



Issues and Challenges in the Recruitment and Selection of Immigrant Workers in Ireland

Final Report

Prepared for the Employers' Diversity Network
of the Public Appointments Service

by WRC Social and Economic Consultants



An tSeirbhís um Cheapacháin Phoiblí
Public Appointments Service

Oifig an Aire d'Imeachtha
Office of the Minister for Integration



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Chapter 1

Exploring the Recruitment of Immigrant Workers in Ireland: Context and Methodology

1. Introduction

Over the past fifteen years or so, immigrants have been a major and very necessary source of labour supply in the context of Ireland's rapid economic and employment growth. Consequently, this is now reflected in increased ethnically and culturally diverse workforces, albeit more marked in specific sectors of the economy. This presents challenges and opportunities, for both immigrants and employers, but one of the more positive developments is the growing awareness of the value of diversity in the workplace and the growing interest in the effective management of diversity. To date, however, the process of recruiting immigrant workers and its role in underpinning diversity, as well as in meeting employers' needs, has received very little attention in Ireland. This research attempts to open this issue for investigation by:

1. exploring how Irish employers recruit workers and the implications of this for the labour market well-being of immigrants; and
2. identifying the challenges and issues related to the recruitment of immigrant workers that arise from the process of recruitment itself or from the context within which it occurs.

The research was commissioned by the Employers' Diversity Network which is coordinated by the Public Appointments Service (PAS). The PAS is the centralised provider of recruitment, assessment and selection services for the Civil Service and also provides recruitment and consultancy services to local authorities, the HSE, An Garda Síochána and other public bodies.

The PAS is committed to the ongoing development of best practice recruitment and selection processes that do not unfairly disadvantage any group and that facilitates and encourages diversity. In order to increase awareness and understanding and to improve practice in the area of diversity, the PAS established an Employers' Diversity Network in 2007. This Network is made up of Human



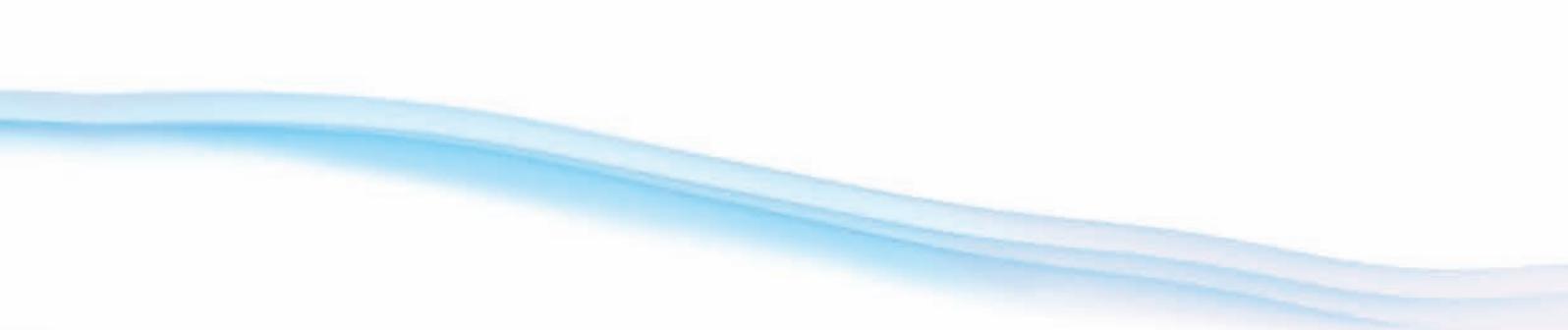
Resource practitioners/experts from a range of private and public sector organisations who are interested in sharing experiences and developing best practice in this area.

In March 2008, the Employers' Diversity Network commissioned the current research into the recruitment of immigrant workers. The context for the research was provided by (a) the growing awareness amongst employers of the benefits of targeting a wide and diverse pool of applicants to fill vacancies and address skills gaps within their organization and (b) employers' growing awareness of their obligation to ensure that their selection processes are as open as possible and that they do not alienate or unfairly disadvantage people from particular minority ethnic groups.

1.1 The Global Context of Immigration in Ireland

The Irish economic context has changed in the short period since this research was commissioned. Economic growth has stalled, unemployment has increased dramatically and it appears that many immigrants are leaving the country. Despite this, immigrant workers will continue to be a feature of the Irish labour market and the recruitment of immigrant workers will also continue to be a pertinent issue in the coming years. This reflects the fact that Ireland is now part of the EU labour market; however, immigration will also be driven by family reunification processes amongst those who have already settled here (NESC, 2006a), as well as by skills shortages in specific areas of the economy and the race for talent at an international level (PwC, 2006). It is important to bear in mind that while the economic boom increased the attractiveness of Ireland as a destination for immigrants, it was not the only factor at play: world demographic growth for example and the enlargement of the European Union were, and continue to be, key factors in shaping migration movements (MacEinri, 2003).

Many writers have also pointed out that the economic inequalities between the global north and south have become so large as to create an inexhaustible potential for migration (Portes and DeWind 2004; Castel, 2004; Zolberg, 1999). At this point, therefore the more relevant context in which to locate an assessment of immigration in Ireland is not the national economy but its incorporation into international economic processes. Contemporary migration is driven in large part by the globalisation of the world economy, as reflected in increasingly integrated production, exchange and consumption processes that extend beyond national boundaries. The National Economic and Social Council put this succinctly as follows:



“Pressure for migration – legal and illegal – is an unavoidable feature of the emerging world order to which all societies and states must respond”.

(NESC, 2006b)

One consequence of this is that migration itself has also assumed a global character, as more countries are affected by population movements. Castle and Miller (1998) identified a number of characteristics of global migration that have also been evident in Ireland over the past number of years including the following:

- The differentiation of migration whereby most countries experience different types of migration including economic migration, refugee-based migration etc;
- The feminisation of migration, as women come to play a major role in labour migration in all regions;
- The politicisation of migration as reflected in domestic politics, international arrangements etc.

The centrality of globalisation in understanding and explaining migratory processes has also resulted in a move away from ‘push-pull’ theories of migration towards models which focus on an array of forces and processes that impact on the decision to migrate. Push-pull theories of migration, developed within neo-classical economic equilibrium theory, emphasise the individual decision to migrate, based on a rational comparison of the relative costs and benefits of remaining in the area of origin or moving to various alternative destinations.

While push-pull models continue to dominate both media and state discourses on migration (Loyal and Staunton, 2001), there is an emerging consensus in the literature that the emphasis on individual rational choice in explaining migration is severely limited on both a theoretical and empirical level. Instead, international research has identified a wide range of factors that influence both the decision to immigrate and the destination (Krings, 2007). These include factors at the level of the migrant populations, including information, cultural capital and social capital and in this context the importance of family in influencing the decision to migrate, the target destination and the duration of stay has been highlighted. Other factors that influence migration exist at the political and institutional level including international relations, political economy, and the role of the state in facilitating movements.

This type of analysis applies mainly to economic migrants, who constitute the vast majority of immigrants to Ireland (Ruhs, 2005), but the very different circumstances of refugees must be noted. Whereas economic migrants are motivated by economic challenges in their country of origin and perceived opportunities in the country of destination, refugees seek to escape conflict and

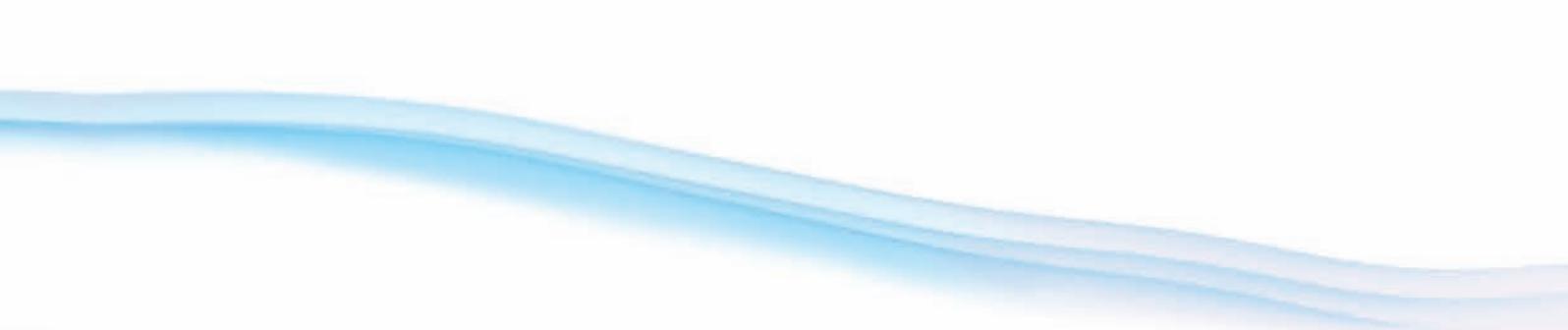


persecution. Economic migrants encounter great diversity in their immigration experience including their experience of exploitation and their legal status in their country of destination is a significant determinant of their vulnerability in this regard. Those who have rights to travel and work across an extensive area (as for example are enjoyed by most EU citizens) are extremely mobile on the international (in particularly the EU) labour market. This mobility will be reflected in their short and long term aspirations, including the desire to settle permanently in their country of destination, the desire to enhance their vocational and language skills or the desire to accumulate savings: and all three orientations will influence their labour market decision making. Recent research has highlighted the extent to which contemporary economic migrants (unlike those of a generation ago), keep their options open with regard to their ongoing plans and the term 'intentional unpredictability' (Drinkwater et al, 2006) has been coined to describe this 'wait and see' process.

In contrast to economic migrants, the initial motivation for refugee migration is very different as is the national and international policy context. As such, refugees may have far less mobility across national boundaries e.g., refugees in Ireland have the same entitlement to work here as Irish citizens, but require work permits to work in other EU member states. Due both to the impetus for their migration, the more restricted entitlements they enjoy, and the requirements of seeking citizenship status, refugees are more likely to have long term aspirations regarding settling down in their country of destination, and this too will be reflected in their labour market aspirations. Conversely, in the Irish context whereby the asylum process can take many years, most refugees coming onto the Irish labour market are *de facto* long term unemployed - a situation which can exacerbate the difficulties they face.

1.2 Migration and Labour Market Segmentation

One of the key labour market phenomena that arise from the interaction of globalisation and migration is labour market segmentation such that new patterns of ethnic segmentation are hall marks of the transformation of the global economy. Consequently, there are widening gaps both between immigrants and non-immigrants, and among different immigrant categories. Labour market segmentation is a complicated process affecting migrants in very different ways depending on a whole host of factors including ethnic and national background, gender, recentness of arrival, legal status, education and training. Notwithstanding some research findings that indicate that a substantial proportion of immigrants have labour market experiences that are indistinguishable from the majority population (Iganski and Payne, 1999), there is a consensus within the literature that labour market segmentation has become



a defining feature of contemporary immigrant employment, most evident in the clustering or concentration of immigrants in particular jobs, industries and economic sectors.

Three key factors have been identified as contributing to labour market segmentation and these are particularly relevant to the current study. Firstly, there are the attributes of immigrants themselves: when immigrants lack local knowledge or networks as well as proficiency in the language and are unfamiliar with local ways of work then their entry point into the labour market is likely to be at a low level (McCormick, 2008). In this sense, clustering in certain sectors is an integral (though ideally short-lived) element of the migration experience. Secondly, employers' recruitment practices and processes of globalised recruitment have been shown to contribute to segmentation: while the international race for talent has forged new global recruitment chains to recruit high end workers, at the other end of the job market, many immigrants are vulnerable to exploitation by unethical agencies and employment practices and even to trafficking. Thirdly, government policy can play a key role in generating blocks to labour market mobility and hence in determining whether or not labour market segmentation continues over time.

In social terms, segmentation can lead to the long term marginalisation of certain groups and embodies the risk of creating racial or ethnic enclaves and generating racial tensions. In economic terms, segmentation can also limit the positive effect of immigration on economic growth. When highly-skilled migrants are forced into low-skilled jobs or prohibited from working, their overall contribution to economic growth is reduced (Barret et al, 2006).

Castle and Miller (1998) have identified how, internationally, governments have responded to the problem of segmentation in various ways depending on their overall migration policy.

- Firstly there are those countries that have developed and implemented active policies to improve the labour market position of immigrants and minorities through language courses, basic education, vocational training and legislation (such as, for example, positive action measures). These countries include Australia, Canada, Sweden, Britain, France and the Netherlands.
- Secondly, there are countries that focus on reducing formal discrimination by implementing equal opportunities policies, anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action but without investing in social policies such as training and education. The key example here is the USA.



- The third group is the so-called guest-worker countries, of which Germany is the most frequently cited example, which may have supportive measures (such as, for example, training) but which also may have restrictions on the rights of workers, particularly in terms of their long term integration and entitlements.

Immigration, including economic migration, is an ongoing feature of the global economy. Labour immigration policy has already emerged in Europe as a significant aspect of public policy and continues to evolve. As the discussion above shows, however, labour immigration policy ideally is not just about determining or regulating who has the right to work: it is also integrally linked to how well immigrants can be integrated into the society and economy of the host country.

1.3 Irish Labour Migration Policy

Irish immigration policy has evolved against a backdrop of international human rights instruments and the recently agreed EU Common Principles. Nevertheless Ireland has considerable autonomy in this policy area and despite the recentness of immigration here, Irish immigration policy and particularly labour migration policy has already seen a number of distinct phases. In the early years, Irish labour migration policy has been described as ‘employer led’ with few restrictions placed on employers in hiring non-Irish workers and the widespread use of work permits to fill low-skilled positions (NESC 2006a). In 2003 / 2004 a number of changes were made, which introduced a distinction between European Economic Area¹ (EEA) immigrants and those from non EEA countries. These included a policy change whereby low skilled employment was to be sourced from the enlarged EU and the work permit system re-focused on high skilled occupations. Later, in 2005, a more managed approach to labour migration became evident in such developments as the establishment of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) (NESC, 2006a).

Labour migration policy determines the categories of immigrants that are entitled to work in Ireland. This is a complex area, and the following attempts to summarise the main aspects of it:

¹ The EEA comprises the member states of the European Union, in addition to Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Swiss nationals also have rights which are similar to those of nationals of EEA countries

Right to Work

Those who have a right to work in Ireland include the following:

- Citizens of the member states of the EEA (other than Romania and Bulgaria) and Switzerland, and their spouses and dependants (regardless of their nationality);
- People who have been granted refugee status in Ireland;
- People who have been refused refugee status but have been given leave to remain on humanitarian grounds;
- People who have been given leave to remain because they are the spouse or parent of an Irish citizen;
- Students on a fulltime course of at least one year's duration leading to a recognised qualification may work part time, and full time during summer holidays;
- Postgraduate students where the work is an integral part of the course of study being undertaken;
- Non-EEA nationals carrying out scientific research for approved research organizations;
- Other people granted a Stamp Four including non-EEA spouse and Dependent Children of an Irish National who is in employment or self-employed
- Citizens of Bulgaria or Romania who were employed for over 12 months on work permits prior to 2005.

Permission to Work

For those outside the above categories, there are two mechanisms to enable them work in Ireland.

- Work permits are issued for jobs in certain sectors² that cannot be filled by citizens from the EEA. Employers must ascertain that the vacancy cannot be filled by EEA citizens by registering the vacancy with FÁS for four weeks. The permit is issued to employers for specific identified employees and can be from one month to one year in duration. Applications for renewal of work permits can be made by the employer. Immigrants who are employed on work permits are entitled to work only for the employer who holds the permit at any point in time.

² Some types of jobs in some sectors are ineligible for work permits. These jobs change from time to time. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment provides details of ineligible jobs and sectors on its website: www.entemp.ie/labour/workpermits/elements/index.htm.



- Green Cards, which have replaced work visas and work authorisations, were introduced as a mechanism to speed up the recruitment of non-EEA citizens whose skills are in high demand in Ireland. A Green Card is valid for two years and authorisation to continue to work and reside in the country may be granted at the end of the first period of validity. Holders of Green Cards are expected to remain with the original employer for 12 months, after which they are allowed to change employer as long as they continue to have authorisation to work and reside in the country. Green Cards operate in respect of two categories of job:
 - Where the annual salary is 60,000 euros or more, the Green Card is available for all occupations other than those classified as being ‘outside the public interest’;
 - Where the annual salary is between 30,000 and 59,999 euros, the Green Card is available for a restricted number of occupations classified as ‘strategically important’.

The current policy provisions have been criticized by employers, trade unions and NGOs working in the area of immigration as well as by other national and international commentators. A main focus of such criticism is the lack of policy and legislation to support the integration of immigrants and the lack of adequate recognition of the permanency of immigration. For example, the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in its Second Report on Ireland stated that “more attention needs to be paid to non-citizen workers as members of Irish society rather than just economic entities and that measures should be taken to reflect this approach, such as the introduction of a wider range of work permit types to meet different situations and wider possibilities for family reunification”. The National Economic and Social Council has argued that “Migration is most likely to enhance Ireland’s economic and social development when it is characterised by mobility and integration rather than segmented labour markets and social separation” (NESC, 2006b).

A number of aspects of current policy³ have been highlighted as needing improvement to better ensure the wellbeing of immigrant workers and their families. These include the following:

- The cost to immigrants of work permits - currently each applicant for a work permit must pay 1,000 euros;

³ Currently the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill is at the amendments stage and is expected to be passed into law in the near future. Some of the current policy areas which have attracted criticism will be covered in the forthcoming Bill.

- The fact that work permits are issued to employers and not to employees, ties the employee to a specific employer thereby increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and reducing their labour market mobility;
- The need to recognise that some immigrants intend to be here permanently– the current system is seen as reinforcing the perception that immigration is temporary;
- The need to develop appropriate family reunification measures for immigrants;
- The need to accord the right to work to the family members of some categories of immigrant.

