

## Looking Back to Move Forward

### Background document in developing a work plan for the Migrants Forum

#### **The Migrants Forum – a community work response to working with migrant workers and their families**

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The Forum was first initiated by MRCI in 2003 to provide a space for migrant workers and their families to come together to discuss issues and take action. The Forum aimed to provide opportunities for migrant workers to<sup>1</sup>;

- Collectivise the individual experiences of migrant workers and their families
- Identify solutions to issues and concerns
- Become more involved in the work of the MRCI
- Build solidarity with each other
- Build and show leadership
- Access a point of contact in building links with others
- Develop skills and knowledge about the Irish system and way of making and influencing decision making

From its earliest inception the Forum was an effort to create a collective space for migrant workers who had accessed MRCI's Drop In Centre and illustrates the community work response informing MRCI's approach to working with migrants. Early Forum's focused on discussing and articulating experiences of migrating to Ireland, understanding the political system and understanding employment rights. The value in being part of the MRCI Migrants Forum at the time was very much linked to potential collective action on issues and concerns identified, building friendship and solidarity, strengthening the MRCI and accessing better information about rights<sup>2</sup>. Whilst the Forum met several times during the early period of MRCI's work it was more directly resourced following the inception of MRCI's first strategic plan in 2005.

#### **MRCI's first strategic plan 2005-2008**

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In 2005 (year one of MRCI's strategic plan) the aim was to get the Migrants Forum 'off the ground' again so that it was consistently meeting every 6 weeks. The aim was to increase the diversity and numbers participating and respond to critical information gaps experienced by migrant workers and their families. External inputs from other organisations also provided an opportunity to build strategic links and contacts and gave statutory agencies and relevant others an insight into the issues on the ground (for example, Office of the Garda Ombudsman, Work Permit Section DETE, Trade Unions).

By year three of the strategic plan the Migrants Forum had evolved into a more diverse and political space with migrant workers participating more actively in the Forum, taking on spokespersons roles and identifying key collective concerns which ultimately fed into MRCI policy position and campaigns. These key concerns more often than not related to the operation of either the immigration system or work permit system. The leadership development of migrant workers active in the Forum was supported by the establishment of The Migrants Forum Core Group - a core group of nine migrant workers supporting the strategic planning and organisation of the Forum. Whilst some members of this original core group are still very much involved in the work of the Migrants

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from an agenda written up for the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Migrants Forum on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2003, the main focus of the first meeting was to provide an opportunity for participants to discuss and articulate their experience of migrating to Ireland

<sup>2</sup> Taken from *The Value of being part of the MRCI Migrants Forum* September 2003

Forum others have moved on and the core group as it existed no longer meets. Leadership development and ownership of the work of the Forum however is still supported and maintained by building relationships with migrants in attendance, linking individuals into collective campaigns and actively supporting the development of leadership skills such as public speaking and lobbying.

### **The Present – where is the Forum currently at?**

Over the past 4 years the Migrants Forum has met approximately 30 times during which over 1500 migrant workers participated in its activities and discussions. The Forum remains an important collective space for migrant workers and their families to access support and relevant information, to share their concerns and have their voices heard. It is also an important space for leaders to emerge and to actively lobby decisions makers and key stakeholders on critical concerns identified by migrant workers. At the same time the economic downturn is impacting on migrant workers and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Migrant workers are increasingly at risk of been made redundant, are experiencing difficulties accessing new jobs (particularly in the case of Non EU migrant workers on work permits), and are facing greater restrictions in the form of incoming work permit changes. MRCI has responded to the economic downturn by identifying 6 strategic priorities for the foreseeable future, one of which realties to the impact of the downturn on migrant workers and their families in Ireland. Future work of the Forum will need to take this direction and the current context into consideration.

