



**An Introduction to the Situation
and Experience of Women
Migrant Workers in Ireland**



Jane Pillinger



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Dr Jane Pillinger, Dublin

Foreword

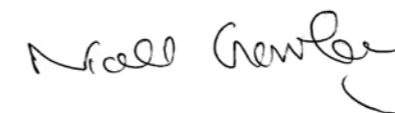
This “Introduction to the Situation and Experience of Migrant Women” has been prepared by the Equality Authority to mark Anti-Racist Workplace Week 2006. It is published to stimulate and inform debate on the experience and situation of women migrant workers. This is important if the intercultural workplace is to benefit both men and women migrant workers.

We are grateful to Dr Jane Pillinger for her work on this project. She has provided a valuable framework through which to better understand the particular experience and situation of migrant women workers, she has set out a range of issues for migrant women workers and provided a valuable input to all concerned with creating workplaces that

- are free from discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment,
- are welcoming to Black and minority ethnic (including Traveller) employees and customers – both women and men,
- accommodate and value cultural and linguistic diversity in the workplace, alongside a wider accommodation of diversity including making reasonable accommodation for employees with disabilities,
- take practical steps to achieve full equality for men and women migrant workers,
- communicate a message for greater equality within its wider community.

The current context for women migrant workers is one of change. The Employment Permits Act, the recently published scheme for an Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill and the broad range commitments agreed in the “Towards 2016” national agreement will create a new context for migrant workers with important opportunities to enhance the situation and experience of women migrant workers.

It will be important that the challenges set out in this publication are further explored and responded to within this current context of change so that any multiple discrimination that occurs on the basis of gender and ethnicity can be eliminated.



Niall Crowley
Chief Executive Officer
Equality Authority



Chapter 1

Introduction and background

1.1 Aim and scope of the study

This report is the outcome of a small-scale study of the specific situations and experiences of thirty-six women migrant workers from nineteen countries. These women come from a diverse range of situations including work permit holders, people with refugee status, spouses of migrant workers or refugees, holders of working visas, people on student visas and citizens of EU member states. It covers women who have migrated to work, but does not include domestic workers working in private households and women who have experienced illegal forms of bonded labour and trafficking.

1.2 Research methodology

A variety of methods have been used to explore the specific situation and experience of women migrant workers.

- Face-to-face interviews, based on a semi-structured questionnaire (lasting between 1.5 and 2 hours) were held with twenty-one women.
- Three group interviews were organised involving fifteen women.
- A focus group with employers was held.
- A focus group with trade unionists was held.
- A focus group with migrant led and migrant support organisations was held.

1.3 Profile of the women interviewed

A profile of the thirty-six women interviewed can be found in Appendix 1.

- Over half of the women were working in sectors that predominantly employ women.
- Fifteen women had dependent children living with them, some of whom were Irish citizen children.

- Seven women sent remittances home to support dependent children living in their countries of origin. A larger number regularly sent money home to support other family members.
- A significant number of the women interviewed stated they came from countries where poverty and lack of employment opportunities were commonplace and they migrated in order to make better lives for themselves and their families.
- In other cases women said they migrated to avoid traditional marriage roles or to escape violence or difficulty at home.

1.4 Framework for exploring the situation of women migrant workers

On completion of the interviews the material gathered was analysed with a view to establishing a framework through which to explore and understand the experience and situation of women migrant workers. There are four parts to this framework:

- Women migrant workers in a labour market characterised by gender inequality**
Women migrant workers experience a labour market characterised by gender inequality. Gender gaps exist in pay, conditions of employment, access to promotion and career development, and the participation of women in decision-making. Occupation segregation also exists whereby women are clustered into lower paid and lower skilled jobs.¹
- Specific experiences of women migrant workers**
Women migrant workers have a range of experiences that relate to their status as migrant women. Particular issues arise for migrant women in relation to pregnancy and to caring responsibilities in a context where there is an unequal sharing of caring between men and women. Gender stereotyping can also result in a misrepresentation of migrant women as dependents of migrant men rather than as being financially independent or in misrepresentations in relation to their sexuality.
- Double burden of racism and sexism**
The intersection between ethnicity and gender can involve a double discrimination based on racism and sexism experienced by migrant women. Their identities, roles and situations are therefore shaped by a range of inequalities². The Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) highlights the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by women and in particular that migrant women are faced with multiple discrimination in society at large and in their own communities and that the intersection of gender and ethnic and religious factors negatively affects access to health, education, permanent residence status, work permits and employment.

¹ *Women and Men in Ireland, (2005), Central Statistics Office, Dublin*

² *Zappone K (ed.) Re-thinking Identity - The Challenge of Diversity (2003), The Equality Authority, Dublin*

iv) Shared issues with migrant men

Women migrant workers share a number of issues with migrant men. These are predominantly issues that are affected by their legal and employment status and their position as non Irish nationals. However women can be in more marginal situations than men in a labour market characterised by gender inequality and due to the double burden of racism and sexism.

1.5 The policy context for migration

The policy context for men and women migrant workers is currently a focus for significant change. Of particular relevance in this regard are:

- the Employment Permits Act 2006,
- the recently published scheme for an Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill,
- the commitments in the new national agreement “Towards 2016” which include the creation of a new statutory Office of the Director for Employment Rights Compliance.