1.4 Other Relevant Social Policy Areas

Other areas of social policy and legislation that can shape the immigrant experience include those in the area of social protection, equality, anti-racism and active labour market policies.

- **Social Welfare Policy**
Under current provisions, entitlement to social welfare support is dependent on two years habitual residence in Ireland. This provision, which also applies to Irish citizens, means that those coming newly to Ireland are not entitled to receive any support from the Irish government. One exception to this is the case of asylum seekers who are housed in direct provision housing and given an allowance of 19 euro per week. If their application for refugee status is successful, or if they are given leave to remain on humanitarian or other grounds, and they have been pursuing their application for over two years, they become entitled to welfare support.
- **Equality and Diversity Policies**
Within the overarching framework of labour migration policies, all those living in Ireland enjoy the protection from discrimination afforded by Equality Legislation on nine named grounds. These grounds include race and ethnicity and the Employment Equality Act specifically outlaws discrimination on this basis in relation to employment, while the Equal Status Act extends this to all service areas.
- **Active Labour Market Policies**
The provisions of active labour market policies (particularly services provided by FÁS and the Local Employment Services) are available to immigrants on a restricted basis. In general, only immigrants from within the EEA countries can avail of the full set of services provided by Local



Employment Services (LES) although some of these make their drop-in information services available to all. At local level, many community organisations have begun to address the gap in labour market services for some categories of immigrants and some peer led migrant groups are also involved in supporting their members.

1.5 Immigrants in the Labour Market and Workforce in Ireland

Irish immigration has been characterized by three features which are relatively unique: the speed with which it has occurred; the profile of immigrants to Ireland; and the coincidence of immigration with a period of rapid economic growth.

- Between 2002 and 2006, the percentage of non-Irish born people living in Ireland increased from just under 6 per cent to 10 per cent. This rate of immigration is rare: in the UK, the foreign born population grew by just 2 percentage points in the thirty years between 1960 and 1990. In absolute terms, there were 419,733 non-Irish born people among the population in 2006 (Census, 2006) and this is estimated to have reached 491,500 in the first quarter of 2008 (QNHS, 2008). The largest single grouping of immigrants (over 216,000) is from the ten states admitted to the EU in 2004 (EU10): including 63,276 Polish people, (a figure that is widely viewed as a serious under-estimation) of whom almost 90 per cent had arrived since 2004. Over 100,000 were people from Africa and Asia: among the former are 16,300 Nigerians (increased by 82% since 2002), while among the latter are 11,161 Chinese people (up 91% since 2002).
- Immigrants to Ireland tend to be younger than the indigenous population and to be better educated. In effect, Ireland has succeeded in attracting well educated prime age workers, in marked contrast to the experiences of some other countries, such as the USA (Barrett et al, 2006). A high standard of education has been a consistent feature of immigrants to Ireland since the mid-1990s (Minns, 2005, Barrett et al, 2006) and the most recent census data suggests this is ongoing. In particular, immigrants are much more likely to have third level education or higher compared to their Irish counterparts. However, the data also indicate the degree of diversity within ethnic groups with regard to education: with the exception of non-Chinese Asians, the proportion of ethnic groups with only second level education is on a par with the Irish born population.

- The coincidence of immigration with the economic boom since the mid 1990s is reflected in (a) the fact that the vast majority of immigrants to Ireland are economic migrants from the EEA and (b) the high rate of incorporation into the work force amongst immigrants. Both these are evidenced by channels of migration (NESC, 2006a), applications for work permits, official statistics and research. The desire to find work, to augment qualifications and language skills or to save money have been identified by research as the predominant reasons for coming to Ireland and the findings are consistent across different contexts and national groups: close to three quarters of immigrants in studies state work or career related reasons as their chief motivation in coming to Ireland (Fitzgerald, 2008, MRCI 2007a, Kropiwiec, 2006). For some, this was linked to aspirations to return home in better circumstances (Kropiwiec, 2006) but other research suggests that substantial proportions of immigrants plan to stay in Ireland (Ruhs, 2005). In terms of their economic incorporation, immigrants made up 16 per cent of the Irish labour force at the end of 2007, up from 3 per cent in 1997 (FÁS, 2008). Census data also shows that less than 7 per cent of EU 10 immigrants were not in the labour force in 2006 compared to almost 40 per cent of Irish nationals. Among non-EU immigrants however almost one third were not in the labour force.

1.6 The Well-Being of Immigrants on the Irish Labour Market

When one moves away from the aggregate statistics on immigrants, the degree of diversity amongst different groupings become clear. Census data shows considerable variation between the employment situation of immigrants on the basis of nationality and ethnicity. In particular, the variation in the economic status of EU and non EU immigrants has led some to refer to a bi-polar dynamic in immigrant employment (Krings, 2007). The rate of unemployment amongst immigrants also varies: while the overall rate amongst immigrants is higher than amongst the indigenous population, it is particularly high amongst those of Black origin, of whom over one quarter were returned as unemployed in the 2006 Census. Since then, unemployment amongst foreign nationals has continued to increase (to over six per cent, considerably higher than the 3.9 per cent for Irish nationals (FÁS, 2007) and the increase was particularly marked amongst workers from the EU10 where the numbers on the Live Register quadrupled from 3,000 at the end of 2006 to 13,000 one year later.

Since this research has been completed unemployment has continued to rise and there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of Irish and non – Irish nationals on the Live Register.



Unemployment is not the only issue that besets immigrants at work and seeking work in Ireland. Official statistics indicate the clustering of immigrants in some sectors, with workers from the EU 10 concentrated in manufacturing industry and construction while those from non EU countries are concentrated in hotels and restaurants and in health and social work. It has been argued that the majority of new entrants into the Irish labour market have taken up predominantly low skill jobs which Irish workers have tended to avoid (McCormick, 2008) while the NESCC (2006a) has also noted that the entry to low skilled jobs is even more marked amongst more recent arrivals to Ireland. This clustering is not driven by the skill level of immigrants; rather it reflects under-employment, where immigrants are employed below their skill level (Barrett et al, 2006). Significantly, Barrett et al found no evidence of underemployment or occupational gap, amongst workers from the EU 15, but a gap of 23 per cent amongst those from the EU 10. It also appears this tendency is increasing: a comparison of QNHS (Quarterly National Household Survey) data for 2001 and 2006 shows that the number of highly educated non Irish working in unskilled jobs in hotels and restaurants had risen (Wickham et al, 2008).

Downward mobility amongst some immigrant workers was also highlighted by a recent study of immigrants from India, China, Nigeria and Lithuania (ICI 2008) which compared their occupations before and after coming to Ireland. Overall, Indians and Chinese showed the most consistency in their pre and post immigration occupations whereas, in contrast, Lithuanians and more especially Nigerians showed considerable downward mobility. Some gender differences were also evident in this research. Interestingly, from the point of view of the ICI's research, the Nigerians were the only group to have prior experience of working in central and local government: before coming to Ireland approximately 13 per cent had such experience, now fewer than 2 per cent were in this sector. Clustering, under-employment and downward mobility are evidence of labour market segmentation in Ireland (McCormick, 2008; Krings, 2007, Barret et al, 2006) and the importance of government policy in terms of the continuation of segmentation or otherwise has been highlighted (McCormick, 2008)

An additional indicator of labour market wellbeing is the level of earnings attained by immigrants. Barrett and McCarthy (2006) who analysed the earnings of immigrants based on the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions for 2004 found immigrants earn 18 per cent less than Irish workers, controlling for education and years of experience. However, immigrants from non-English speaking countries experienced a 31 per cent wage disadvantage relative to comparable Irish workers. Data based on Tax Returns also confirms that EU10 workers who entered Ireland in 2004 were earning considerably less than the average wage in the sectors in which immigrants tend to work (FÁS, 2007).

1.7 Barriers to finding work or appropriate work

McCormack (2008) has argued that the characteristics of immigrants, the recruitment practices of employers and government policies drive labour market segmentation. A number of small scale studies have highlighted barriers to employment on both the supply and demand side as well as blockages to labour market mobility arising from policy constraints.

Supply side issues include:

- Lack of proficiency in the English language;
- Poor information among immigrants regarding how the Irish labour market operates along with poor information on the existence of agencies that can provide assistance (Fitzgerald, 2008, Pillinger, 2006);
- Effective usage of available supports can be hampered by a lack of knowledge of the cultural norms and traditions (Dunn and Morgan, 2001);
- Lack of awareness or erroneous knowledge of their employment rights (Conroy and Brennan, 2003).

In terms of employer practices, the following issues have been identified:

- Problems in having qualifications recognized (Ni Mhurchu, 2007);
- The requirement of Irish employers that recruits should have Irish experience (Refugee Information Service 2008);
- The experience of racism and discrimination (McGinnity et al 2007; O'Connell and McGinnity, 2008);
- The failure of some recruitment practices to conform to labour market standards (NESC, 2006b).

In relation to policy, the following have been noted:

- The labour market status of some immigrants has a significant impact on their mobility in employment and therefore increases vulnerability (Barret et al, 2006);
- Workers are reluctant to leave exploitative employment because of their work permit status (MCRI, 2004);
- Treatment in the workplace differs according to legal status with those on work permits particularly vulnerable compared to EU citizens and visa holders (ICI, 2008);
- Changing from Student Visa to work permit status is a major obstacle (MCRI, 2007b).



Overall, both official statistics and research findings in relation to immigrant workers in Ireland indicate a high level of incorporation into employment but frequently on unfavourable terms. There is also considerable diversity amongst immigrants, based on legal status, ethnicity and gender⁴ (Pillinger, 2006; ICI 2008; O'Connell and McGinnity, 2008).

1.8 Overview of the Research

The Employers' Diversity Network sought to explore issues around the recruitment and selection of immigrant workers by examining the experiences of people from a range of immigrant communities seeking employment in Ireland and by identifying any particular challenges/barriers that they have encountered. The research aimed to examine the experiences and practices of a sample of employers (both Public and Private sector) in relation to the recruitment and selection of employees from immigrant communities.

The terms of reference for the research were as follows:

- To carry out quantitative and qualitative research with potential candidates/job seekers from the main immigrant communities in Ireland to collect information on the following:
 - Their experiences of seeking employment in Ireland and the key challenges or difficulties encountered.
 - The methods/sources used by job seekers from immigrant communities when seeking employment.
 - The level of knowledge of people from different immigrant communities in relation to the job opportunities available within various sectors in Ireland and their views of the attractiveness of opportunities in different sectors.
- To collect information from a sample of employers across different sectors to explore how they approach the issue of recruiting and selecting candidates in general and specifically from immigrant communities.
- To identify any challenges employers have experienced in attracting and selecting candidates from immigrant communities and to identify examples of innovation in responding to these challenges.

⁴ This research sought to ensure a gender balance in focus group participation which was broadly achieved. Few gender specific issues came to light however.

1.9 Methodology

The research focused on three groups of immigrants: East Europeans and especially Polish; Asians and especially Chinese; and people from Africa. Over the period April to July 2008, the process of recruitment from the perspectives of both employers and immigrant workers was explored. In addition, the views of organisations that support immigrants, labour market service providers in the public and private sectors and the Social Partners were sought. Given the short time frame, the focus was confined to employers and workers in the Greater Dublin area. The main elements of the methodology were as follows:

1.9.1 Literature Review

A literature review was undertaken which drew on:

- Official statistics relating to immigrants' engagement with the labour market and employment;
- Irish research into the experiences of immigrants in the labour market and at work;
- Critiques of policy as well as related policy documentation concerning immigrants in the labour market;
- International best practice with a focus on those countries with an acknowledged track record in attracting and integrating migrant workers.

1.9.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involved consultation with key stake-holders, as follows.

- **Interviews with Representative Groups**
Four semi-structured interviews with organisations representing and / or working on behalf of ethnic minorities were carried out. These interviews allowed the broader perspective, from the vantage point of the representative and migrant led organisations, to be included in and inform the subsequent stages of the research.
- **Interviews with Labour Market Service Providers**
Eight interviews with labour market service providers in both the public and private sectors were undertaken to situate the experiences highlighted by the subsequent focus groups within the broader contemporary labour market processes and to identify any additional



issues from the perspective of these key players. Organisations consulted with included Local Employment Services and private recruitment agencies.

- **Interviews with Employers**
In depth interviews were conducted with nine employers, five in the private sector and four in the public sector. Employers were selected on the basis of having experience of recruitment of immigrant workers and both small and large employers were included. This was therefore a purposive sample, chosen to provide actual insights into how immigrants are or could be recruited. The interviews explored in detail the various elements of the process of recruitment and how these impacted on the recruitment of immigrants. In addition, examples of innovation in terms of recruitment or elements of recruitment were also collected during this stage.
- **Consultation with Social Partner Organisations**
Interviews were carried out with representatives of IBEC, ICTU and SIPTU to ensure a rounded view of the issues emerging.
- **Focus Groups**
Three focus groups were organised with participation from each of the three groups that were the primary focus of the research. Each focus group had a mix of men and women and people at work as well as looking for work. All had legal entitlement to work through EU citizenship, work permits, refugee status or entitlement to work part time while on student visa. For logistical reasons and given the fact that most immigrant workers are located in Dublin, all focus groups were conducted in the Dublin region. The Focus Groups were organised in collaboration with the New Communities Partnership. These Focus Groups allowed us to identify the employment aspirations of participants, their experiences of seeking employment and the difficulties or challenges they encountered. The findings from these group sessions were used to inform the development of survey instruments for the quantitative phase of the research.

1.9.3 Quantitative Research

The main objective of the quantitative phase was to broaden out the data capture mechanisms and to ensure the input of varied organisations, including companies, to the research. Two surveys were conducted as follows:

- An email survey of labour market service providers in the eastern region, including Dublin and its hinterland and adjoining counties. A total of 30 questionnaires were sent out and 11 responses were received, giving a response rate of 36 per cent;

- A postal survey of a sample of employers within the Construction, Health and Hospitality sectors in the Dublin region. A detailed questionnaire was developed and distributed to 800 employers. 122 fully completed responses were received, giving a response rate of 15.25 per cent⁵.

1.10 Structure of the Report

In the following chapters we report first on the experiences of immigrants in seeking work in Ireland (Chapter 2) and subsequently on the practices and experiences of employers in recruiting (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 presents the overall conclusions. As a preface to presenting the findings, it is useful to note the following points.

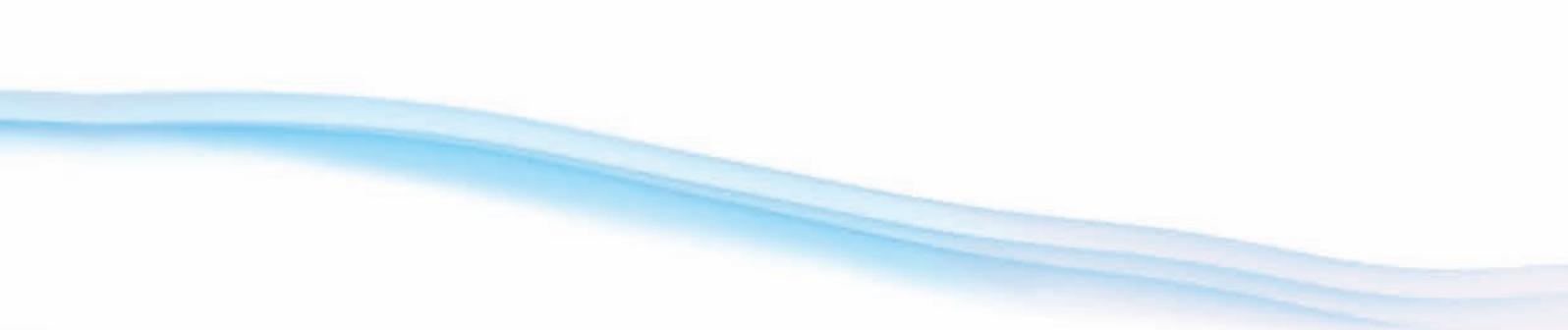
- a. Despite the current economic downturn, Ireland as a developed economy will continue to be a country of destination for immigrants. The appropriate management of immigration and integration therefore will continue to grow in importance as a policy area for Government and as an area of practice for employers and Trade Unions. Roche (2007) has suggested that as diversity in the workplace becomes normalized, there is the possibility of concern shifting from instances of gross exploitation to the perils of labour market segmentation, the management of diversity and pursuit of equal opportunities in employment. This is a challenging, but achievable agenda and one which, as the NESC has pointed out, is most likely to enhance Ireland's economic and social development.
- b. At this point in time, and notwithstanding a number of unique features of immigration to Ireland, it appears that the Irish experience of immigration and particularly economic migration is not untypical of international experience. The feminization of immigration, diversity amongst immigrants along a range of dimensions, the segmentation of labour markets and the risk of vulnerability on the labour market are all features of global migration and have been for some time. Similarly, practices of Irish employers *vis-à-vis* immigrant workers, whether exemplary in terms of accommodating diversity or exploitative of vulnerable groups, are replicated worldwide - in the contemporary immigration context, there is nothing new under the sun. From an Irish perspective, this holds out the possibility of learning from those countries that have put in place policies and structures to manage immigration

5 As noted elsewhere in the report, this was a purposive survey that sought to collate employer views and practice regarding the recruitment and selection process. Available resources did not allow for follow-up and statistical significance was neither sought nor is it claimed from the relatively low response rate.



and facilitate integration and, equally importantly, avoiding the pitfalls of those which have not.