**Table 1 Overview of Forums to date (2005-2010)**

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic of Forum</b>	<b>Estimated No's</b>
1.	22nd May 2005	Know Your Employment Rights	30
2.	13th Nov 2005	Understanding Your Taxes	40
3.	18th Dec 2005	Celebration of International Migrants Day	30
4.	19th Feb 2006	Social Welfare Rights and Entitlements	50
5.	26th May 2006	Family Reunification Policy and How to Apply	55
6.	14th May 2006	Long Term Residency - Discussion, Policy, Application	70
7.	2nd July 2006	Unfair Working Conditions - how to make a complaint	35
8.	24th Sept 2006	Immigration Residency and Protection bill - info and concerns	65
9.	12th Nov 2006	Tenant Rights - private rental sector	46
10.	17th Dec 2006	Annual Celebration International Migrants Day	70
11.	25th Feb 2007	Employment Permits Act 2006	100
12.	29th April 2007	Accessing Financial Services in Ireland	30
13.	10th June 2007	Policing in Ireland	30
14.	22nd July 2007	Immigration Issues for children of Non EU migrant workers	25
15.	2nd Sept 2007	Integration Policy Development in Ireland	21
16.	18th Nov 2007	Political parties in Power - key concerns facing migrant workers	60
17.	18th Dec 2007	Annual Celebration of International Migrants Day	100
18.	24th Feb 2008	Immigration residency and protection bill - opposition government parties	100
19.	11th May 2008	Policy Developments relevant to migrant workers	40

20.	29th June 2008	Limited mobility facing work permit holders in Ireland	40
21.	28th Sept 2008	Registering and Voting in the Local Elections	20
22.	16th Nov 2008	In dialogue with the Employment Permits Section	80
23.	14th Dec 2008	Celebrating International Migrants Day	90
24.	8th Feb 2009	Information Session on Redundancy	22
25.	19th April 2009	Information Session on Unemployment	50
26.	7th May 2009	A meeting of the Forum - burning issues	30
27.	24th May 2009	EU and Local Elections - meet the candidates	80
28.	16 <sup>th</sup> August 2009	Work Permit Changes and Long Term Residency/Citizenship Waits	60
29.	20 <sup>th</sup> September 2009	Recent Immigration Changes (Work Permit Changes announced)	70
30.	18 <sup>th</sup> October 2009	Celebrating Migrant Campaign Victories – Campaign to Stop the Work Permit Changes	120
31.	18 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	Annual Celebration of International Migrants Day	75
32.	28 <sup>th</sup> February 2010	Immigration Updates and Unemployment/Employment Support	50
33.	25 <sup>th</sup> April 2010	Campaign for Right to Change Employer	60
34.	8 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	Recession Session- setting up your own business & information/support for the unemployed	50

**Table 2 – Average attendance at the Migrants Forum**

Year	Average Attendance	No of Migrant Forum's organised
2005	33	4
2006	55	7
2007	52	7
2008	61	6
2009	55	8
2010	TBC	TBC

**Table 3 – Diversity at the Migrants Forum**

Year	Top 3 nationalities	Others strongly/consistently represented
2005	Philippines, Ukraine, Lithuania	Tanzania, Belarus, Russia, Belarus
2006	Philippines, Ukraine, Moldova	China, Russia, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Argentina, Pakistan, Slovakia, Indonesia, Lithuania, Zimbabwe, Poland,

		Malaysia, Slovakia
2007	Philippines, Ukraine, Pakistan	Morocco, Mauritius, Poland, Ukraine, Indonesia, Romania, Bangladesh, Egypt, Kenya, China, Lithuania, Armenia, Thailand
2008	Philippines, Ukraine, Pakistan - Bangladesh	Mauritius, Zimbabwe, China, Moldova, India, Belarus, Russia
2009	Philippines, Ukraine, Bangladesh	Moldova, South Africa, India, India, Pakistan, China, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Russia, Malawi, Morocco

**Table 4 – A sample of organisations who have participated in the Forum (2005-2010)**

<b>Name of Organisation</b>	<b>Organisation Type</b>
Impact	Trade Union
O'Connell Street CIC	Citizen Information Centre
Bank of Ireland	Financial Institute
Threshold	Housing rights organisation – community sector
Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)	Broader Civil Society legal organisation
Africa Centre	Community sector organisation
Community Gardai	State organisation, locally based
Office of Garda Ombudsman	State organisation
Immigrant Council of Ireland	Non Governmental Organisation
AKWIDA	Non Governmental Organisation