The equality legislation is an important element of the policy context for men and women migrant workers. The Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004 prohibit discrimination in employment and vocational training. The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. Both Acts:

- cover nine grounds including grounds of race and gender;
- prohibit (with exemptions) discrimination, sexual harassment and harassment, and victimisation;
- require a reasonable accommodation (with exemptions) of people with disabilities;
- allow for positive action on all nine grounds;
- contain a number of detailed exemptions;
- impose vicarious liability on employers and service providers in relation to discriminatory acts of employees and agents unless the employers and service providers can prove they took reasonably practicable steps to prevent the discrimination.

1.6 Overview data on women migrant workers

The 2002 Census recorded roughly equal numbers of males (112,600) and females (111,700) among the resident non-Irish national population (all ages). The latest Population and Migration Estimates from the CSO suggest that by 2006 the total population of non-Irish nationals had increased to 409,000 but that the female share had fallen back somewhat to 47.5% (194,000) as the female share in the inflow of migrants fell from 50% in 2003 to 43% in 2006. These are provisional estimates pending the publication of the relevant data from the 2006 Census.

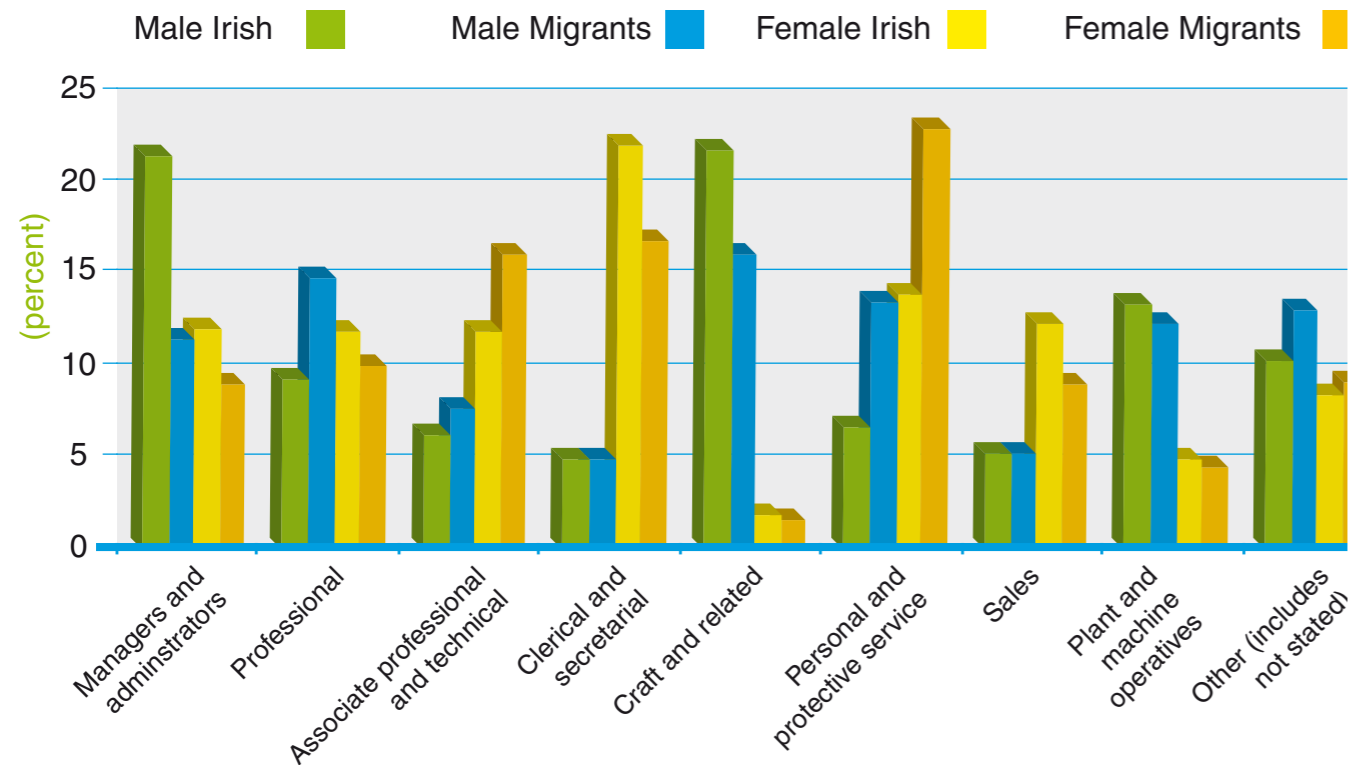
The main factor at work in these figures was the gender composition of immigration from the new EU member states between 2004 and 2006. Women accounted for just 36% of these inflows and for 42% of migration from the UK in that period. However 53% of migrants from the rest of the EU were women as were 79% of those from the USA and 49% of those from the rest of the world.

Overall migrants - both men and women - have a better educational profile than the Irish population as a whole, at least in part because they are younger. However, despite their relatively high educational qualifications, migrants' occupational profile is similar to the Irish population.