- c.** Labour market well-being is central to promoting the social integration of immigrants, yet the mechanisms of labour market integration are poorly understood. In this research we are opening up an enquiry into a specific aspect of this integration: the recruitment process. In doing so we are mindful of the great diversity that exists amongst immigrants and amongst employers as well as the fact that the process of recruitment is itself complex, comprised of multiple elements not all of which are equally amenable to investigation. However, given the time and geographic constraints on this research, we have not been able to fully take this diversity and complexity into account. Ideally, to determine the implications for immigrants (or any other group) of any particular company's practices would require an audit of all the stages involved in the recruitment process. Such an approach was not possible and instead we have to rely on the self-declared practices of employers, albeit employers with a demonstrated level of commitment to ensuring equality of access for immigrants. It is important to stress therefore that this research cannot claim to be a fully comprehensive account of how Irish employers recruit or how they recruit immigrant workers. What it does do is open up this issue for discussion by identifying a number of key areas where challenges and issues arise for immigrants seeking work and for employers seeking workers, and highlight a number of innovative responses to these.
- d.** In Chapter 2, we present the views of immigrant workers on their experiences of seeking work and of the recruitment process. Almost all of the immigrant workers involved in the research (and most of the organisations consulted with) were of the view that immigrants per se experience difficulties on the labour market and that some groups of immigrants (notably Africans) experience severe difficulty. In some respects, the difficulties they identify and the views they express could have been articulated by other groups who experience disadvantage on the Irish labour market: lack of information; distance from service providers; employer's negative mindsets for example, invariably feature in the subjective accounts of disadvantaged job-seekers (Duggan and Loftus, 2006). This commonality suggests that in addressing the labour market needs of immigrants (and particularly the most disadvantaged) lessons can be learnt from labour market inclusion measures more generally. However, the fact that immigrants share certain labour market difficulties with other groups should not detract from what is specific to their situation or from the heterogeneity of immigrants themselves.

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- e. Among the employers consulted with, several did specifically address the needs of immigrant job applicants and developed innovative approaches to removing barriers to their recruitment and selection. These examples of innovation are presented in Chapter 3 and discussed in Chapter 4. These highlight the types of measures that can be taken to ensure that the recruitment process accommodates diversity. Other findings also provide insights into the type of practices, provisions and policies that could improve the well-being of immigrants on the labour market and ensure their access to appropriate employment. These insights are also discussed in Chapter 4. While the research did not aim to produce definitive recommendations in relation to such a broad area, based on our findings however, it is evident that there is a wide range of measures that could be taken to enhance practice in this area. It is also clear that there are issues that merit more comprehensive and in-depth research with a view to enhancing the recruitment and selection chances and experiences amongst immigrants. These are elaborated on in the following chapters.



Chapter 2

Looking for work in Ireland: The Experiences of Immigrants

2. Introduction

In this Chapter we present the findings of the research in relation to the experiences of immigrants in seeking work in Ireland. The data used in this section is drawn from the following sources:

- Interviews with peer led migrant organisations working with immigrants including those from the EU, Africa and Asia;
- Interviews with Irish NGOs working with immigrants including one which focuses on refugees;
- Interviews with Local Employment Service (LES) co-ordinators in areas with significant proportions of immigrants;
- Interviews with other organisations providing supports to immigrants including refugees;
- Survey results from organisations providing supports to immigrants;
- Focus groups with participants drawn from the three targeted communities and involving people working and people seeking work.

The data presented here, echoes the findings of other studies cited earlier, particularly in relation to problems looking for work. The diversity among immigrant groups is also clear, most notably in relation to the fact that some groups of immigrants encounter a greater level of difficulty than others on the labour market. In particular, the distinction between EEA immigrants and those from non EEA countries (especially Africans) is evident. The following points, taken from the survey of organisations, but echoed throughout the interviews and focus groups, summarises these differences:

- One third believed that it is always difficult for immigrants to find work in Ireland;
- 100 per cent believed that it is difficult to find work at the right skill or qualification level;
- Two thirds believed that it is difficult for immigrants to find work in the public sector;

- Over two thirds believed that EU citizens experience less difficulty than other immigrants;
- Over half said that black Africans experienced the most difficulty on the labour market. Other sub-groups of immigrants that were noted to experience particular difficulty were Muslim women and immigrants with disabilities;
- The most frequently cited reasons for the greater difficulty experienced by Africans were difficulty in having prior work experience recognized, difficulties with getting qualifications recognized and racism.

The discussion in this chapter is presented under the following headings:

- Personal Circumstances and Motivation in the Labour Market;
- Labour Market Decision Making & Job Search;
- Experience of the Recruitment Process;
- Experiences of mobility in employment.

2.1 Personal circumstances and motivations

The personal plans and aspirations of immigrants, sometimes referred to as the mode of orientation, can potentially have a significant bearing on how they operate on the labour market and what type of work they want or will accept. In reality however this tends to be constrained by the financial imperative to find employment quickly. There is a perception among some service providers that orientation on the labour market differs between those who intend to make a life in Ireland and who will therefore have career aspirations commensurate with their skill and qualification level; those who want to upgrade their skills including language skills for a planned return home and who will seek work which facilitates this, and those who want to accumulate savings as quickly as possible and who are likely to accept any job that allows them achieve that aim.

Labour market orientation is not totally individualised: it will frequently reflect the aspirations of the family of the worker or workers and if different members of the family have different work entitlements, this can have consequences for long term planning. Some focus group participants, for example, were spouses of people who had been granted work visas, but who themselves did not have entitlement to work. Some Filipino participants referred to their colleagues who had come to Ireland as nurses but had left for the UK because of the social and financial implications of their spouses not being allowed to work.

Regardless of their orientation, however, most immigrants face a severe financial imperative to find work immediately and consequently have to balance career

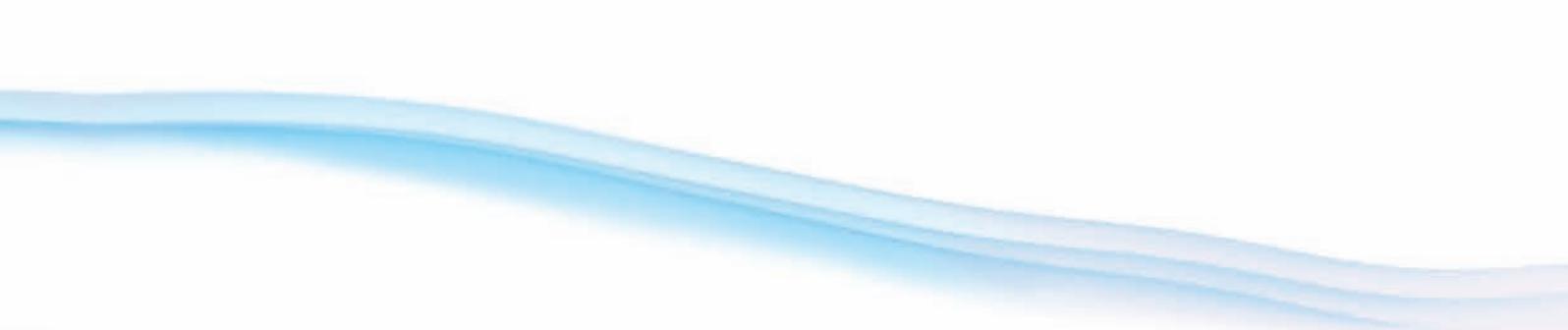


and longer term aspirations with the need to generate income. This can be a particularly acute issue for those who have incurred debts as a result of immigrating to Ireland, a feature noted by a number of interviewees to be particularly prevalent among the Chinese and some other Asian communities. On the other hand, some immigrants, including refugees and EU citizens who have lived here in excess of two years, may be eligible for social welfare at the initial point of their job search, so can take more time to look for the best possible job. The need to find work quickly can also be driven by factors other than financial: refugees for example are under specific pressure to secure employment if they wish to apply for citizenship. Similarly for students taking undergraduate courses in specified areas there are also time pressures: they must find appropriate work within a six month period following graduation to entitle them to a Green Card.

The general view amongst those consulted, however, is that regardless of their long term aspirations, immigrants are likely to take whatever work they can find and develop their advancement strategy subsequent to this. As a result of this, under-employment is a very frequent part of the immigrant labour market experience. For some of the immigrants and the peer organisations that were interviewed, there is nothing particularly amiss about this, it is just a normal part of the process of ‘finding ones feet’ in a new country. For these, underemployment was perceived to be a problem only if it coincides with segmentation in the labour market and / or if those affected cannot find more appropriate work in a reasonable period of time. The NESC has previously highlighted the lack of information on this issue in Ireland, which results in a significant gap in our knowledge of the wellbeing and degree of integration of immigrants over time. However, as is discussed later, some immigrants have been able to develop and implement personal strategies and mechanisms to overcome these barriers and to secure their advancement in employment.

2.2 Decision Making and Job Search

Although there is economic pressure on immigrants to find work quickly, there is still a decision making process regarding what companies to apply to or in what sector to look for work. Among the factors influencing decision making are the English language skills of the immigrants themselves. This issue is discussed again in looking at barriers to employment below, but it also features in decision making: if language skills are not proficient, this alone will steer people towards jobs where language competence is not an issue. Some service providers express the view that those without English can survive in the workplace if they are working amongst their own language groups. However, if they become unemployed they are in a very vulnerable situation and some may also be at risk



of exploitation by members of their own language groups. Even those with good language skills may not have the necessary business or technical vocabulary to work in the Irish context and this can be instrumental in directing them away from employment at the level they would otherwise be qualified for.

An additional factor in deciding what jobs to apply for, which also acts as a barrier to employment, is the difficulties some immigrants face having their qualifications recognised by the appropriate professional bodies. This has led to delays in the past although interviewees note that there appears to have been some improvement in this situation recently. The qualification recognition process can also lead to requirements to work under supervision in Ireland for a probationary period – a factor which can impede employment for some professionals, particularly in the health area.

It also appears from the consultation with immigrant workers, that decision making with regard to what jobs to apply for is frequently informed by an assessment of employers which is based, rightly or wrongly, on the signals that companies or organisations send out. Immigrants can be very sensitive to signals, even unintentional signals, sent by prospective employers. For example, if an immigrant has a negative experience of a company or agency that they perceive to be related to their immigrant status, they may be reluctant to apply to that agency for employment. Similarly if a company or organisation is seen to have no foreign workers, it can be interpreted as a negative sign by immigrants. More generally, even if nothing is known about the company, immigrant workers may perceive that their applications are not welcome for certain jobs: a number of focus group participants for example, expressed the view that more effort is needed to be made in ensuring that immigrants realize that their applications are welcome.

Immigrants will also frequently have access to information from workers already employed in specific companies. These personal networks can be a route to recruitment but they can also play a role in decisions not to apply to certain companies, if for example, they are considered to be poor or abusive employers. One Asian community has formalised this process and its Irish consulate has drawn up a black list of employers which it recommends its citizens should not apply to.

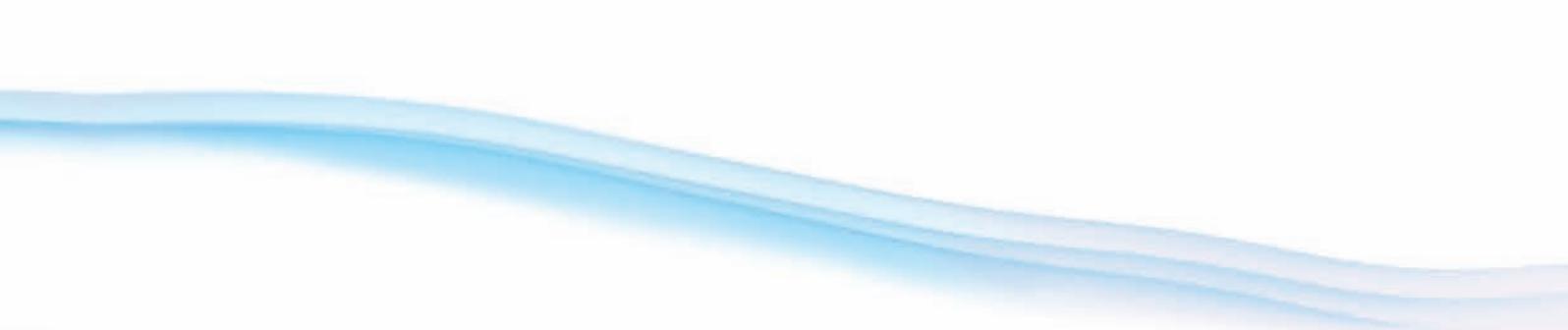
A further factor that can have a negative impact on decision making is that of poverty and welfare traps, particularly on the part of those entitled to rent allowances. The cost of childcare was also noted here and both these factors contributed to raising the level of earnings required to compensate for the additional costs incurred by taking up employment. This is a particular issue for people with refugee status.



In terms of public sector⁶ employment, there appears to be a wider range of factors influencing decision making as follows:

- There is a view that public sector work is unlikely to be considered because it is somehow seen as outside the bounds of what immigrants should aspire to. This view, expressed in particular by East Europeans, is linked to a perception of being guests in Ireland and of not wishing to occupy too much of the host country's space, in terms of 'encroaching' on civil society, political life, or the public sector. This was seen by some of those consulted with as reflecting a lack of assertiveness on the part of Eastern Europeans which in turn was seen as linked to their lack of understanding of their entitlements as EU citizens;
- The idea that public sector employment was not something they should aspire to was not helped by the perception among some focus group participants who pointed out that every state agency they encounter has nothing but Irish workers. One East European participant said: "the Irish want to keep things green and Irish". This perception is compounded by the apparently widespread misconception that proficiency in the Irish language is required for all public sector jobs, although again this was not reflected in the survey where only one quarter of service providers indicated that immigrants believed Irish to be a requirement across the public sector.
- There is also a view that many public sector jobs are offered at a grade and salary level that makes it difficult for older immigrants, or those with families to apply for. This is particularly the case when recruitment occurs predominantly at entry level with promotion from within. This gives rise to a type of catch 22 situation, noted in particular by Africans (who were on average older than other focus group participants). Many Africans felt they were over-qualified for entry level grades, but the bulk of the more senior or managerial positions, for which they believe they are qualified, are recruited internally. Some focus group participants expressed the view that public sector employment is low paid. However this was not corroborated by the majority of organisations surveyed, which did not believe that this view was prevalent among immigrant workers
- At a different level, there is also a view that some immigrants – and particularly non-EU immigrants – may have experienced complex interactions with state institutions which may inhibit them applying for public sector work. This can be particularly an issue for those who have

⁶ There is a requirement that general grade Civil Service positions be filled exclusively by EEA Citizens. Much of the discussion here relates to the broader public sector.



had experience of the asylum process in Ireland. In addition, immigrants may have had a bad experience of the State in their home countries which makes them wary of interaction with state organisations in Ireland. Overall, there is an element of consensus that an aspect of immigration in general is that those involved do not wish to attract the attention of the State.

In summary, when it comes to deciding what jobs to apply for immigrant workers consider:

- their own competencies and capacity to have these recognised;
- the information provided to them by personal networks; and,
- the signals, intentional or otherwise, emitted from employers.

The implication of the latter, as was pointed out by participants in the African Community focus groups, is that employers need to use better mechanisms to attract immigrant workers or to make it clear to them that their applications are welcome. As discussed in the following chapter, this is not an area that employers tend to think about. There was a view also, most marked amongst East Europeans, that whereas some private sector employers may make an explicit effort to attract migrant workers for commercial reasons, the public sector does not have to respond to business pressures and does not experience pressure to change in this regard.

2.3 Information and awareness of the Irish Labour Market

The level of labour market information amongst immigrants and their job search skills have been identified in previous research as contributing to their difficulties in seeking work. These issues were also apparent amongst those engaged with for this research. In general, knowledge of how the Irish labour market operates or how best to go about looking for work appears to be varied across different groups of immigrants. At the focus groups for example, and at the risk of some over-simplification, East Europeans were the most aware of how to go about looking for work while the Asian community appeared to have least information on this issue. This may be partly attributable to the fact that most of the Asian focus group participants were on student visas and entitled to work part time only. Respondents to the survey also believed that whereas immigrants were reasonably well informed with regard to private sector labour markets, they were poorly informed of opportunities in the public sector.

There was a general perception, most marked amongst East Europeans that personal connections matter greatly in Ireland and the more established



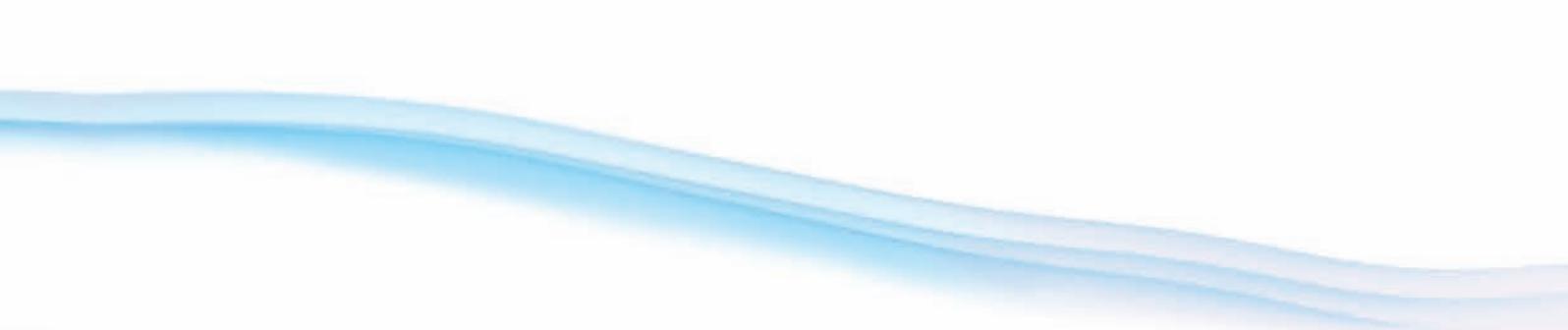
immigrant communities have come to use their own networks in sharing information about employment and related issues (a job search strategy that is widely used among Irish workers too). The use of personal networks was noted to have both benefits and disadvantages – on the one hand it opens up opportunities for employment whereas on the other it can reinforce labour market segmentation and lead to the creation of immigrant employment ghettos.

