, proved difficult to establish for co-facilitators.

When the focus group convened, the facilitators again explained the purpose of the research and the discussion began. The facilitators were provided with a schedule of questions to initiate conversation but once started conversation was allowed to flow naturally. Not all prompts were used in all groups so that a particular topic (e.g. work) might be discussed at length in one group, but not at all in another. All focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. All names or people and places used in the report are pseudonyms.

Before research began the design and methodology were approved by the Ethics committee of the School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

## Selection bias

One concern we had with the research design was that school principals could select particularly bright and articulate students to take part in the focus groups. There was some evidence of this. Although we made provision to provide interpreters these were never needed as all participants had sufficient English to take part in focus group discussions. However in every focus group we asked participants why they thought they had been selected. Although a small number of participants felt they were selected because they were particularly 'good' students the majority felt there had been open selection in the class.

## **Appendix B: Census Data on Migrant young people in Ireland at the time of the study**

Census 2006 recorded 222,874 persons aged 13-16 living in Ireland. Of these, 206,214 (92.5%) were Irish nationals and 16,660 (7.5%) were from migrant backgrounds.

Table 1 shows the international region from which these migrant young people originated.

**Table 1: 13-16 year old Migrants living in Ireland in 2006 by Region of Origin**

<b>International Region of Origin</b>	<b>Number of Migrants Aged 13-16</b>	<b>% of Total Migrants Aged 13-16</b>
E.U. 15 excluding Ireland	6796	40.8%
E.U. 16-25 (2004 accession states)	1676	10.1%
African and Asia	2841	17.1%
All Others (inc Americas)	2827	17.0%
No Stated, No Nationality or Multi-Nationality	2520	15.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>16660</b>	<b>100%</b>

47,968 persons aged 13-16 lived within the Dublin Regional Authority area. Of these, 44,074 (91.9%) were Irish, 645 (1.3%) were from the 'E.U. 15 excluding Ireland', 365 (0.76%) were from the 'E.U. 15 -25 accession states, 1,362 (2.8%) were from Africa or Asia; and 755 (1.57%) were from 'All other regions'. 767 cases (1.6%) were recorded as 'Nationality Not Stated', 'No Nationality' or 'Multi-Nationality'. Within the Dublin region, the largest actual *number* of migrant young people aged 13-16 was recorded in the Dublin City area (1,507). However, this only constituted 7.6% of the relevant age cohort in that district. The area with the highest *proportion* of 13-16 year olds from a migrant background was Fingal (14.4%). In South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire- Rathdown respectively, migrants made up 8.2% and 5.6% of all 13-16 year olds.

There was considerable variation across other large Irish cities in the proportion of 13-16 year olds of migrant background. Migrant young people made up 5.4 % of the relevant age cohort in Cork, 6.2% in Limerick, 11% in Galway (the highest proportion of any major Irish city), and 7.8% in Waterford.

There were 34 towns in Ireland with in excess of 10,000 inhabitants. Immigrant young people made up 9.6% of all 13-16 year olds in these towns, and the proportions were generally similar across all of sites, being in the range of 7-16%.

There were 48 towns within the population range of 5,000 to 10,000. Immigrant young people made up 9.3% of all 13-16 year olds in these towns. While this percentage was similar to that recorded in larger towns, settlements of this size (and smaller) appear more variable in terms of the size and diversity of their migrant communities. In some towns in this category, the proportion of children from migrant backgrounds approached 20% of all 13-16 year olds, for example- Monaghan (19.7%) and Longford (19.1%). However, other towns of this size and smaller contained *no* migrant 13-16 year olds from certain 'regions of origin' (i.e.: E.U 15-25, Africa/Asia etc.). Examples include Dungarvan (no Africans or Asians recorded) and Portmarnock (no E.U. 15-25 cases). This 'reduced diversity' becomes much more prevalent as towns get smaller, with no Africans/ Asians 13-16 year olds in particular, being recorded in many of the smaller settlements (1,500-3,000 inhabitants).

## **Appendix C: The Participants**

In total 169 participants took part in 19 focus groups. This group consisted of 86 girls and 78 Boys (5 participants did not provide information on their gender). As can be seen from Table 2 the majority of the participants came from 'Europe / Central Asia' or 'Africa'.

**Table 2: Regional background of Participants**

Europe and Central Asia	67
Africa	59
East Asia and Pacific	14
South Asia	14
Latin America & Caribbean	3
Middle East and North Africa	3
No information	9