Compared to Irish women, migrant women are more likely to be in the labour force and more likely to work full-time. Occupational gender segregation is an entrenched feature of the Irish labour market and is being broadly reproduced among the migrant workforce (Table 1). Compared to men, few women - Irish or migrants - are plant and machine operatives or are in craft and related occupations, while both Irish and migrant women are much more likely to work in sales or clerical and secretarial occupations. Men overall are less likely to work in personal and protective services, although both migrant men and migrant women are more concentrated in such services than their Irish counterparts. Irish men are much more likely than women - Irish or migrant - to be managers and somewhat less likely to be professionals. While relatively few Irish or migrant women are managers or administrators, this is also true of migrant men to date. Migrant men are more likely to be professionals than are migrant women and less likely to be in associate professional and technical occupations (which includes nursing and other professional care work).



Table 1: Occupational distribution of women and men (percent)



Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, CSO, 2005

There may also be different experiences among migrant women related to factors such as country of origin, ethnicity and legal status. In 2005, the majority of women work permit holders were from the Philippines, South Africa, Ukraine, USA, Russia, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, India, Malaysia and Moldova. An assessment of work permit data between 2000 and 2005 shows that women work permit holders predominate in sectors that predominantly employ women such as catering, domestic work, care and health sectors.

In 2004, there were 346 new migrant workers in Ireland on work authorisation visas and 1,098 on working visas. These cover skilled and professional work in areas such as science, technology, construction and nursing. This data is not broken down by gender. The majority of work authorisation and working visas were issued to registered nurses (806 on working visas and 74 on work authorisations) who are predominately women. (Of the 1,318 non-Irish nurses that were registered by An Bord Altranais in 2004, 1,178 or 89% were women.)

Chapter 2

The experience of women migrant workers in the workplace

2.1 Introduction

This chapter documents the experiences in the workplace of the thirty-six women interviewed in this study. The interviews explored recruitment, information, pay and working conditions, access to training and promotion and flexible working hours. This information is presented using the framework set out in the previous chapter.

This chapter concentrates on the issues and difficulties raised by the women interviewed. These issues and difficulties pose a challenge to current policy and practice and require a response. However it is important to note that a range of instances of good practice were also highlighted in the interviews. These are highlighted through the text as relevant to the particular issues and explored further in Chapter 4.

2.2 Women migrant workers in a labour market characterised by gender inequality

Women migrant workers interviewed entered a labour market and society already characterised by gender inequalities. This labour market is typified by horizontal and vertical occupational segregation whereby women tend to be clustered into lower paid and lower skilled jobs. The women migrant workers that were interviewed worked in sectors where the employees were predominantly women, for example, in hospitality, cleaning, care work, nursing and in retail.

Danuta's experience of working for a contract cleaning company has not been a positive one. Danuta is from Poland and she doesn't know who her employer is and does not know about her rights and terms and conditions of employment. Although she did not sign a contract, she does receive pay slips. Her pay is €7.95 per hour with no holiday pay. On average she works 20 hours a week but she does not know from one day to the next how many hours she will work. She has to wait for a phone call each morning where she is given details of the jobs for the day. She is picked up in a van and brought to the places of work. She would like to change her work as she is not that happy in the job. Her work is dirty and heavy and she has to start at five o'clock in the morning. Some days she has no work or just a few hours work.

Women migrant workers also represent skilled labour in some sectors of the labour market, particularly in the welfare and social professions (education, social work and health care). However, skilled migration is gender divided. Men comprise a majority of those taking up skilled jobs in transnational corporations and in the knowledge society, whereas women predominate in skilled occupations associated with education, health and social work.

2.3 Experiences specific to women migrant workers

Women migrant workers experience a range of issues that relate to their status as migrant women. Some of these issues are not unique to migrant women and can be shared by Irish women employees. However they reflect important differences between the experience of migrant women and migrant men in particular, given the manner in which caring responsibilities tend to be shared unequally between women and men.³

Work-life balance, family friendly working hours and children

The juggling of work and caring responsibilities was a constant stress for the women interviewed who had children. Most of these women were also in workplaces that offered limited work-life balance working arrangements. Many of these women do not have family and other social supports as a back up.

One woman interviewed is a single parent, whose son is looked after by a child minder after school hours. She has difficulty in combining childcare with shift work and stated that this was made worse for her as she had no family networks to turn to for help if she was working a late shift. “When it comes to shift work it is very difficult, sometimes I don’t get home till two o’clock in the morning, I may not see my child for two days...I would like more flexibility in my work”. In contrast, Bisi’s experience as a childcare worker in the voluntary sector is much more positive. “My working conditions were excellent and my employer had good working practices. I was able to work part-time and combine my work and study with my own childcare responsibilities”.

Separation from children

The difficulties for women who have been separated from their children were highlighted in several interviews. As one woman working in the hotel sector stated: “We don’t leave our countries because we want to...we are forced to leave because we have to ensure that our children don’t grow up in poverty...I wouldn’t have come to Ireland if I was able to earn a decent living at home and I would love to go home and be with my daughter, I feel very sad to be missing out on her upbringing, this is the hardest thing for a mother”. Another woman, Chandra, from the Philippines who has been living and working in Ireland for the last four years had been sending money home to her three young children. When she first came to Ireland her children were looked after by her mother at home in the Philippines. She missed her children very badly. “I kept telling myself to be strong as I was doing it for

my kids”. She now has her children living with her.