There was also a general consensus among focus group participants that immigrant workers need to be flexible in their approach to looking for work and that they should anticipate some difficulties. In line with this, most participants used a variety of methods of looking for work, sometimes simultaneously. The most frequently used methods were newspaper advertisements, job-related web sites (including Publicjobs.ie), personal networks, FÁS, dropping CVs into employers and approaching recruitment agencies. Some LES (Local Employment Service) co-ordinators corroborated this view, noting that immigrant workers rarely relied on a single strategy to find work, but used as many mechanisms as they could identify. There was a view, however that the job search efforts of immigrants are frustrated by the practice of some employers of advertising vacancies in a limited range of media and by the use of their own informal recruitment practices or networks which may exclude immigrants.

Some focus group participants had sought information on public sector employment and noted some criticisms. They felt for example, that websites of public sector agencies can be difficult to use by people unfamiliar with the system here. They also commented that they have never seen any public job, other than an Garda Síochána, advertised in a manner that suggested that migrant workers would be welcomed. Others said they found it hard to position themselves *vis-à-vis* the general grade jobs that were on offer – it wasn't obvious to them what the job entailed or whether or not they were qualified to apply.

2.4 Getting help to look for work

In general, focus group participants recognized the need for support for immigrants in finding work in Ireland. The types of support people wanted included information on jobs, on how to apply for jobs and on preparing for interviews. Specifically, preparing CVs within a different cultural context and advice on personal presentation at interview were frequently mentioned as areas requiring support. Some participants expressed the view that the extent of cultural differences in how people are expected to sell themselves at interview is poorly understood by employers. These views were also echoed in the consultation with organisations: all noted that difficulties in preparing CVs and difficulties in preparing for interview represented barriers to employment in both the public and private sectors.



However, the dominant experience appears to be that immigrants find it difficult to secure assistance in looking for work and the following problems were frequently mentioned:

- Lack of awareness among some groups about the existence of agencies that offer support. As noted, this was most marked amongst Asian participants.
- Even where there is an awareness of the existence of agencies, immigrants have found it difficult to get assistance. People who were studying or working in 'stop-gap' jobs had no time to engage with the agencies and noted that there are no telephone line services to provide help to people seeking work.
- African participants in particular recognized that having information is the first point in the process of looking for work: but they found information particularly difficult to access and the term 'gate keeper' was used to describe those in positions to provide labour market information and other services. This included personnel in public offices who were considered to be frequently unhelpful, and perceived to consider all Africans to be asylum seekers and therefore wasting their time. There was a more general perception that people working in public sector agencies need training in intercultural work and need to have more connection with migrant networks to sort out issues.
- In a similar vein, some participants questioned the capabilities of the LES mediators and / or their desire to work with migrant workers and there was a general sense that information was not always easy to get. As one focus group participant put it, "you have to know the right question to ask".
- The need to find work immediately also impacts on how immigrants use labour market agencies. Some LES co-ordinators note that frequently immigrants have no time for career planning or vocational advice - they just want to know where the jobs are.
- The view was expressed that sometimes migrant workers simply don't have the confidence, (or as one Lithuanian participant put it, the cultural programming to be assertive), to use what is actually available to them or to ask the right questions.
- Lack of supports in terms of upgrading or adapting skills was also noted by Africans and their experience of FAS courses is that they may be sent



on courses they do not want to do and they frequently do not get jobs even when they complete the course.

As a result of these difficulties, migrant workers are often happier or more comfortable (in terms of language, culture or general familiarity) in dealing with personal contacts or through their own community networks. The extent to which their own peer organisations actually provided assistance with seeking jobs also varied: Africans and East Europeans were most active in this area and it appears that some peer-led migrant support groups that started off as cultural and general support groups are recognising the need to provide employment supports.

However, it also appears that at least some Irish community organisations are developing their role in providing advice on labour market issues to immigrants and that these, as well as the LES in certain areas, are important as sources of information and support. One of the consequences of this is the creation of new job opportunities in the community and voluntary sector for immigrants who can provide services to their own communities. A number of focus group participants were in fact employed in community or local development organizations; however, a counter view is that some immigrants have difficulty understanding the nature of community and voluntary organisations having no tradition of these in their own country. At least some immigrants consider such organisations to be agents of the state and consequently are reluctant to engage with them.

2.5 Experience of the Recruitment Process

The participants at the focus group had, between them, a very considerable amount of experience of applying for jobs. As noted, most participants were employed at the time of the focus group, some were self employed and some were looking for work. Their experience of seeking work varied, but in general the discussions at the focus groups tended to focus on the negative aspects of that experience.

- One of the first frustrations that applicants encountered was not having their application acknowledged or not having an adequate explanation for their lack of success at the early stage. For example, many focus group participants indicated that they had applied for many positions but frequently got no response at all from the employer: a point corroborated by a Trade Union representative interviewed who noted the increased tendency for employers not to acknowledge receipt of applications. This issue is however clearly not specific to immigrant workers.

- When they did receive a negative response to their application, many participants had followed this up to ascertain why they were unsuccessful. For most this was part of their job search strategy – if they could find out what the problem was, they could try to resolve it. However, none of the participants were satisfied with the responses to their queries including those who sought this information from public sector agencies. In many instances they got no response at all and when they did, they felt the reasons offered were vague and unconvincing.
- As noted earlier, some participants also expressed the view that many advertised positions are already filled and that there is a lot of ‘fictitious advertising’ in relation to some positions.

The initial screening of job applications was perceived by focus group participants to be a very significant stumbling block in their efforts to find work. In general, the dominant perception was that applying to an open recruitment process was not likely to lead to positive outcomes. Such was the frequency of negative outcomes at this stage, that the lack of success in getting through the initial screening process was widely interpreted as an anti-immigrant bias on the part of employers, and in the case of African applicants, as racism. Although African participants were slow to suggest that they experienced racism, they did ultimately acknowledge this as a significant barrier to finding employment. Some expressed the view that their names indicated that they were obviously African and that this was a factor in them being screened out at the preliminary stage. For immigrants overall, economic imperatives meant that disillusionment with the labour market was not an option, but their perception of bias and prejudice may have impacted on their assessment of Irish society in general. In addition the extent to which the difficulties experienced by immigrants on the open labour market reinforce their use of personal networks to find work –thereby contributing to the clustering of immigrants in certain sectors– cannot be determined, but it is likely to be a factor.

2.6 The Interview and Assessment Process

Immigrants participating in the focus groups and representatives of their peer led organisations identified a wide range of challenges that immigrant workers have experienced within the interview and assessment process. To a large extent, these were also reflected in the views of organisations interviewed and in the survey.



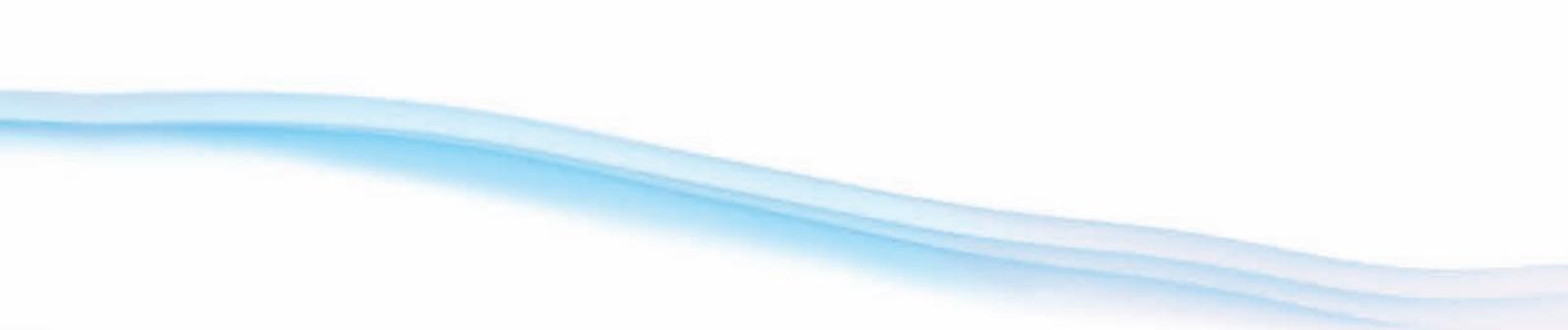
2.6.1 Communication issues

Among the organisations surveyed, the lack of proficiency in English on the part of immigrants was cited as a major barrier to their employment in the private sector and to an even greater extent in the public sector. As noted earlier, this includes a general lack of proficiency as well as limited technical or business vocabulary. Cultural differences in communication were also seen to present significant difficulties although these were considered to be more problematic in the private sector, where they presented a major barrier. For example, one LES interviewee noted that while the social care sector is an important employer of immigrant workers, the type of inter-personal communication required in this sector makes it very difficult for some immigrants to find work, even when they have acquired the appropriate Irish qualifications.

Issues around verbal and non-verbal communication were also frequently cited by focus group participants as causing problems at interview stage. In relation to verbal communication, the greater formality of language during the interview process could be difficult even for those with high levels of proficiency in everyday English. In relation to non-verbal communication, cultural differences in such issues as eye contact, hand shaking and general demeanor during the interview process were frequently mentioned. Some people felt that in line with the expected behaviour in their home country they may have appeared too demonstrative or assertive at interview, whereas others felt, again in line with practice in their own country, that they may have under-sold themselves due to a reluctance to appear to be boastful of previous achievements. In general, there was a view that cultural subtleties are hugely significant during the interview process and that immigrants often had a tougher job in convincing an interview panel that they were the best applicant.

2.6.2 Assessment Tests

The use of psychometric or competency based tests, although not a widespread experience on the part of focus group participants, was also cited as a challenge. Participants felt that these tests could be culturally biased and that they proved more difficult if one had to complete them through a language that was not their first language. Written competency and aptitude tests were considered particularly difficult by focus group participants due to the fact that they were not allowed additional time or any other concession to the fact they were not working in their first language.



The requirement for immigrants from outside of the EU to undertake English language tests, when frequently their level of English proficiency was higher than that of EU nationals, was pointed out. Among organisations consulted with, English language testing, competence tests that were seen as culturally biased and other written tests were all noted as presenting barriers to employment, particularly in the public sector.

2.6.3 Qualifications

The issue of qualifications and having foreign qualifications recognized emerged as a very significant issue among all those consulted. The following are the main points that emerged from the consultation with immigrant workers, their peer led organisations and labour market service providers:

- A number of the organisations consulted with stated that there may sometimes be a genuine discrepancy between the qualification requirements of a job in Ireland and the valid qualifications held by immigrants. For example, some immigrants hold industry specific qualifications at the level of engineer but their skills in the Irish context are closer to those of a fitter.
- More frequent however, are the difficulties and delays in having qualifications recognised by the relevant professional bodies in Ireland. In some instances as noted earlier, these are so extreme as to direct the applicant to lower skilled jobs, but many immigrants also stated they had experience of not getting a job offer because of the problems in having their professional qualifications recognised. This view was corroborated by the representative organisations surveyed, the vast majority of which indicated that not having their qualifications recognised in Ireland, delays in getting qualifications recognised and employers not understanding their qualifications were frequently major barriers to employment for immigrants.
- Formal recognition of qualifications by a professional body is only required in some instances. However, even when this was not required, immigrant job applicants believed that Irish employers frequently are unhappy to accept foreign or unfamiliar qualifications per se. Africans noted particular difficulties getting their qualifications recognized or translated into the comparable Irish equivalent. The point was also made by Chinese students that unless they had really strong grades from well recognized third level institutions, they stood very little chance of getting any work whatsoever in Ireland.



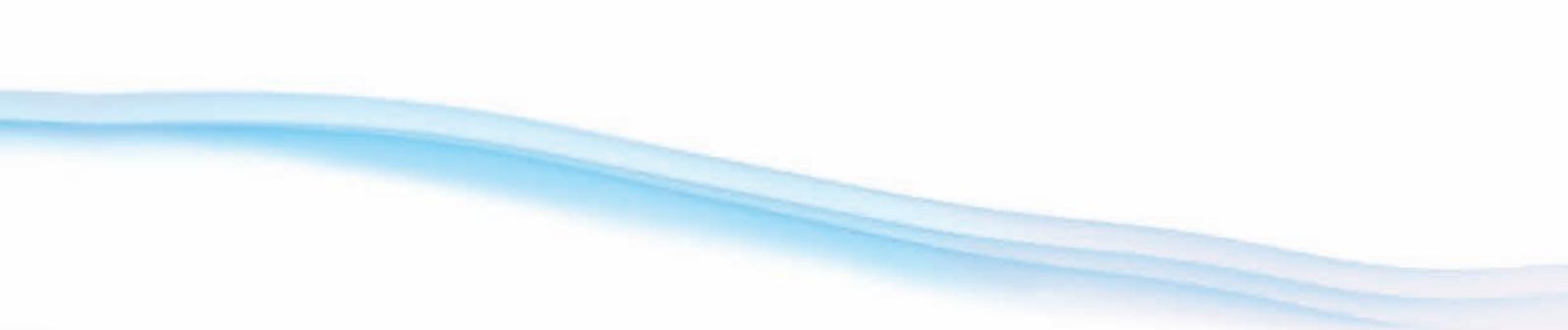
- There was also the view that Irish employers lack awareness of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) system and furthermore that they are disinclined to go to the trouble to validate or establish the appropriateness of unfamiliar qualifications. Others suggested that it suits some employers to misunderstand the qualifications system because they can avoid paying the going rate by suggesting that the migrant worker is less qualified than his/her Irish counterpart.
- There was a strong view expressed that employers need much more awareness and support around the NQF structure with a view to ensuring that they are informed of and sensitized to the framework and the position of various qualifications within it. There was a parallel view that there is a need for NQF personnel to work more closely with migrant communities to establish their needs in this area. Finally, the suggestion was made that NQF information be made available in the principal languages of migrants and in easily understood English.

2.6.4 Irish Experience and References

The issue of Irish employers requiring Irish experience and references has been identified in earlier research. This issue was also frequently referred to by participants in the focus groups and by agencies supporting immigrant workers. Among organisations surveyed, these preferences on the part of employers were considered to be a major problem in securing employment, particularly in the private sector. A related issue identified by representative organisations was the discounting of relevant experience in the home country.

The need for Irish references and Irish experience was also frequently mentioned as a problem by focus group participants. In their view most Irish employers seem to place a lot of store by references, regarding them as a form of verifiable validation of the candidate. Not having an Irish reference was considered to be a particular disadvantage when immigrants were competing for jobs with Irish workers. Focus group participants also perceived that their experience in their country of origin or in other countries, no matter how skilled or how relevant that experience was, tended to be discounted by Irish employers. This problem was most frequently cited by Africans.

Some focus group participants had tried to circumvent these problems by working as volunteers in community sector organisations and using this to develop their experience and acquire references. This was not an option open to all however as the skills deployed in the community sector had to be relevant to job aspirations.



Another approach taken by a number of focus group participants was to seek work within the relevant sector but at a level below their own skills or experience and to use this to demonstrate their capacity and acquire experience. Some noted that they had deliberately tailored their CVs to suggest a lower level of qualification and experience in their home country in order to take this route.

2.6.5 Legal issues

The vast majority of participants in the focus groups were eligible to work in Ireland but had different legal bases upon which to do so: some were EU citizens, some were on work permits, some had refugee or related status and some were on student visas. Among all participants however, and among the organisations consulted with, there was a view that legal issues present significant difficulties for immigrants.

- There was a strong perception that the various entitlements to work associated with different legal status, are poorly understood by employers. This can mean that employers are unsure of which job applicants require permits or other formal procedures and frequently they are de-motivated to take on the additional effort of establishing the position. As a result, the view among many immigrants and the peer led groups (and a view corroborated by some recruitment agencies and employers) is that, given a choice, employers will gravitate to the easiest option.
- The difficulty for both applicants and employers in seeking clarification on entitlement to work and related issues was also noted along with the perception that, frequently, officials in the various Departments do not always appear to be clear on the up to date position. The situation of Bulgarians and Romanians was noted to be particularly problematic, but people with refugee status also cited incidences of employers assuming because they were not EU citizens that they could not work.
- For students who are pursuing accountancy or other similar careers that require an element of serving time following the academic aspect to the qualification, there are difficulties trying to get employers (particularly smaller employers) to understand their status and the fact that they have the right to work in that context.
- The ongoing changes to an already complex body of legislation were cited as unhelpful for both employers and immigrants. So too was the perceived failure to conduct meaningful consultations with immigrants about legislative changes that affect them.



- Freedom of movement for the citizens of the 'new' EU states also makes it much more difficult for non-EU workers to get a job. Those in the job permit stream are still very much at the mercy of their employers – and it is very hard to move job because of their status which locks them into certain sectors. Moreover, as applicants for work permits must apply from outside of Ireland, if the employer does not renew their permit, they are likely to be in a worse situation than someone applying for the first time from their home country.

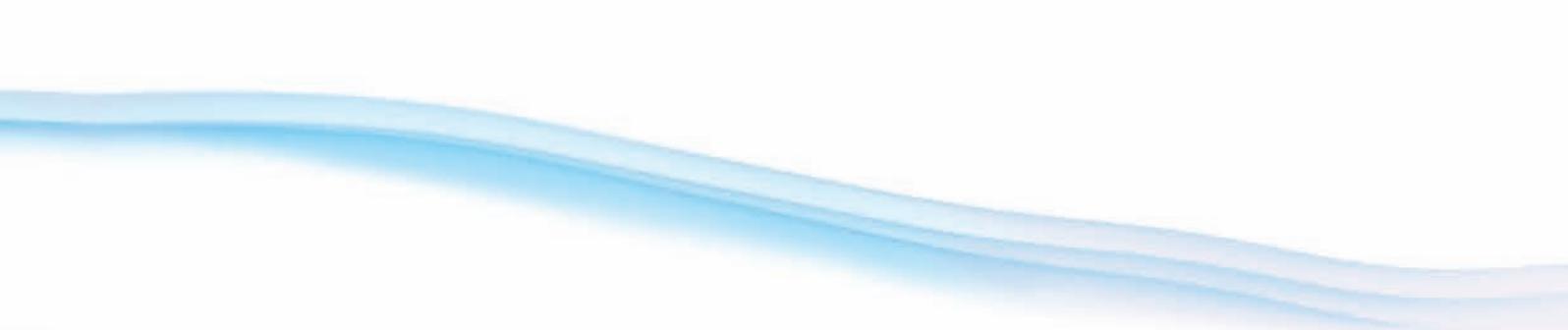
2.6.6 Mindsets and Prejudices

The issue of prejudices amongst employers was also raised and participants at the focus groups believed their immigrant status loomed large within the recruitment process: that is, they believed they were seen not just as potential employees but as foreign employees. They believed the mindsets of some Irish employers were attuned to Irish employees and that therefore they looked less favourably on non-Irish candidates. Among respondents to the survey of service providers, half believed that the reluctance of employers to recruit from amongst some groups of immigrants was a barrier in the public sector, and slightly more than this believed it to be a barrier in the private sector.

In many instances, however, negative mindsets of employers were seen as being determined more by precedent than by prejudice – that is, they were simply used to a culturally homogenous workforce and it was this, and not prejudice, that was influencing their thinking. While this distinction may make little difference to the outcomes for job applicants, it does have relevance for interventions to deal with this issue: changing mindsets that are based on precedence is a lot easier than addressing prejudice. However, for Africans (many of whom were very highly educated) the situation was starker and there was unanimity amongst African focus group participants – although they were initially reluctant to express this – that they experienced a significant level of racism in the Irish labour market and that this was a major barrier to their recruitment. A substantial number of these had become self-employed, frequently very significantly below their skill level, as a response to this.

2.7 Work Place Experiences, Retention and Advancement

Although the primary focus of the research was on recruitment, workplace experiences and the issue of retention and advancement were also explored. This



was in recognition of the fact that companies that can attract immigrant workers, retain them in the workforce and secure their progress in employment are likely to attract ongoing applications from non-Irish workers. A number of observations were made by participants as follows:

- Difficulties in the workplace can arise due to language or cultural differences as immigrants bring their own cultural traditions and attitudes to the work place. Practices such as working extra hours without pay for example can cause conflict with Irish workers.
- When workplace policies and guidelines are not translated into the various languages, this can cause difficulties for immigrant workers and add to the general problem of not knowing their rights and how to secure them.
- There can frequently be poor promotion prospects for immigrant workers and some experienced resentment by Irish staff at middle management level to the prospect of their promotion. There was a view that this can act as a disincentive for immigrant workers and may lead to their leaving the company. Africans cited particular difficulties in regard to promotion and believed they would have to go to geographically isolated areas (where Irish workers did not wish to go) to have the chance of promotion.
- A second view expressed was that some groups are reluctant to appear too 'pushy' in the workplace and therefore are unlikely to put themselves forward for promotion.
- A third barrier to advancement identified through our research is the issue of companies using agency workers. Where they are employed by a third party, immigrants find themselves working in a specific company but not employed by that company and consequently they may not have entitlement to apply for other and better jobs within the same company.

2.8 Conclusion

It seems clear from the data presented here that immigrants encounter the Irish labour market first and foremost as immigrants. That is, their labour market experiences are shaped and determined by:

- their own cultural capital (or lack of);
- difficulties in finding employment at the level at which they were employed in their home country;



- what they see as the reluctance or hesitancy of some Irish employers to recruit immigrants; and by
- their legal status.

Some immigrants have developed personal strategies to overcome these issues: through voluntary work in the community sector in order to acquire work experience; through deliberately omitting qualifications from their CVs in order to gain access to the sector they subsequently hope to advance in; and, through becoming self-employed. More generally, though, it appears the dominant immigrant response to the difficulties in finding work and in particular in finding work at the appropriate level is to accept work at a lower level. How effective or beneficial the strategies deployed by immigrants are in the longer term or how well immigrants in general advance in the labour market subsequent to their initial experiences and compromises, cannot be determined from this research. Nor, as the NES (2006a) has noted, has it been researched elsewhere. This is a very significant gap in our knowledge of immigration in Ireland.

There is some evidence from the data presented here, that while labour market disaffection is not prevalent amongst immigrants, reinforced self-exclusion may be: that is, repeated failure to secure appropriate employment or the perception that their applications are not welcomed by some organisations may lead to a degree of fatalism, the abandonment of effort and the perception that the space within the Irish labour market that is accessible to immigrants is limited.

The greater participation of immigrants in public sector employment could be hugely important in addressing this issue. However, it appears that public sector employment is not frequently considered by immigrants.

Chapter 3

Recruiting immigrant workers in Ireland: the experiences of employers.

3. Introduction

In this Chapter, we turn our attention to the practices of employers when recruiting workers. The data here is drawn from the survey of employers and from the consultation with employers in both the public and private sectors. This is augmented in some instances by additional information from the social partners and private recruitment agencies.

The survey of employers focused on those sectors that employ large numbers of immigrant workers: manufacturing, construction, wholesale, retail & trade, hotels & restaurants and health & social work. Among the 122 employers who responded to the survey, there were 101 who had recruited immigrant workers.

Of these:

- over three quarters had employed workers from Eastern Europe (EU);
- one third had recruited workers from Asia;
- just under thirty per cent had recruited from Western Europe and a similar proportion had recruited from Africa (including South Africa); and
- just under twenty five per cent had recruited from Eastern Europe (non EU).

A little over two thirds of respondents to the survey said their organisation operated a formal set of equality policies and practices in recruitment and selection. Among this group, one quarter said their equality policies and practices specifically referred to the recruitment of non-Irish nationals and / or ethnic minorities. The vast majority of respondents (95.9%) said they recruited directly in Ireland; 14.4 per cent said they recruited directly from abroad. Thirty per cent said they used the services of agency workers.

The interviews with employers were carried out during June and July 2008, a period which saw continuing slowing down in some sectors of the Irish economy, most notably construction and services, in which large numbers of immigrants



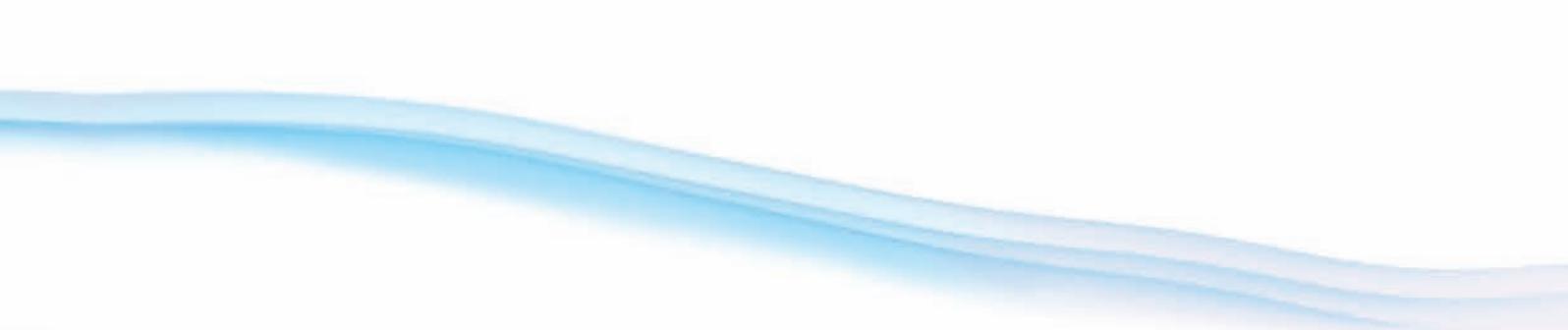
are employed. By the end of the second quarter this was reflected in reduced recruitment, rising unemployment, the repatriation of some immigrants and forecasts of net emigration in the coming year. Employers had views on how the current downturn in the economy would affect their recruitment requirements and / or their recruitment practices. Some, in both the public and private sectors, believed there would be little or no change in the numbers they would recruit and some organisations were involved in large scale recruiting at the time of the interviews. Others felt their recruitment would decrease dramatically and that the information they provided on their recruitment practices related to their experience in the past number of years rather than their current or potential future practice.

All were of the view that their current recruitment practices were effective in so far as they enabled them to find appropriate workers and during the period when the interviews took place (i.e. June to July 08), none of the employers were experiencing significant difficulties in finding workers. Most were also of the view that their recruitment practices did not disadvantage immigrant workers in any way and many indicated they had modified their recruitment practices to make them more accessible to immigrants although one private sector employer noted that in the current climate, there may be few imperatives to address barriers to employment for immigrants as unemployment levels overall increase and the number of immigrants coming to Ireland to seek work continues to fall.

It is worth reiterating here that the employers interviewed were selected on the basis of their experience of recruiting immigrant workers and on the basis of their manifest interest in the issue of diversity in the work place. The latter was evidenced either by their participation in diversity networks or by indicating in the survey of employers that they had recruited immigrants in the past and were willing to provide more information on this. Consequently, we cannot assume that the employers consulted with are typical or in any way representative of Irish employers per se and we know with certainty that our sample excludes those employers who engage in exploitative or illegal practices. The value of consulting with the employers we engaged with is not to generate a representative overview of the recruitment practices of Irish employers, but to explore processes of recruitment that are, at the very least, effective in securing immigrant workers.

3.1 Entry Routes and Recruitment Mechanisms.

The organisations consulted with were quite diverse regarding their occupational structures and the way they recruited into these and it is important in the first instance to differentiate between public sector organisations, large private sector organisations and small private sector companies. In general, public sector



organisations were somewhat more likely to undertake most of their large scale recruitment at entry or equivalent level and promote internally, with a more limited range of recruitment for specialist or higher level positions. Most civil service organisations and An Garda Síochána correspond to this model. Large private sector companies, local authorities and hospitals were more likely to recruit right along the occupational hierarchy, both for expansion and attrition recruitment. Smaller private companies tended to have a less diverse occupational structure and consequently fewer points of entry.

Mechanisms of recruitment varied very considerably across companies and within companies depending on the level at which positions were available. The principal mechanisms used included the following:

- Informal recruitment mechanisms including on the spot interviewing of 'cold callers', informing the industry networks of vacancies and providing financial incentives to existing employees to make referrals. This type of informal recruitment was a feature of smaller private sector companies, although using existing employees to identify potential recruits was also favoured by some large companies.
- Formal recruitment processes with in-company management of all stages of the recruitment and selection process, usually through a centralized and specially trained HR unit. This featured in large private and some public sector organisations.
- Outsourcing of all stages of the recruitment and selection process to recruitment agencies (including to PAS in the case of public sector agencies).
- A combination of the above two in which the earlier stages of application and screening may be outsourced while interviewing and selection is handled by the company.
- Graduate recruitment direct from university, usually involving a formal link between the employer and the universities, including universities based abroad.
- Foreign based recruitment drives: these were used by public sector organisations and large private sector companies.

The occupational levels at which recruitment takes place, and the location from which workers are sourced, have a significant bearing on the mechanisms used. Generally speaking it appears that recruitment into entry level grades in



large organisations are more likely to be contracted out to third party agencies, while more specialist recruitment tends to be handled by the organisation itself, but sometimes with assistance in the early stages from specialist recruitment agencies. Recruitment agencies were also much more likely to be used by those who recruit directly from abroad: among respondents to the survey, 94 per cent of those who recruit directly from abroad use recruitment agencies, compared to just two thirds who use recruitment agencies to recruit in Ireland. Informal recruitment methods were most likely to be used in smaller companies for all positions. The principal distinction arises however between large organisations where recruitment follows a formal and highly structured process usually implemented by specialist HR teams and with little input from managers, and small companies where informal and more personalized approaches are implemented by the employer. In general this enables smaller companies to be more flexible in recruiting but also means that they tend to use more subjective judgment.

While all of the employers consulted with had recruited foreign workers, their reasons for doing so varied from purely commercial factors to the desire to promote social inclusiveness in the work place. The following objectives for recruiting foreign workers were identified:

- Difficulty in getting Irish workers in sufficient numbers;
- Difficulty in getting specific skill sets among Irish workers;
- View that a multi-cultural workforce enabled a better product / service in a global market;
- Need for staff with specific foreign language competences;
- View that public service providers should reflect the community they serve;
- No specific attempts to recruit foreign workers – recruitment, in as much as it occurred, simply emerged from the normal process.

3.2 Implementing the Recruitment Process

The recruitment process – and particularly that implemented by large organisations – is comprised of a number of key elements or stages. These can be summarised as follows:

Box 2: Elements of Recruitment Process	
<p>1. Pre-recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing job description • Establishing eligibility criteria • Advertising 	<p>2. Identifying the most suitable applicants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening • Short-listing
<p>3. Assessment/Selection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Testing • Reference Checking/Vetting 	<p>4. Post recruitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction programmes • Other supports

In the following discussion we look at how the organisations consulted with implement these various elements and the implications of these for the recruitment of immigrant workers.

3.2.1 Job description

The development of detailed written job descriptions featured in the recruitment process of large employers in both the public and private sectors. Smaller employers who tended to have less diversity of function within the company were less likely to use a detailed job description. Job descriptions attempt to make very clear the type of qualifications, experience and any other competencies required and in all cases employers believed that these requirements were essential for the job. Very detailed job descriptions were seen as an important mechanism to provide appropriate information to potential applicants and to deter applicants without the right experience, although this frequently did not prove to be entirely effective.

No special efforts were made to attune the job description to the particular circumstances of immigrants or to accommodate cultural or national differences in the professionalisation of some occupations. One employer believed job descriptions were unnecessary in his specialised line of business as anyone with the right skills or previous experience of the occupation, would know what the work involved. He did not see this as a disadvantage for immigrants as ‘the work was the same the world over’. However, this is not always the case. For example, whereas the skills required by software developers are internationally uniform,



other occupations such as youth work can require very different training and professional backgrounds in different countries. A number of employers in both the public and private sector were aware of incidences in which immigrant job seekers were considered to be unsuitable for a position although their qualifications would have been acceptable in their own country. Despite this, the development of job descriptions was not seen as an area that presented barriers for immigrants or that needed to be addressed.

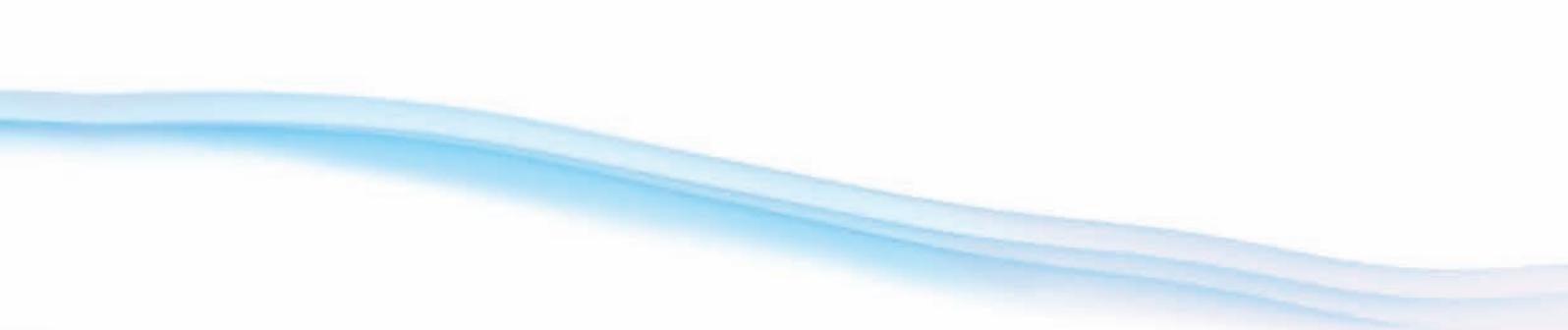
3.2.2 Eligibility Criteria

Within the more formal recruitment processes implemented mainly by large companies and public sector organisations, eligibility criteria for assessing applications were drawn up and communicated to potential applicants. In less formal scenarios, particularly in small companies where cold calling was welcomed, eligibility criteria frequently remained implicit in that they were not formally communicated to applicants. Regardless of these differences between formal and less formal approaches, the criteria were considered to relate to attributes that were essential for undertaking the work required.

Although employers perceive that the eligibility criteria are an essential reflection of what is required by the job, defining eligibility criteria is also useful for preliminary screening, particularly where large volumes of applications can be expected: one company, for example, had received 25,000 applications last year and consequently strict reference to formal eligibility criteria was a vital first step in rendering these into more manageable numbers (see below). In contrast, one employer in a skills starved sector described the eligibility criteria for work in his company as “hands and experience”.

Among the most common criteria for determining eligibility were:

- **Qualifications:** Not all employers used a minimum level of qualification as part of their eligibility criteria (for example, only forty per cent of those surveyed did so). But amongst those consulted with that did use qualifications, these were frequently determined by the requirements of the relevant professional bodies. In other instances, the extent to which the qualification criteria are actually necessary to do the job or reflected other considerations such as established precedent or the need to have a basis for preliminary screening is not clear. Although given the point noted above about large volume applications, it is likely that the latter is a factor. Outside of those contexts in which professional qualifications are required, all organisations had broadened the educational qualification criteria to include the Irish standard (usually Leaving Certificate)



or 'equivalent'. This was seen by many employers as eliminating qualification barriers for foreign applicants and in some instances the change had been made explicitly to facilitate immigrant applicants. Where the qualification criteria were used as a screening mechanism, this frequently occurred in the early stages of the recruitment process. In a number of instances however, the educational qualifications of candidates are not validated until the latter stages of the recruitment process when vetting is taking place. This can lead to anomalies where immigrants (and non-immigrants) inadvertently and inappropriately succeed in the earlier stages of the process before problems with their qualifications become evident.