Pregnancy

Two women interviewed stated that they were fearful of becoming pregnant as they did not believe that they would have any entitlements to maternity leave. None of the women interviewed had experienced problems associated with pregnancy. The Equality Authority has casefiles where pregnancy related discrimination has been experienced by migrant women workers.

Caring roles

Two women interviewed were concerned that they would have to return home to care for an older parent, as this was expected of them as daughters. Family reunification policy and practice does not currently address the needs of these women given the limited access for many migrant workers to any right to family reunification.

Female dependent spouses

Problems were identified in the interviews for women who are dependent spouses of work permit holders, compared to spouses of working visa holders. There is no right for spouses of work permit holders to work. The situation of female dependent spouses of work permit holders is exemplified by Julia’s story.

Julia was a non-clinical doctor in public health when she worked in Russia. She joined her husband who is on work permit as a computer engineer. During her first two years in Ireland she worked as a housekeeper in a hotel on a work permit. Since then she has found it very difficult to be legally employed under the work permit scheme because of restrictions on work permits for certain occupations. For the last two years she has been unemployed and seeking work. She applied for two HSE jobs in the area of health promotion and community development but was unable to take up employment because of work permit restrictions covering this type of employment. She says that “The denial of the right to work creates very vulnerable position for women in this situation and the vast majority stay invisible to service providers and to the Irish Government in general”.

The current Spousal Work Permits Scheme is to be developed to give greater access to employers for dependent spouses who have entered the State under the current family reunification provisions. This will assist on these issues in some instances.

2.4 Double burden of racism and sexism

The women migrant workers interviewed in this study stated that they frequently experienced both gender inequality and ethnic inequality.

³ *Women and Men in Ireland (2005)*, Central Statistics Office, Dublin

A female doctor from Pakistan who was interviewed cited her experience of double discrimination. This was based on her gender and child caring responsibilities, on the one hand, where she described working in a male dominated job where women tend to be overlooked in terms of promotion. She also stated that as a Muslim woman, her ethnicity and religion were additional factors that contributed to her lack of career progression.

Another woman interviewed highlighted “I sometimes think it is because I am a woman and because I am Filippina they think that they can give me the worst jobs to do. I feel I am treated unfairly”. As Eva said “When I worked in the hotel I was left in the bar with a large and difficult party...I was on my own and had to do the bar for over six hours and then clear up without a break...there is no way that an Irish woman employee would have been asked to do this on her own”.

2.5 Shared issues with migrant men

In the interviews a number of issues were raised that are common to both women and men migrant workers. They concern unethical recruitment practices and payment of recruitment fees and fees for work permits; absence of contracts of employment or employment contracts that did not provide for minimum entitlements to pay, holidays and other terms and conditions of employment; underpayment or non-payment of wages, including wages below the national minimum wage; and unfair dismissal. However, it is important to note that women can be in more marginal situations than men, due to a labour market that is characterised by gender inequality and due to the double burden of racism and sexism. As a result these shared issues can have a greater impact on migrant women.

Recruitment

Eleven of the thirty-six women interviewed were recruited through employment / recruitment agencies in their home countries; eight of these eleven women had paid fees to recruitment agents ranging from €500 to €3,500. One woman who was recruited through an intermediary was told that if she was stopped at immigration “that we were to say that we were coming to Ireland to carry out training. We had training visas, that’s what we were told. We eventually got our green book though”.

Information

Many of the women interviewed were not aware of their rights and entitlements. Three-quarters of those interviewed identified information as key in helping to improve the situation of women migrant workers. One woman highlighted that the withholding of information prevented women workers from claiming their rights such as minimum wages, holiday entitlements and working hours. This was particularly the case for those women in low skilled jobs that did not speak English. As Stella stated “most women have no idea about their rights, things like minimum wages, working hours, maternity benefits...no one

tells them and they end up working from nine in the morning until nine at night with low pay. No one is prepared to complain, most women are frightened to complain in case they lose their job. Something needs to be done to give these women information and to make sure that they know their rights”.

Positive experiences included information provided pre-departure and on arrival. One woman highlighted: “I was given information before departure and was given support when I arrived and help with accommodation”; and another woman stated that: “[my employer] has given us lots of information about life in Ireland and our jobs, we were told to ask for whatever help we needed, and were given the name of someone to contact in the company for this, we were also given a phone card so that we could phone home when we arrived”.

Under the Employment Permits Act 2006 the employment contract will contain a statement of the rights and entitlements of the migrant worker. This could enhance information provision to migrant workers.

Quality of employment

A significant number of women had changed jobs since they first arrived in Ireland, moving from poor quality employment into jobs with better employers. Women migrant workers talked about the use of their own networks to identify who were the good or bad employers. Lilia’s experience exemplifies this very well.

Lilia is from Moldova and came to work in Ireland for a contract cleaning company. Although she realised that she was being deskilled in this work, she saw it as a way of gaining experience and a route into better work. She had a very bad experience working for the contract cleaner and as soon as she had fulfilled her contract she gained a new work permit job as a cleaner in a hotel. This turned out to be a very positive experience and she has had opportunities for promotion.