- **Proficiency in English:** This requirement was very common as part of the eligibility criteria and where included, it was perceived to be essential for the role that successful applicants would have complete proficiency in English. Many of the employers consulted with in both the public and private sectors were of the view that it would be impossible for someone to work in their organisation (or sometimes in their profession) without excellent language and communication skills. However, a small number of employers did not require English language proficiency on the part of their employees and for these, this was not a criterion: in most of these cases it appears that if there were a number of other employees from the same language group as a candidate with limited English, the latter could be accommodated in the workplace. In general, it appears from the consultations that English either matters hugely and a very high level of proficiency is required, or it does not matter at all or at least not at the initial stages of employment. The experience of employers who recruited candidates with limited English is that they developed proficiency in a very brief period of time and some employers facilitated this by providing or paying for language classes for immigrant employees.
- **Previous Experience in Ireland:** Among the employers consulted with, the requirement to have experience in Ireland or familiarity with the Irish system did not feature within the eligibility criteria to any great extent, although a very small number of companies noted that in certain occupations within their overall workforce, familiarity with and experience of the Irish system was essential. This appeared to have as much to do with the development of business or professional networks as with the actual technical requirements. Most employers indicated that if an immigrant job seeker had relevant experience in their own or some other country, this would be taken into account and would enhance their likelihood of success. The proportion of those surveyed indicating that they required Irish experience and / or references was somewhat higher



at 24 per cent (and just 22 per cent use this as a basis for short-listing, see below). Nonetheless, the variation in the experiences and perceptions of immigrants in relation to this issue discussed in the previous section and the view of employers regarding their own practices is substantial.

- **Entitlement to work in Ireland:** Where formal eligibility criteria are drawn up and communicated to job applicants, these invariably include the legal entitlement to work in Ireland. Some organisations require this status to be in place at the time of application, which means that only those immigrants with entitlement to work are eligible to apply. For other organisations, it is sufficient that such entitlement can be secured subsequent to job offer, through the work permit or green card system. As discussed further below, it seems the more sought after the skill set, the greater flexibility employers will demonstrate on this issue.
- **Citizenship status:** Within the civil service, citizenship of EEA countries is part of the eligibility criteria for many roles. While this is seen as a major barrier to potential applicants from outside of the EEA, it is currently a requirement for all general services grades within the civil service. Interestingly, the Defence Forces have recently changed the eligibility criteria for entry to the Cadets: previously only Irish citizens were entitled to apply, now, eligibility has been extended to all those who are legally present in Ireland and have five years experience of lawful residence in Ireland.
- **Proficiency in Irish:** Within the public sector, there are a number of areas where competence in Irish is required such as for Primary school teaching, and librarian positions. Until recently Irish was also a requirement for An Garda Síochána, although this was amended to facilitate greater diversity. While Irish is now a requirement for a very limited range of jobs in the public service, the misperception amongst some immigrants, and indeed amongst Irish that it is a requirement for a broad range of roles represents a barrier.

Responding to the Irish Language Requirement

An innovative response to the issue of the Irish language requirement for entry into An Garda Síochána was taken in 2005 when measures were announced to remove the requirement for having passed a leaving certificate or equivalent examination in the Irish language and to deem non-Irish nationals who had a qualifying grade in two languages (one of which was English or Irish) eligible to apply. This facilitated non-Irish nationals who had not previously studied Irish to apply to become Garda Trainees. As a basic level of competence in Irish is seen as a requirement of the job, successful applicants with no knowledge of Irish can instead learn the language as part of their training period in Templemore.

3.2.3 Advertising Vacancies and Attracting Applicants.

A very wide range of advertising avenues were used by employers and in some instances the nature of the job determined the avenue used. In general, the most common advertising mechanisms were the Irish national press, the organisation's own website and other job related websites. Where specialist positions are involved, organisations frequently advertise in the professional or trade journals or through specialist recruitment agencies. Smaller employers noted that they often have no need to advertise because of the frequent number of 'cold callers' many of whom are immigrants. Where it is necessary, frequently used mechanisms among smaller companies include using existing employees (although this is used by some larger companies too) and using industry networks. Very few companies surveyed or consulted with used avenues of recruitment specifically tailored to immigrants.

Among those surveyed:

- 57 per cent used national newspapers,
- 52 per cent used recruitment websites,
- 50 per cent used referral by existing employees
- 39 per cent used their own website
- 30 per cent used local newspapers,
- 20 per cent used professional journals
- 8 per cent used free newspapers
- 3 per cent said they used immigrant publications



Other mechanisms to recruit foreign workers include:

- graduate recruitment programmes, involving formal or semi formal links to specific overseas universities,
- hiring direct from the country of origin. As noted already, only 13 per cent of employers surveyed recruited directly from abroad and it appears that large scale hiring of this sort is no longer a common feature.

It is worth stressing, that in general, there were no attempts to recruit through specifically immigrant avenues, except where immigrant workers were explicitly being sought. This applies both to the avenue used to advertise and to the content of the advertisement: although 40 per cent of companies surveyed said they always indicated in their employment advertisements that they are an equal opportunities employer, none of the organisations consulted with specifically indicated in advertisements that they welcomed applications from immigrant workers. For the most part, this was not seen as a barrier to recruiting immigrants and in some organisations, including public sector organisations, there was a perception that immigrants were being successfully recruited through the 'mainstream system'. Some public sector organisations, however, did note that they are not attracting immigrants in the numbers they would like and they are aware that the methods of advertising, and more significantly, the methods of attracting immigrants would need to be addressed.

Outreaching to Immigrant Communities

- 1 The Defence Forces have made a number of changes to their recruitment procedures in order to attract more applicants from immigrant communities. These have included changing educational criteria and citizenship criteria for recruitment to the Cadets. Most recently they have addressed the issue of direct outreach to immigrant communities. The Equality and Diversity Officer of the Defence Forces has undertaken a series of consultations with peer led immigrant groups.
- 2 Following the decision of the Department of Justice to remove the Irish Language requirement for the Garda Trainee role a number of initiatives were introduced to encourage people from ethnic minorities to consider a career in An Garda Síochána. As well as targeted advertising, the NCCRI organised an information seminar, the Gardai organised open days at Templemore and the NCCRI in conjunction with the PAS organised a briefing session on the selection process. As a result of these initiatives, a significant number of candidates from minority ethnic groups applied for the post of Garda Trainee, and a number have now graduated and are serving in the force.

3.2.4 Application, Preliminary Screening & Shortlisting

There was again a considerable degree of standardization across large organisations consulted with in both the public and private sectors with regard to the application process. The most common approach used was to require the candidate to complete an application form, sometimes accompanied by a CV. Among those surveyed, including large and small companies, 96 per cent required CVs while 31 per cent used application forms. Frequently, the application form can be completed and submitted on-line, and guidelines are often provided to give assistance to applicants in doing this. Most organisations consulted with were satisfied that the application forms per se did not include anything that could prejudice applications from immigrants: for example, in most cases the forms do not require information on nationality. A small number of surveyed employers indicated that they had made some changes to application forms when they became aware that some questions caused problems for immigrant applicants.



In large volume recruitment campaigns, applications are subject to a preliminary screening process, the objective of which is to remove candidates who are ineligible based on the types of criteria discussed above. This first screening, based on the eligibility criteria, is sometimes carried out on line on the basis of answers to 'yes/no' questions – as for example, '*Do you have Leaving Certificate or equivalent?*' Some employers acknowledge that this initial screening may sometimes lack rigour and as noted above ineligible candidates may get through it. But there is a consensus across organisations that it in no way presents any barriers to immigrants who do meet the eligibility criteria.

Once the initial screening for eligibility has taken place, two possible options are implemented. In the first of these, practiced for example in recruitment to most entry level grades in the public sector, all those deemed eligible proceed to the next stage of the process. Usually this is the testing phase but in some cases may involve direct progression to interview. The second option is where the recruiting organisations shortlist for interview from amongst the eligible candidates.

It is at this short listing for interview stage that the distinction between the various recruitment processes – whether large volume entry level or more specific, whether very formal or more informal – begin to disappear. It is also at this stage that a very robust engagement with the applications on the part of those implementing the recruitment process begins. In short-listing applications (in some cases large volumes of them), applications are looked at closely and any that are considered inappropriate are eliminated. Reasons for elimination include ineligibility becoming apparent at this stage, poorly presented application forms or clear problems with the use of written English.

Further assessments are made on the basis of specified criteria, but some organisations agree that there is an imperative at this stage to reduce the numbers of candidates and that reasons to remove them rather than retain will be sought. At this point, therefore, applicants are competing with each other and the subjective assessments of those involved in short-listing begin to play a significant role. Overall the short-listing stage appears to be a crucial stage in terms of progressing applications and it is one where it is difficult to determine with any accuracy exactly what the basis of assessment is.

Among survey respondents:

- 86 per cent use proficiency in English as a basis for shortlisting
- 99 per cent refer to previous relevant work experience as a basis for shortlisting and 65 per cent note that lack of same is a barrier for immigrants.
- 22 per cent use Irish experience as a basis of screening/shortlisting and 13 per cent note this is a barrier for immigrants.

- Only 40 per cent indicate minimum qualification requirements as part of their eligibility criteria but 67 per cent take qualifications into account in short listing and between 32 and 42 per cent note that unfamiliar qualifications and inadequate qualifications present barriers for immigrants.
- Additionally, 60 per cent indicate that poor presentation of CVs stops immigrants reaching the interview stage.

3.2.5 Testing & assessments

Psychometric tests and technical tests figure strongly in the recruitment practices of the larger organisations consulted with but did not play a role in the practices of smaller companies. This was evident in the survey also where just 9 per cent used these types of tests. The use of such tests depends on the skills being sought and the sequencing of the tests within the overall recruitment process also varies.

In general, if the job involved is technical in nature, technical tests will be conducted. Sometimes these can be conducted on-line or even over the telephone. Both these mechanisms are seen to facilitate applicants who are not living in Ireland at the time of assessment.

Psychometric tests or other forms of aptitude testing are also frequently used by larger organisations and these are usually written. There is a strong awareness amongst organisations using these tests that they are very difficult and that many people fail them. While the high failure rate includes Irish people, it is also recognized that written aptitude tests are particularly difficult for people whose first language is not English.

While organisations were aware of the difficulties that tests presented for people who did not have English as their first language, few have done anything to address this.

The Public Appointments Service, as a significant user of testing in the Public Service has carried out some work looking at the issues involved in testing people from diverse backgrounds and with different language skills. Culturally diverse panels have been used to review test materials and ensure that they are not culturally biased and some assessments have been conducted using translated versions of test material. This is however a complex area and more work needs to be done to establish how best to facilitate different groups as part of the assessment process whilst maintaining a rigorous and fair assessment process.



Innovation in the use of tests

Irish Life uses a written aptitude test for some positions before or after interview. The aptitude test is difficult and many people, including Irish people, fail. Some time ago they became aware that it was a real hurdle for non-Irish candidates, so they consulted the company that does the testing for them. Their own preferred option was to provide testing in the language of the candidate, but the cost was too high. A kind of compromise situation has been reached whereby they keep the use of tests to a minimum and in the case of non-Irish candidates will override a negative result if the candidate performed well at interview.

The timing of tests as part of the selection process varies quite a bit. In some instances tests are used as a way of narrowing down the numbers going forward for interview: only those who get through the test make it to the interview and selection stage. In other instances, tests are used to aid selection after the interview, by providing an objective measure of the competence of the individual. In one private sector company, 'technical testing' took the form of an opportunity to work in the company for three days to demonstrate skills, subsequent to which satisfactory candidates are offered work.

3.2.6 Interviewing and Selecting

In all instances, interviews were a crucial part of the recruitment process and in most cases these are competency based interviews. Frequently, interviews are the penultimate stage in the recruitment process and are the main basis upon which the selection is made. However, as noted above, interviews may also rank alongside aptitude tests in underpinning selection. The most common form of interviewing was face to face interviewing, frequently with an interview panel. In some large private sector organisations, interviewing by phone takes place. Although this is perceived to facilitate overseas applicants, the challenges associated with it, for both interviewer and interviewee are acknowledged.

Among the organisations consulted with, where competency based interviews are used, all interviewers are trained in the relevant techniques; however, training in intercultural interviewing is less frequent and in fact appears to be quite rare. Some organisations perceive that the broader diversity training and practices within their workplaces will transfer to the interview scenario. Among the surveyed organisations, just ten per cent said they provide training to interviewers specifically in relation to their interaction with non-Irish candidates.

Innovation in interviewing

Microsoft trains all its interviewers in competency based interviewing and this includes interviewing over the phone – which is challenging for both interviewer and interviewee – and interviewing people whose first language is not English. All interviewers in the company are trained to take cultural issues into account.

One small company whose recruitment process is flexible and informal and heavily focused on getting the right skills also requires a high level of language competence. Sometimes, it can accommodate an applicant without good language skills, if the work team they will join is competent. On one occasion, a candidate for interview who had no English was allowed to bring his wife to translate for him. He got the job, was provided with language tuition and acquired a high standard of English very quickly.

Organisations were aware of the communication issues that might confront immigrants during the interview stage. Where English was seen as an essential requirement, issues of verbal communication factored in very highly in the decision making stage: candidates who present with poor communication skills, including lack of proficiency in English, are unlikely to be selected. Attitudes to problems with non-verbal communication, however, were more flexible. One organisation noted that following the investment of company time and resources in getting the candidate as far as the interview, they were unlikely to discount someone simply because they might not make good eye contact. In companies where English language skills are not essential, the basis of selection reverts to technical skills.

When asked to indicate the barriers to good performance of immigrants at interview stage, the companies surveyed responded as follows:

- 89 per cent cited inadequate proficiency in English
- 69 per cent cited poor communication skills
- 41 per cent cited poor personal presentation
- 21 per cent cited lack of confidence
- 18 per cent cited lack of eye contact
- 13 per cent cited lack of assertiveness

In addition, many of the organisations require a probationary period for new employees: this is seen as a sort of safety net, allowing them to overcome any outstanding doubts about the suitability of a candidate at this stage.



3.2.7 Vetting

The vetting of candidates takes place when a job offer is imminent or immediately prior to the final decisions being made. Vetting includes checking references, validating qualifications, medical (and sometimes physical) exams, and for some occupations, police clearance. For immigrant workers, there is the additional procedure of ensuring legal entitlement to work. While vetting of all candidates takes place, organisations acknowledge the additional burden of time and effort in relation to vetting immigrant candidates. However, there is some consensus across organisations that the more highly skilled the job in question or the more scarce the skills set, the more willing the company will be to overcome any difficulties. Some differences between public and private sector approaches are also evident, with the private companies displaying a greater tendency to be expedient in areas where they have discretion.

- **Checking references:** Organisations take different approaches to this but one area of consistency is that Irish referees are not required. Some believe that the practice of providing references (other than verifying actual periods of employment) is declining and invest minimal effort in following up on foreign references. Others will follow up and will have references translated if necessary.
- **Validating qualifications:** Some organisations tried to anticipate issues with qualifications at the application or screening stage, but many frequently had to invest time and effort in establishing the validity and comparability of foreign qualifications prior to job offer. Some, but not all, of the organisations are familiar with the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) and the NQAI (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland) and use these to validate qualifications prior to job offers. Among the companies surveyed, almost three quarters were aware of the various organisations that are in place to clarify the status or relevant standing of the qualifications of an immigrant candidate, but less than five percent had actually approached these bodies for assistance. Some organisations are prepared to make job offers subject to the candidate undertaking to validate their qualifications within the Irish system. Validating qualifications is perceived as time consuming and difficult although most note that there have been improvements in recent months. It is also seen as delaying the process of recruitment while the validating takes place: notably, where recruitment is the responsibility of a dedicated department or team, these are prepared to wait to see the process through, but recognize that the line managers may be very anxious to speed things up.

- **Police clearance:** A wide range of occupations require police clearance and where immigrants are concerned this may introduce an additional delay. As some countries will not provide police clearance outside of the context of a criminal investigation, some Irish employers will accept police clearance within Ireland only.
- **Establishing legal entitlement to work:** Establishing a candidate's legal entitlement and other administrative requirements (e.g., PPSN) is a costly and time-consuming exercise for employers. For some employers, having to wait for one month to recruit non EEA workers can also be harmful to business, others note the delay in the visa process. In many instances, and particularly where very skilled workers are involved, companies will provide assistance in dealing with all the legal requirements. It is also common practice for companies to make a job offer subject to legal entitlement being established subsequently. Employers consulted with claimed a high level of awareness of the various legal entitlements to work. Among those surveyed, also, almost seventy per cent said they had a good or very good understanding of the various distinctions in the legal status of immigrants.

In general, the greater the difficulty in getting Irish workers, the more likely companies are to overcome all problematic issues to secure the employment of suitable foreign candidates, particularly where these are highly skilled. Some organisations believe that most employers would opt for the worker whose recruitment required no legal paper work if they had the choice, a view also expressed by recruitment agencies.

3.3 Post Recruitment Supports / Retention and Advancement

Although this research is not concerned with the employment experience of immigrants, the post recruitment supports provided to immigrant workers were briefly explored. This was for two reasons: firstly to discern to what extent organisations actively tried to retain immigrants who had been recruited and secondly to explore the advancement opportunities available to immigrant workers.

With regard to retention, companies differed with regard to how much priority they gave to this. At one extreme, were companies which perceived that an ongoing supply of foreign workers would be essential and these were at pains to ensure that they retained their existing immigrant employees and sent positive signals to potential immigrant employees. At the other extreme were companies



that considered foreign workers to be just part of the normal recruitment intake and were therefore not any more focused on retaining them over and above any other employee.