Conditions of employment and pay

Even within the small group of women interviewed there existed a wide diversity of terms and conditions of employment. A number of women interviewed spoke about working in very bad conditions of employment and gave examples of low pay, not being paid the minimum wage or for overtime, long hours and harassment by employers. Most of these women felt they were not in a position to complain or question their employers for fear of losing their work permit.

The Employment Permits Act 2006 provides for the granting of the work permit to the employee and that employees may apply for the work permit. This could assist in addressing such fears.

As one woman stated “The Irish girls were getting the minimum wage but the rest of us

were not.” There was limited knowledge among the women of pay rates and whether they were paid equally with Irish workers. Many suspected that they were on lower rates of pay.

Of the thirty-six women interviewed those that had worked in or were currently working in the contract cleaning, hotel and hospitality and horticultural sectors had the most frequent complaints about their working conditions.

The following examples of women among those interviewed highlight issues in relation to working conditions.

Olga from Russia worked in Co Galway for seven months as a waitress, in a pub and a take away restaurant. Her employer did not give her a work permit. She felt that he “wanted to keep me as a slave with no rights”. Olga eventually went to the Garda station to complain and she was sent to the Galway immigration registration office.

Sasha was recruited from South Africa to work in a meat packing factory and came to work in Ireland through a recruitment company that was working on behalf of Irish companies. Although the work was low paid “We all signed seven month contracts with pay of £130 a week. That seemed loads considering where we came from. Many of us were working from six in the morning till eight at night in order to earn as much money as possible. After a while it didn’t seem so much money because we had to buy food to eat. On my second contract I earned more.... The big problems started when the employer changed....we were still doing the same job but then we found that we were getting lower pay and worse conditions of employment. It felt like a kick in the teeth. When I questioned and kicked up a fuss, I was told that they had to let me go”. She was sacked but got support from her trade union.

Anita used to work in the horticultural sector, picking mushrooms, but was sacked for speaking out against low pay, which averaged 50 cents per hour. She felt very strongly that women migrant workers in the horticultural sector should be supported by trade unions and that there should be more detailed inspection of workplaces, particularly because on the surface “everything looks fine, its only when you look under the surface that the exploitation and bad treatment of women is found...many women are too scared to speak out in case they lose their jobs...they have no rights”.

Skill levels

The majority of women interviewed were working in jobs below their skill levels. Thirty out of the thirty-six women were educated to second level, and twenty to third level. Women were working in contract cleaning with university degrees, women were carrying out routine service jobs who are qualified teachers and university lecturers, and women were working in hotels and bars who have masters level qualifications.

Job security

A large number of the women that were interviewed stated that they felt insecure in their jobs. This was particularly the case for women working on work permits who relied on their employer renewing their work permits on an annual basis. One woman had been under the impression that her employer had renewed her work permit, but when she discovered that this had not happened it was too late and she became undocumented. The insecure work position that Irina works in exemplifies this.

Irina works in a beauty salon as a hairdresser and doesn’t know if she will have a job in six months time because she is on a work permit. She has to pay her employer €500 in cash for the work permit every year. She is worried that if she complained she would lose the job. All the staff working in the beauty salon are migrants and all have to pay the fee. She said “The system is not good enough. I am always scared I will lose my job. I can’t switch my contract and change job”.

Several women were fearful that they would lose out to women migrant workers from the new member states who would replace them in their jobs.

Access to training

Few women interviewed had access to training in the workplace. Where training was provided this had mostly been health and safety courses connected with their work. One woman working in the IT sector had received a good level of training and this was linked into her career progression.

Promotion and career development

A number of women stated that they had few opportunities for promotion and career development. Several women identified difficulties in relation to access to training, language and that their legal status worked against their career development. As one woman said “who would employ a Chinese woman over an Irish woman or man, it just wouldn’t happen”. Skilled women spoke about the impact on their career development of not being able to travel outside of Ireland to attend meetings, seminars and conferences. Contrasting experiences of this issue of career development are exemplified by Jen who is from China and works in a software company and Yuxin who works for a multinational software company.

Jen is currently on a work permit; she sees this as a problem as she feels it ties her to the one employer who has to renew the permit annually. She would prefer to be on a working visa but her company would not be willing to cooperate with her on this, as they fear they could lose her to another company. She has good working conditions but knows she cannot be promoted.



Yuxin is currently on a working visa which gives her more flexibility to move jobs and more security than work permit holders (because the visa is for two years). Her workplace is a very positive environment to work in and there are good opportunities for career development and promotion.

Two women interviewed highlighted how self-employment had been the key to their career development, progression of skills and control of their working lives.

Cultural differences

In the interviews some women identified differences in culture as leading to difficulties in communication, misunderstandings and racist assumptions. In some cases the subtleties of Irish culture were not understood by women migrant workers and this had led to difficulties, particularly in jobs involving front line customer contact.

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter has shown that there are a number of issues experienced by women migrant workers that raise important challenges.

These challenges include the need to:

- develop specific initiatives to support career progression for migrant women;
- improve access for women migrant workers to affordable childcare and flexible working arrangements to enable women to combine work with childcare;
- develop and enhance policy in relation to family reunification;
- provide information about rights and entitlements in areas such as childcare issues, family friendly working hours, pregnancy and maternity entitlement;
- enhance the sensitivity of information providers to, and awareness of, women migrant workers' particular needs;
- further develop awareness of staff and managers in workplaces about how to combat the double discrimination of sexism and racism in the workplace and
- enhance the experience of all migrant workers through steps to address the issues identified that are shared by men and women migrant workers.

Chapter 3

Women migrant workers: living in Ireland and accessing services

3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at women migrant workers' experiences of living in Ireland and of accessing services. Most of the thirty-six women that were interviewed had no complaints about local community life. However, almost all of the women felt that they were not integrated in their local communities and rarely socialised outside of their homes or their ethnic communities.

Many of the women interviewed saw migration to Ireland as a means of lifting their families and themselves out of poverty. The majority intended to stay in Ireland in the longer term. Several women stated that they were freer to be an individual in Ireland, compared to their home countries, which often restricted their roles and independence. One woman from Nigeria and another from Sierra Leone spoke about the greater opportunities to live independently than in their home countries.

This chapter again concentrates on the issues and difficulties raised by the women interviewed. Instances of good practice were highlighted and these are raised in the text and further explored in the next chapter.

3.2 Experiences specific to women migrant workers

Women migrant workers experience a range of issues that relate to their status as migrant women. Again these experiences can be shared by Irish women but do distinguish the experience of migrant women from that of migrant men due to current inequalities in the sharing of caring responsibilities.⁴

Domestic violence

One woman interviewed had experienced domestic violence, but had had no knowledge of where to go. She said "I was very scared, I had no one to turn to, but I did get out of the situation". There are particular vulnerabilities in this regard in contexts of isolation and

⁴ *Women and Men in Ireland (2005)*, Central Statistics Office, Dublin

dependency.

Maternity and reproductive services

Several women had had babies since they began working in Ireland. Several spoke about their vulnerability when pregnant and having no information about services, although they had no complaints about the health services. Two women spoke about their fear of getting pregnant because of the lack of abortion services and also because childcare costs are so high. One woman had gone home to have an abortion, as this was not available in Ireland.

Childcare and children's services

Childcare was identified as a major problem for women migrant workers, particularly because the costs of childcare are so high. The absence of family support systems was identified as a major problem, particularly for women who came from cultures where family support systems are central to childrearing. Several of the women interviewed had organised their shifts with their partners to ensure that their children were cared for. One woman had brought her mother over to live with her, whilst another woman rotated childcare support from temporary visits from family members.

3.3 Double burden of racism and sexism

In interviews several women spoke of their experience of gender inequality combined with ethnic inequality. A number of women highlighted negative stereotypes associated with women migrant workers, which affected their personal security and sense of independence. These included racialised notions of motherhood in relation to Black women and sexualised notions of migrant women from Russia and the Baltic States.

In the interviews the women migrant workers associated the racism they received with negative stereotypes associated with them as women and as migrant workers, including assumptions that they were unjustly claiming benefits for themselves or their children or taking jobs from Irish people. There were examples of highly sexualised racism and sexual harassment on the streets or in the shops.

One woman stated that she felt very vulnerable when walking home from the bus at night. Because she worked shifts she felt scared at night, particularly at weekends "it's when Irish people are drunk at night that it is the worst...the racist and sexist abuse to women is terrible, they can be really nasty".

3.4 Shared issues with migrant men

There are a number of shared issues that both migrant women and men experience. However, women can be in more marginal situations than men, in a society that is

characterised by gender inequality and due to the double burden of racism and sexism. As a result they can face greater barriers, social isolation and difficulty in integrating.

Access to services

Most of the women interviewed knew little about how health, housing, education and training services operated or where to go for help and information about these services. Many women felt disadvantaged because of the limitations on their claims to welfare benefits, medical cards and other services because of the Habitual Residence Condition, which in turn exacerbated their isolation and vulnerability.

Health

The majority of women had never used the health services and did not know how to access them. They relied on the pharmacy for medications if they got sick or they went home. As one woman said in interview "I just hope I don't get sick as I don't have insurance, is that what I would need insurance? You see I don't know what to do to get health care. I was told you had to pay for it". One woman visited her dentist every year in Moscow when she took her annual trip home. Another woman had difficulty in registering with a GP: "I have had problems with the GP, I tried seven GPs before they would take me onto their books; they told me that they were full, but I knew they were still taking people onto their books".

Housing

The women interviewed had mixed experiences of accessing housing. One woman who had been recruited into a contract cleaning company arrived from Moldova and had accommodation arranged for her. This accommodation was overcrowded and of poor quality. She stated that "the recruitment agent, the hotel owner and the accommodation provider were all the same company...the accommodation was not given out of generosity but was a property investment for the employer".

The major barriers for the women with access to higher incomes from work in the IT sector and in nursing was in getting a mortgage so that they could get into the housing market. Banks, they said, were reluctant to arrange mortgages and insurance companies were reluctant to give insurance to workers who cannot demonstrate permanent employment and require evidence of residence for this purpose.

Several women cited difficulties with landlords. Some landlords had not repaid deposits when they moved, others simply refused to let properties to them when they realised they were from minority ethnic communities and had children. One woman interviewed with two young children, who had experienced racism from her neighbours was subsequently rehoused by Dublin City Council into more secure accommodation.