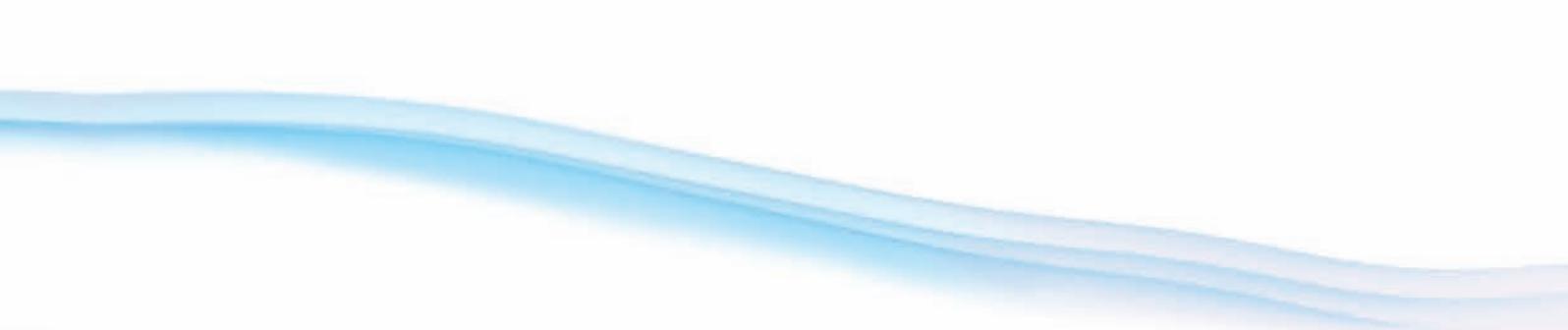
Nonetheless a number of supports were put in place to assist immigrants in the workforce, for example:

- Ace Auto Body operates a buddy system whereby each immigrant recruit is appointed a fellow worker to help with work and non-work issues (for example, opening bank accounts etc).
- Several employers securing the services of English language tutors to provide classes in the workplace.
- Temple Street Children's Hospital sought the support of the SIPTU trade union to help conduct conflict resolution workshops and address problems arising in the workforce.
- Microsoft provides cultural training workshops for both employees and their spouses, the objective of which is to help both workers and family members settle in Ireland. They have evaluated the workshops and made changes based on employee feedback.
- Temple Street Children's Hospital actively supports immigrant employees to apply for better posts within the hospital thus providing a career pathway.
- Several companies provided induction for all workers without any specific elements for immigrants, while one noted that its overall diversity policies were very good and therefore no additional measures were required.

In relation to advancement, very few of the companies consulted with had special programmes or interventions to facilitate the advancement of immigrants, but all were of the view that there were no barriers to their advancement and that there were numerous examples of immigrants having been promoted.

3.4 Conclusion

In general, employers consider the recruitment process to be robust, demanding and difficult to get through, and that this is the case for Irish workers and immigrant workers alike. They also perceive that it is essential that the robustness of the process is maintained in order to retain the high standard of employee /



productivity / customer service etc. With the exception of PAS who monitor their recruitment process for equality, none of the employers consulted with had audited their recruitment process with respect to immigrants, although some had modified elements of it when they perceived a specific difficulty arising. Overall, there was a general willingness among employers to make changes to accommodate immigrant workers, and this was frequently related to a desire to promote diversity within the workplace. Some organisations however did not perceive any need for this.



Chapter 4

Conclusions and Discussion

4. Introduction

Diversity in the Irish labour market, although fuelled by the unprecedented economic growth of the recent past, is likely to be an ongoing feature notwithstanding the changed economic environment. Diversity extends to the immigrant population itself and immigrants to Ireland will continue to include highly skilled workers who are sought after internationally, EU citizens exercising their right to live and work throughout the EU, economic migrants from under-developed countries and refugees seeking to make their home here. The heterogeneity of immigrants needs to be recognised not least because the different legal status associated with it contributes to variation in the wellbeing of immigrants on the labour market as does ethnicity and gender.

Roche (2007) has pointed out that as diversity at the level of the work force becomes normalised, the policy agenda is likely to change from one of addressing the exploitation of immigrants to one of addressing labour market segmentation. Labour market segmentation is shaped by factors on both the supply and demand sides, as well as by labour immigration policy: a feature which is common globally. In addressing labour market segmentation, it will be more important than ever to have a clear vision of what we want to achieve with immigration policies and to learn from the experiences of other countries, particularly as the economic circumstances change and as competition for jobs increases. Already, as noted in the last Chapter, at least some employers are acknowledging the possible decrease in interest in ensuring equality of access to employment for immigrants.

Immigrants are just one of a number of groups who will face difficulty in the new economic context and, ideally, they should be able to benefit from interventions to combat labour market disadvantage more generally including, for example, interventions and programmes offered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FÁS, the VECs and the Local Employment Services. However, measures to address the specific circumstances of immigrants and different categories of immigrants (including refugees) will also be necessary.

4.1 Managing Diversity in the Workforce: The Place for Recruitment

While the initial impetus to employing foreign workers may have been to address labour shortages and skill shortages there has been a shift to a growing interest in managing diversity amongst employers as Irish work forces have become more culturally mixed. This has been driven by a number of imperatives including the need to: comply with equality policies; retain personnel that were expensive to recruit and train; reflect the customer (or service user) base and the value of diversity for product development and consumer relations as well as corporate social responsibility.

Research has consistently demonstrated the value of diversity and good diversity management in the work force. Most recently, Monks (2008) has provided a valuable assessment of the business case for diversity from the international evidence. Among the more novel findings are those that relate to the discovery that diversity and equality systems as well as workplace partnership systems are positively and synergistically associated with significantly higher levels of labour productivity, workforce innovation, and reduced employee turnover. The author concludes that while strategic human resource management will clearly remain a core concern in terms of best practice approaches to the management of companies, it is becoming increasingly clear that companies may find competitive advantage through more effective approaches to managing employee involvement, participation, diversity and equality in the workplace (Monks, 2008). However, Lemaire (2008) has also argued that (particularly in the public sector) the business case does not present a sufficiently robust framework: instead, a cultural diversity approach is required.

Lemaire (2008) also argues that recruitment is just the beginning of diversity management. To date however, the interest in promoting good practice in relation to cultural diversity has tended to focus primarily on managing diversity within the workplace, with little or no attention paid to the process whereby employees are recruited. With a small number of exceptions, there have been very few measures taken to promote best practice in the recruitment of foreign workers⁷. More generally, there is little awareness of the role of recruitment in underpinning diversity. The findings of this research suggest that the process and practices

7 In 2003, the Health Service Employers Agency produced a guide to diversity which included advice on recruitment. Similarly a guide to recruitment in the horticultural sector was produced in 2001.



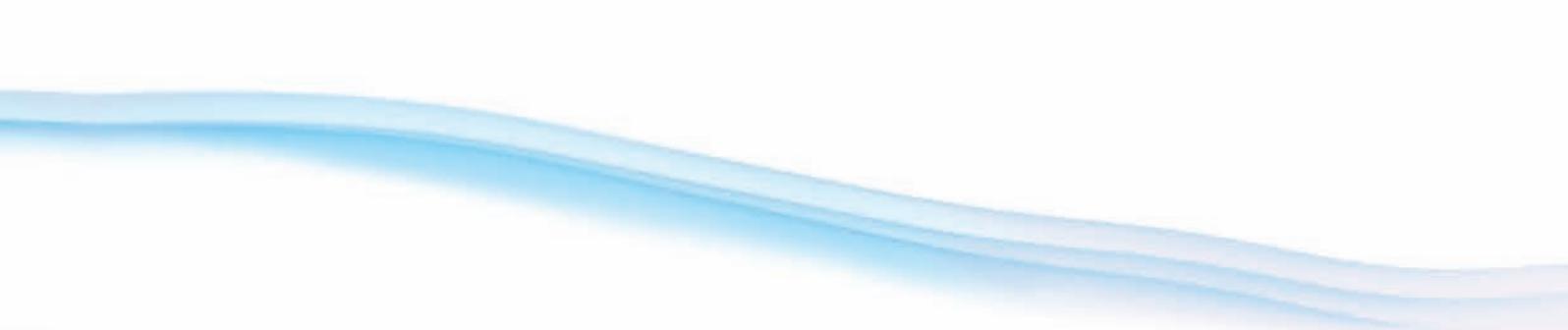
of recruitment should be more integrally linked into the concept of managing diversity, in both the public and private sectors.

4.2 Key Findings

By focusing specifically on the recruitment process, this research has tried to provide some insights into the ways in which employers' recruitment practices impact on foreign workers and on the ways in which potential immigrant employees interact with those processes. It is clear from the data discussed in Chapter 2 that immigrants experience difficulties across a range of headings in relation to recruitment and selection and that these difficulties extend into decision making and seeking support from labour market service providers. Some of these derive from their own attributes, such as a lack of proficiency in English or unfamiliarity with the workings of the Irish labour market. Some are the result of labour immigration policy including delays in securing visas or the barrier to employment for non-EEA nationals in the civil service. But in the views of immigrants themselves, many of the barriers and challenges to their employment arise within the recruitment process itself. This tends not to result in high levels of unemployment amongst immigrants (with the exception of Africans), but rather to underemployment: either as an (hoped for) interim strategy prior to advancement in the workforce or as an accommodation to a difficult reality.

A significant issue moving forward is our lack of knowledge on the extent to which underemployment is a temporary experience as immigrants find their feet in the labour market (NESC, 2006a). Such data as is available suggests that the experience of an occupation gap is an ongoing feature of the immigrant experience in Ireland, but whether this reflects recentness of arrival or the consolidation of labour market segmentation is unclear (FÁS, 2007). There is a clear need for research in this area to guide future interventions and policy.

Chapter 3 presented the employers' views of their own recruitment processes. Among these there is a strong view that their recruitment practices, while necessarily robust and frequently difficult, do not present additional barriers to immigrants seeking employment in their companies. The exception here is the use of tests through the medium of English which are recognized by employers as presenting specific challenges to immigrant job applicants. None of the organisations had audited their recruitment processes to determine if they are or are not 'immigrant-friendly'; however, many had responded to difficulties encountered by immigrants (for example by modifying educational requirements on application forms) when they became aware of these. A number of companies also introduced innovative responses to specific issues. From the employer perspective the challenges to recruiting immigrant workers derived



from the global race for talent, delays in validating qualifications, difficulties with police vetting (where required) and difficulties arising from the policy context particularly with regard to the one month waiting period to employ non EEA workers.

In brief, the two parties involved – employers and job applicants – had divergent views on most elements of the recruitment process. We need to note again here that while substantial numbers of immigrant workers and of employers were consulted with for this research (and therefore we can have confidence in our findings), the two groups are not describing their perceptions or experiences of the same recruitment process. That is, employers are speaking about what they do generally, immigrants are speaking about what they experience generally: we have no reason to assume that the specific immigrants we consulted had interacted with (and are therefore describing) the recruitment process of the specific employers involved in the research. Further, our employers were drawn from a purposive rather than random sample and can make no claim to representativeness. Nonetheless, given the numbers involved and the consistency of the findings, it is safe to conclude that the extent to which the process of recruitment and selection presents barriers to immigrant workers is viewed very differently by immigrant workers and by employers.

In drawing out the conclusions of the research, it is useful to summarise the divergent views of employers and potential employees on the different stages of the recruitment process. In Table 4.1 below the elements of the recruitment process are listed in the middle column, the views of immigrants regarding these are listed on the left, while those of employers are on the right. This succinctly illustrates the divergent views or understandings that were identified through our research.



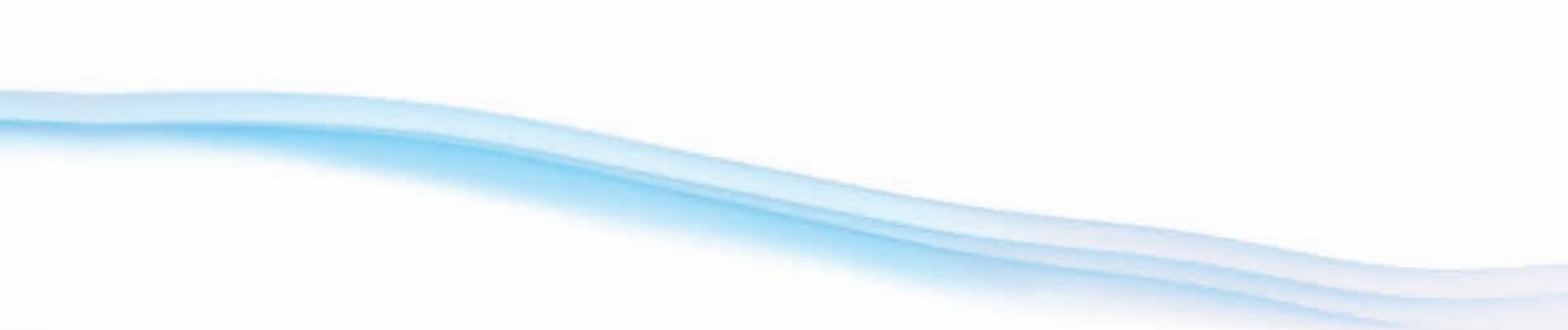
Table 4.1: Divergent views of Employers and Immigrants on the Recruitment Process

Views of Immigrant job seekers	Elements of the Recruitment /Selection Process	Practice and views of employers
<p>Feel it is frequently unclear what the job requires, particularly less specialized jobs. Uncertainty about eligibility exists particularly with regard to qualifications.</p>	<p>Job description</p>	<p>Feel that formal job descriptions makes it clear to applicants what is involved and should assist immigrants applicants to determine if they are qualified.</p>
<p>Limited advertising avenues are used especially immigrant specific avenues.</p> <p>Often not clear if their applications are welcome.</p> <p>Believe that advertised jobs are sometimes already filled.</p>	<p>Advertising</p>	<p>Immigrant specific avenues are rarely used but the dominant perception is that mainstream channels are sufficient for attracting immigrants.</p> <p>Rarely indicate that jobs are open to immigrant applicants.</p> <p>Rarely indicate that equality policies extend to immigrants.</p>
<p>Express difficulties with on-line applications.</p> <p>Frequently require assistance in preparing CVs, completing application etc.</p>	<p>Application</p>	<p>Changes to application forms have been made to accommodate immigrants.</p> <p>Employers agree that poorly presented CVs are an impediment for immigrants.</p>

<p>Strong perceptions that immigrants are deliberately screened out both at initial and subsequent screening stages.</p> <p>Feel that many employers have a requirement for Irish references and Irish work experience, and that work experience outside of Ireland is given little consideration.</p>	<p>Screening/ Short-listing</p>	<p>Initial screening based on eligibility criteria. Subsequently short-listing influenced by strong pressure to reduce numbers.</p> <p>Employers are adamant that no anti-immigrant bias is operating, but some agreement that the basis of screening out may be quite spurious.</p> <p>Mixed views were expressed from employers on the need for Irish experience and references, but the majority indicated they did not select or shortlist on this basis.</p>
<p>Perception that employers underestimate the difficulties for immigrants at interview.</p> <p>View that cultural differences in presentation / performance at interview can limit the applicants chances.</p>	<p>Interviewing</p>	<p>Employers generally showed an appreciation of the difficulties experienced by immigrants at interview. Larger companies frequently train interview panels but not always in inter-cultural interviewing. Perception that language and verbal communication are very important, but cultural norms less so.</p>



<p>Perceive written and language based tests as presenting difficulties and sometimes being culturally biased.</p> <p>Little or no accommodation to immigrants for example by providing more time.</p>	<p>Testing</p>	<p>Limited use of tests amongst employers , but a lot of emphasis on such tests as do take place. Few examples of innovation in responding to immigrant issues.</p>
<p>Perception that employers do not understand the legal situation or the qualifications framework and that many employers will not take the extra time to process paperwork etc on these issues.</p>	<p>Vetting</p>	<p>Employers reasonably familiar with legal system and with NQF framework. Experience mixed in the extent to which they use them. The more sought after or scarce the skill set, the more likely the employer will undertake the necessary work to vet immigrant applicants.</p>
<p>Perception of limited promotion or advancement prospects. Some sense that their opportunities are deliberately blocked. Some hesitancy to go forward for promotion.</p>	<p>Promotion</p>	<p>No barriers to advancement perceived by employers.</p>



Job Descriptions and Job Titles: This is an area where there is a clear dichotomy between the views of immigrants and those of employers. A perceived lack of clarity in job descriptions and, in certain cases job titles, can reflect cultural differences in what types of training or experience are required for specific jobs or it can reflect a lack of understanding on the part of immigrants of what certain jobs in Ireland entail. Public sector occupations, and particularly the less specialised ones, were particularly referenced in relation to overly vague job descriptions or titles which were difficult to interpret from an immigrant perspective.

Advertising: Advertising job vacancies contains an implicit element of ‘outreach’ in that the advertising avenues used can imply the target audience. Many immigrants perceive that employers use limited advertising avenues and employers themselves agree that they rarely use immigrant-specific channels in advertising job vacancies. In addition, many employers noted that they do not specifically state on their advertisements that their equality practices provide for equal treatment for immigrants. This can contribute to a situation whereby immigrants are unclear whether their applications are welcome or not.

Application: This is one area where there is broad agreement between employers and immigrant candidates regarding difficulties. Some employers have made changes to application forms to better accommodate foreign workers, but they note that poorly presented CVs and applications are a barrier to advancement in the recruitment process. For their part, immigrants are aware of this and also cite the cultural differences at play.

Screening: The process of screening applications is complex for employers and particularly those dealing with large volume applications. While employers are adamant that no anti-immigrant bias operates at this stage, some acknowledge that the basis for screening out applications can be very pragmatic and even spurious. From the immigrant’s perspective, repeated difficulties in getting past this stage tend to be interpreted as bias. As noted above, employers had not audited their recruitment practices with regard to immigrants.