Education and training

A large number of the women interviewed had undertaken education courses or aspired to do so. Some women had taken English classes as they felt these were important to their integration, whilst others had gained professional or other qualifications to enable them to get a better paid job. A significant number of women had attained second and third level education in their own countries and viewed education as their most important route to gaining a better position in Ireland. Several women stated that they had no knowledge of education and training courses. Patricia's and Eva's experiences exemplify specific problems.

Patricia is a single parent from Nigeria. She gained residence in 2005. She had her rent allowance terminated because she has taken up a place on a training programme. She had not known that this restriction was in place and consequently had to leave the training course in order to maintain her rent allowance.

Eva is from Latvia and has worked in a number of low paid jobs in horticulture, hotel work and cleaning. When she tried to get information about education and training courses she was given a very poor response "(The organisation) didn't want to help me when I went to them...the woman there just thought she can't do this...I walked out and wanted to cry I felt so bad".

Social networks and language

Many of the migrant women interviewed spoke about difficulties integrating into life in Ireland, with common experiences of social isolation. Language and cultural difference were identified as major barriers, as were limited links with Irish people. A group of women interviewed in the horticulture sector spoke about their isolation from local communities. Most of the women shared accommodation and pooled resources. They live and cook cheaply so that they can send money home. They found Irish people to be friendly and helpful in the shops.

In some cases the women interviewed felt isolated because they were working away from their extended families, partners and children, in other cases they found it difficult to integrate into Irish life because of cultural differences. One Muslim woman found it difficult to socialise with colleagues at work because most social activities away from the workplace took place in the pub.

Migrant support organisations


More than three-quarters of the women interviewed did not know of any migrant support organisations, neither did they know where to access help and support. One woman has been in touch with an African women's support group that has provided networking, advocacy, information and training, with an emphasis on women's human rights. The lack of information available to Polish migrant workers had led to a small group of Polish people establishing the Polish Information and Cultural Centre in Dublin.

Bisi become very involved with her local church and through the church she found out about the support group for Africans who helped her through a difficult time she was facing finding accommodation. She also had a lot of support from the organisation's women's group over a problem with rented accommodation and bills. The women's group was also very helpful in giving advice about education and training.

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has identified women migrant workers experiences of integrating into life in Ireland and in accessing services. The main challenges that emerge include the need to:

- enhance the dissemination of and access to information about services such as health care, children's services, maternity services and benefits, accommodation and services for women experiencing domestic violence;
- enhance the development of advocacy supports to migrant women experiencing discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education;
- further develop the range and capacity of migrant support organisations and associations;
- review service provision in education and training, health, accommodation, social welfare and other benefits to identify and remove barriers experienced by migrant women;
- address the stereotyping of migrant women through media and education initiatives and
- enhance the experience of all migrant workers through steps to address the issues identified that are shared by men and women migrant workers.



Chapter 4

Exploring good practices - employers, unions and migrant support organisations

This chapter explores good practice developments identified in the interviews that help to shape and improve the living and working conditions of women migrant workers. It draws on examples of good practice that have already been put in place and that were identified in interviews and in the focus groups with employers, trade unions and migrant support organisations.

The issues presented in this chapter are underpinned by the importance of:

- partnership working between employers, trade unions and migrant support organisations and
- the development of equality and diversity policies, training and practices for a planned and systematic approach to equality at workplace level.

4.1 Employers

Many employers recognise the business benefits of a workplace that accommodates cultural diversity. Women migrant workers represent an important pool of workers in Ireland. Employers have identified a business case for being employers of first choice. The following are the types of good practice identified in the interviews.

Equality and diversity policies and practices in the workplace

- Having workplace equality and diversity policies that link business priorities with the accommodation of cultural diversity and the achievement of full equality in practice for women migrant workers.
- Taking anti-discrimination measures in the workplace that link the combating of gender discrimination with combating discrimination on the race ground.
- Including a gender dimension in the recruitment practices relating to migrant workers, including induction and adaptation programmes that take into account the particular experience and situation of migrant women workers and that assist women's integration into the workplace.

- Providing anti-racism and cultural competence training, which includes a gender dimension, for staff and managers.

Information provision

- Providing information to migrant workers covering moving to Ireland, getting employment for other family members, access to childcare, finding schools for children, health care and other family related services, maternity rights and gender equality issues.
- Providing information on specific women's initiatives in local communities, voluntary organisations, information providers and migrant support organisations.
- Providing practical help in finding accommodation, sourcing childcare and settling in, including specific and targeted support for migrant women on arrival.

Flexible working hours

- Putting in place flexible working arrangements, including allowing migrant workers to bank their overtime and holiday time to take longer periods of leave to visit children and family members.
- Developing specific family friendly working arrangements for migrant workers with childcare and other caring responsibilities.

Workplace supports to assist with integration into the workplace

- Networking employees to support migrant women in the workplace.
- Designing mentoring schemes to provide specific support for migrant women in developing their skills and progression in the workplace.
- Taking measures to assist with integrating migrant women into the workplace, including language classes in the workplace or release from work for language classes, social events, buddy systems and support for newly arrived women migrant workers.