Shortlisting: In small volume applications it may be quite difficult (and even artificial) to separate out the process of screening from that of shortlisting but very different considerations do generally apply in relation to the two aspects of the process. From the perspective of immigrants, a key barrier to being shortlisted is the requirement to have Irish experience and Irish referees. This information is derived from feedback from employers when applicants query their lack of success. For employers, however, the issue of Irish work experience and references was not significant: very few of those interviewed considered it important and fewer than a quarter of those surveyed used Irish experience or Irish references

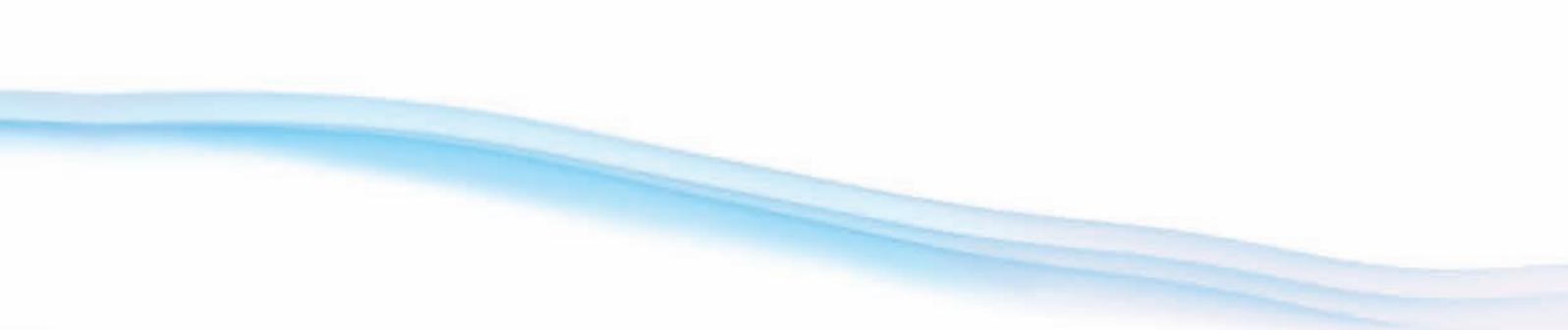


as either a basis for determining eligibility or a basis for shortlisting. We cannot discount the possibility however, that some employers may refer to this when giving feedback to unsuccessful foreign job applicants as a way of avoiding a more complex interaction.

Interviewing: Both immigrant workers and employers recognize the difficulties that interviews can present for non-Irish job applicants. Immigrants however perceive that employers are not fully aware of all of the difficulties or make sufficient efforts to address them. Employers emphasise verbal communication skills at interview and recognise that this can be a difficulty for immigrants, even those who have a good command of English. Awareness of cultural differences in non-verbal communication and presentation also exists – although it appears to be less likely to cause difficulties for employers. From the immigrant’s perspective, verbal communication is also seen as challenging at interview, given the greater formality of language and so on. But immigrant job seekers place a greater emphasis on the difficulties resulting from cultural practices and norms in terms of non-verbal communication. In general, immigrants believed that it was much harder for them to convince an employer at interview stage that they were the right person for the job.

Testing: A minority of employers use tests, but when they are used they assume a high level of significance in determining the outcome of the recruitment and selection process. This is one instance in which employers and foreign job applicants are agreed: both groups see the use of tests that require written or spoken English to be a specific challenge for those whose first language is not English. A small number of employers have tried to address this, but they are prepared to accept that their efforts have been limited and that the more comprehensive approach of translating tests into the language of candidates would be too difficult and costly. In general, there is a view that tests are meant to introduce an element of scientific objectivity into the recruitment process and consequently there is a reluctance to tamper with them.

Vetting: It is at this stage of the process that employers encounter the external reality of immigration when they are required to assess qualifications, ensure entitlement to work, check references, and on occasion seek police clearance. Here, most employers will acknowledge challenges that are outside of their control. That said, employers indicate that they are well equipped in terms of information on issues such as the legal entitlements of different categories of immigrant, on the provisions of the NQF system and on the existence of agencies that can provide assistance with the vetting process. For their part, immigrant job applicants are fully aware of the difficulties deriving from the external environment, particularly in relation to qualifications and entitlement to work, but also believe that employers are poorly informed on these issues and will tend to



avoid the additional administration and paper work in employing an immigrant if they have a choice – something that was acknowledged by employment agency personnel. Immigrants also believed that as the legal provisions determining who has the right to work is both complex and subject to ongoing change it is difficult for employers to keep up with these.

Promotion and advancement: Although only tangentially discussed in this research, the issue of promotion and advancement is relevant in terms of both the wellbeing of immigrants in employment and in terms of sending positive signals to prospective foreign workers. From the employer's perspective, there were no particular barriers to advancement for immigrant employees and many employers could point to specific examples of promotion or to measures they had taken to support immigrant employees to advance within their company or organisation. Immigrant workers did not share this view and many felt that they faced significant challenges in advancing in employment.

Our research has highlighted a range of issues and challenges that arise in the recruitment and selection of immigrant workers in Ireland. In the final section of the report below we draw some overarching conclusions that emerge from the research and that point towards issues that can be taken into consideration on an ongoing basis in order to maximise both the equality and effectiveness of the recruitment and selection processes in play from the point of view of immigrants on the one hand and employers in both the public and private sectors on the other.

4.3 Ways Forward

As previously noted, the intention and design of this research was to open up the issue of the recruitment and selection of immigrant workers in Ireland for discussion. The terms of reference for the research required: (i) the collection of information on immigrants' experience of seeking employment and their knowledge of the Irish job market; as well as (ii) the collection of information from employers on how they approach the recruitment of immigrants. The terms of reference also required the identification of issues and challenges arising as well as the identification of innovative responses to same.

However, since the research was commissioned in April 2008 the economic and employment context in Ireland has significantly altered, with unemployment reaching over 9%. Of particular relevance to this research is the prediction made by the ERSI in its Quarterly Economic Commentary, Autumn 2008, that net migratory outflow would increase, reaching an anticipated 30,000 in 2009⁸.

8 In contrast, net inflow for 2006 was 72,000.

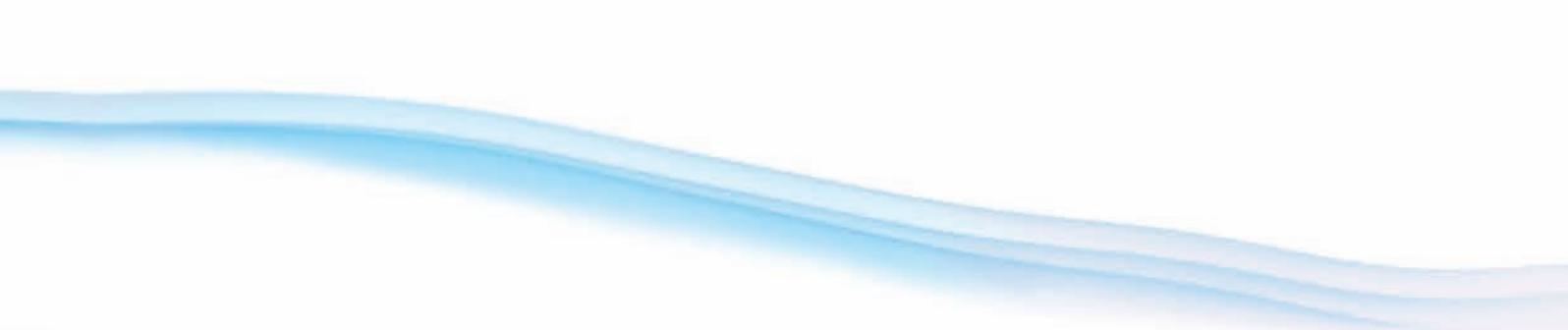


It is reasonable to assume that in the context of a contracting labour market and net migratory outflow, at least some of the issues raised in this report will not feature as priorities in ongoing labour market policy and debate, at least in the short-term – this probability was commented on by some of those interviewed over the course of the research. On the other hand, issues such as the recruitment of ‘agency workers’ have already emerged in the national debate and are likely to feature into the future (thirty per cent of the employers surveyed for this research said that they use agency workers). While the debate concerning the use of non Irish agency workers is likely to predominantly focus on the displacement of Irish workers, it is worth noting that the agency workers themselves and the communities into which they are placed will face challenges of integration and that the agency worker approach can result in a lack of opportunity for advancement for the immigrants themselves as they are employed by the agency and not the company they work in and consequently they may not have the same entitlement to apply for other and better jobs within the same company.

However, and notwithstanding current economic and labour market difficulties, it is evident that immigration will continue to be a significant feature⁹ of the modern world and the global economy. Within this context and as an essential and critical part of economic recovery, Ireland will need to attract foreign workers. *Tomorrow’s Skills: Towards a National Skills Strategy* (EGFSN, 2007), identifies Ireland’s current skills profile and provides a strategic vision and specific objectives for Ireland’s future skills requirements. The report projects that the labour force will have grown to about 2.4 million by 2020. Of the projected 950,000 new entrants to the Irish labour market over the period 2006 to 2020, the report suggests that 640,000 will be sourced through the school-leaving population and 310,000 will be sourced through inward migration (an average of almost 21,000 per annum over the period). Allowing for the now evident inaccuracy of the projections in terms of the current context and the short to medium term outlook, the general thrust of part of the report’s contention that Ireland’s economic development will rely heavily on inward migration, remains true.

In that regard a representative of IBEC consulted as part of the research said that Ireland needed to take a longer-term view on attracting people to work here and that includes, for example, the identification of the skills we need in the Irish economy to achieve sustainable, high-end enterprise over the medium to longer term; and, the development of our social and economic infrastructure (including the quality of childcare, civic services, education and so on) such that Ireland is seen as an attractive place in which to live and work.

9 “Pressure for migration – legal and illegal – is an unavoidable feature of the emerging world order to which all societies and states must respond” (NESC, *ibid*)



The challenge of attracting immigrant workers over the longer term is likely to become increasingly difficult as states and individual employers begin to vie with each other to attract foreign workers and skilled workers in particular – this inevitability is exacerbated by the ageing of the workforce in all states of the European Union. Even now and in the context of a deteriorating labour market, employers are experiencing difficulties in recruiting adequately skilled people in particular sectors. Speaking at Ernst & Young’s Irish Employment Permit and Immigration briefing on 11th September 2008, Jim Ryan (Partner), Human Capital Practice from Ernst & Young said:

“Despite the economic downturn and the impact this has had on the construction sector there is still a critical shortage of highly skilled talent within the local labour market in certain sectors (e.g., information technology, financial services and in particular healthcare). The changing economic environment means that the Government needs to adapt its current economic migration policy. It is vital that Ireland maintains its competitive advantage in not only attracting overseas investment but protecting the existing investment in Ireland while at the same time protecting the local labour market.”

The conditions under which migrant workers are working abroad are also of concern to their country of origin in certain instances. For example, India is currently set to sign a series of social security agreements (e.g., with Germany, the Netherlands, Oman and Bahrain) designed to secure a better deal for Indian nationals working abroad¹⁰ (Metro Éireann, Vol 9, Issue 49).

4.4 Key Issues for Consideration

The findings of our research suggest a number of key issues that need to be considered in ensuring the capacity of the Irish labour market to attract and retain immigrant workers. Some of these issues relate to the policy context, others to the provision of labour market services. The role of English language competence in underpinning labour market wellbeing is relevant here as is the provision of more labour market supports to immigrant workers in relation to issues such as information, assistance with job application (including the presentation of CVs) and assistance with interview techniques. The scope to resource peer-led immigrant groups to play a role in both supporting immigrant job seekers and in providing relevant information to employers could also be explored. In addition, the problem of labour market segmentation and the lack of research into the longer-term integration of immigrants into the workforce and their advancement in employment needs to be addressed.

¹⁰ It is estimated that 25 million Indians live overseas spread across more than 110 countries.



Of more specific relevance to the concerns of this report are those issues which fall within the ambit of employers, in both the public and private sectors. The following, we suggest, are areas that need to be considered by employers:

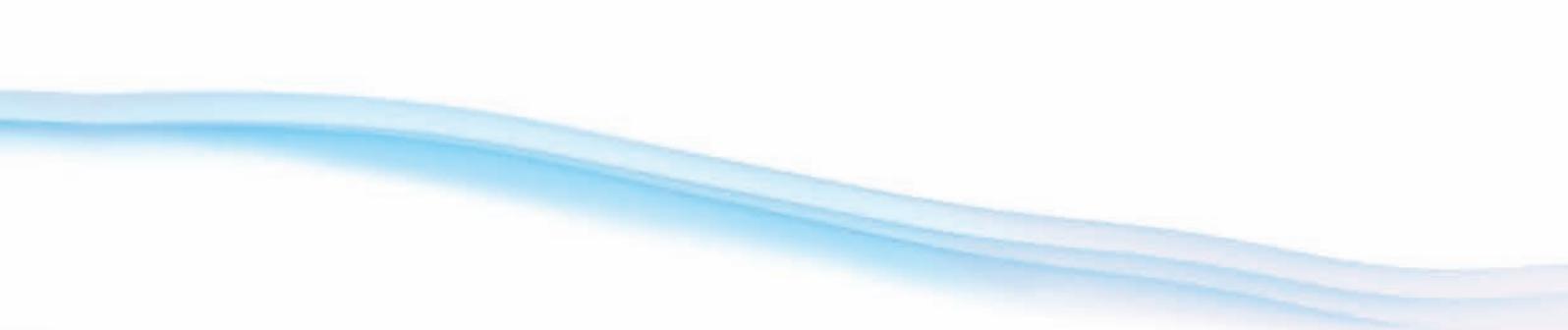
There is a need for employers, to be more mindful of the signals they send, inadvertently or otherwise, to potential foreign job applicants. The extent to which immigrants seeking work will exclude consideration of organisations they perceive to send negative signals has been highlighted by the research. The implication is that employers, including public sector organisations, should ensure that they are seen to be immigrant-friendly. This is particularly relevant for organisations which wish to attract a culturally diverse workforce.

There appears to be considerable scope for employers to expand the range of media they use in placing job advertisements in order to more explicitly target immigrant candidates. There is also a case to be made for stating on advertisements that applications from immigrant workers will be welcome and / or that being an equal opportunities employer covers the race ground. For larger organisations wishing to attract a more diverse workforce the possibility of consulting with immigrant communities through their peer-led organisations could be considered. This strategy could help to ensure that advertising reaches immigrant audiences and that advertising and recruiting practices are inclusive.

In developing job descriptions and defining requirements and eligibility criteria employers should be mindful of cultural differences across national boundaries in respect of the requirements for some occupations as well as a more general lack of insight amongst immigrants into what a job might entail in the Irish context. Clarity and precision are required in order to minimise confusion and misinterpretations on the part of immigrant candidates. Employers – and especially those which have not thus far succeeded in attracting immigrant candidates – should take greater care to ensure that the descriptions of jobs they provide can be understood by non-Irish workers and in particular that they do not contain implicit cultural assumptions that would not be readily understood by potential immigrant candidates.

Screening and shortlisting procedures, particularly in large volume situations, can be opaque and driven by pragmatism. Auditing the recruitment process is an effective but costly way of dealing with this issue. However, employers should introduce measures to ensure that no unintentional or implicit biases are at play that could militate against the short-listing of immigrant applicants.

Interviewing and to a lesser extent, testing, are hugely significant in underpinning the selection of candidates and both present very real challenges to immigrant candidates, particularly but not exclusively for those for whom English is not their



first language. The extent of the difficulty that foreign candidates experience in relation to the interview process may not be fully appreciated by employers. The value of intercultural training of interviewers is indicated here. In general, employers were more aware of the difficulties for immigrants associated with written tests but few had sought ways to minimise these. The difficulty in finding effective alternatives to testing must be acknowledged and at the level of the individual company, addressing this issue may be costly. However, macro level approaches including ongoing monitoring and experimentation should be considered.

Measures to smooth the vetting process – including in relation to references, police clearance, recognition of qualifications and legal entitlement to work – need to be put in place. Greater support for employers in terms of information and assistance is required, as is better communication of ongoing legislative changes and easier access to sources of information.

If the requirement to have work experience in Ireland is operating as a significant barrier, particularly for highly skilled applicants, it would point to clear remedies in terms of innovative work experience programmes for immigrants (including refugees).

4.5 Conclusion

Looking at the issue of immigration in the round - taking into account, for example, the need to maintain competitiveness, to attract and retain adequately skilled individuals, to ensure that the legislative and socio-economic contexts are supportive of immigrants, and the need to meet the requirements of the country of origin (as in the case of Indian nationals and the transferability of social security entitlements for repatriated migrants) etc. – it would appear, in conclusion, that the findings of this research are likely to become not less but more important in the future. As previously noted, the emphasis on diversity to date from an Irish perspective has centred on the management of diversity that exists in the workforce and not to the same degree on the accommodation of diversity in the recruitment and selection processes that effectively ‘control’ the resultant diversity in the workforce of any organisation. In the future the emphasis is likely to lie in our capacity to attract people to work in Ireland.

As previously noted, Ireland’s experience of inward migration is still a relatively new phenomenon. To date that experience has been largely unproblematic despite the dramatic scale of inward migration and this can in part be attributed to the economic and employment growth achieved over the last decade. However, the national and international contexts have changed and the State (including



public sector employers) as well as employers in the broader economy will need to develop and improve on the available expertise to attract, recruit and select immigrant workers with a view to promoting the longer term viability of the economy and of individual organisations. It will also be necessary to demonstrate to actual and prospective immigrants that Ireland is committed to promoting equality of opportunity in the first instance and equality of outcome over time. In our view, this will require a level of pro-activity that is not generally apparent despite evident good practice amongst certain individual employers and/or groups of employers.

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