The **Interact Project** has developed a website designed to support employers, trade unions and employees in a multicultural workplace www.interact2.com. The website provides a review tool to help unions and employers to develop best practice with regard to the implementation of legislation; information for employers and unions on immigration in Ireland; information about workplace practices and examples of good practice; and information about training courses on diversity training for managers and trade unions, and language and induction courses.

4.2 Trade unions

Trade unions play important roles in supporting women migrant workers and building a gender dimension into their wider work on migrant workers.

Information provision

- Providing information about rights and entitlements to migrant workers, including issues concerning childcare, maternity entitlements, domestic violence and rights under the equality legislation.

Support for women migrant workers

- Negotiating a focus on the working conditions of migrant women through seeking equality strategies that secure good practice in this area.
- Providing advocacy and legal support in taking specific cases where women migrant workers have been discriminated against in the workplace.
- Developing migrant women support and networking facilities within the trade unions.

Recruiting and organising women migrant workers

- Taking initiatives to work with women migrant workers including recruiting and organising women migrant workers in the workplace and taking initiatives to recruit women migrant trade union organisers who can work directly with women migrant workers.
- Providing specific trade union education and training on racism/cultural awareness, which includes a gender dimension, for trade union staff and their members.

4.3 Migrant support organisations

Migrant support organisations and migrant led organisations have played important roles in providing support, advocacy and information to migrant women workers. Migrant support organisations are often an early point of contact for information and support for migrant women workers. Increased levels of financial support are needed for migrant led and migrant support organisations.

Community based outreach and support work

- Providing supports to break down the social isolation of women migrant workers, including mother and toddler initiatives and childcare facilities that are accessible to migrant workers.
- Providing drop in facilities for migrant women in local community centres in a way that breaks down social isolation.
- Assisting with the provision of English language learning for migrant women, and working in partnership with employers and trade unions to develop appropriate work based and community based language learning provision.

Information provision

- Bridging information gaps identified by women migrant workers who do not know their rights and entitlements, with information in multiple languages and targeted to the needs of migrant women.

Networking

- Developing and supporting networking opportunities for specific groups of women migrant workers, that seek to overcome social isolation, provide support and address information gaps.

Policy work

- Highlighting the experiences of women migrant workers to policy makers and promoting a gender dimension to migration policy and practice.

Community development and empowerment approaches

- Building capacity of migrant women to address their health, education and other needs.
- Organising consultations with women migrant workers at local, regional and national level as a basis for mobilising and empowering women migrant workers.
- Developing projects to give migrant women a voice and role in policy-making.

Appendix 1: Profile of the women interviewed

Sector	Name	Country of origin	Status	Current work
Health care				
1	Chandra	Philippines	Working visa	Private nursing home
2	Marie	Philippines	Working visa	Private nursing home/ HSE
3	Judith	Philippines	Working Visa	Nurse: learning disability
4	Sari	Philippines	Working Visa	Nurse: learning disability
5	Sara	Pakistan	Resident	Hospital doctor
Other public sector				
6	Nyandwi	Burundi	Former refugee	Bus driver
7	Agnes	Poland	EU citizen	Bus driver
8	Carmila	Spain	EU citizen	Bus driver
9	(anon)	Kosova	Former refugee	Bus driver
10	Ingrid	Romania	Work permit	Bus driver
11	Gannau	Ukraine	Work permit	Administrator
Self-employment				
12	Stella	Nigeria		Hairdresser
13	Olena	Ukraine		Fitness instructor
14	(anon)	Bangladesh	Work permit	Hotel chamber maid
Hotel, restaurant and hospitality				
15	Liliana	Moldova	Work permit	Cleaning supervisor
16	Terri	China	Student visa	Waitress
17	Eva	Latvia	EU citizen	Waitress
Cleaning				
18	Danuta	Poland	EU citizen	Contract cleaner
19	Tania	Moldova		Domestic worker/ cleaner
Horticulture				
20	Anita	Latvia	EU citizen	Mushroom picker
21	Tamara	Latvia	EU citizen	Mushroom picker
22	Gallina	Latvia	EU citizen	Mushroom picker
23	Ilota	Lithuania	EU citizen	Mushroom picker
24	Susta	Lithuania	EU citizen	Mushroom picker
25	Sasha	South Africa	Work permit	Meat industry
Voluntary/community				
26	Magdalena	Poland	EU citizen	Information centre worker
27	Tendai	Zimbabwe	Work permit	Community organisation
28	Bisi	Nigeria	Former refugee, now resident	Childcare worker
29	Josephine	Nigeria	Former refugee	Childcare worker
Other services				
30	Sonja	Belarus	Work permit	Hairdresser

Appendix 1: Profile of the women interviewed (Continued)

Sector	Name	Country of origin	Status	Current work
Skilled IT				
31	Yuxin	China	Working visa	IT company
32	Zheng	China	Work permit	IT company
Skilled finance and accountancy (training)				
33	Lin Li	China	Student visa	Accountancy
34	Li Hong	China	Student visa	Accountancy
Currently not working				
35	Julia	Russia	Former work permit holder, dependent spouse of work permit holder	Hotel housekeeper / currently unemployed and pregnant
36	Patricia	Ivory Coast	Resident	Various

Notes





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