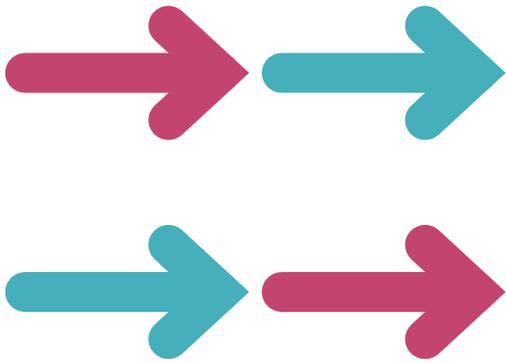
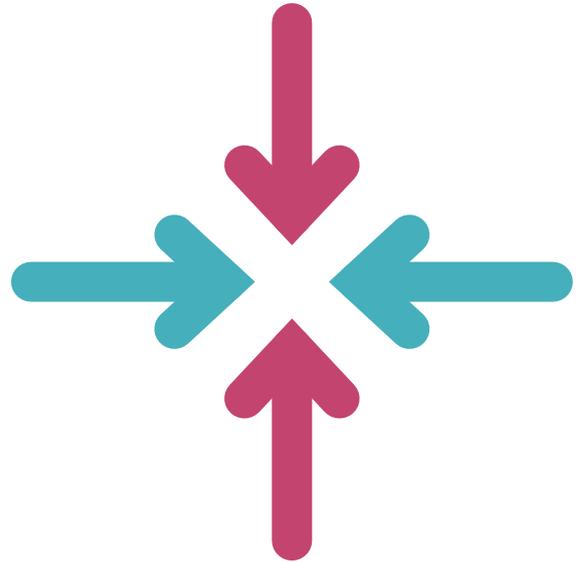
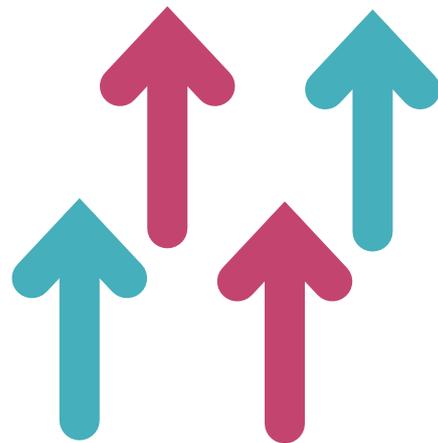


Access



Progress

Thrive



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Migrant Rights Centre Ireland

The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) is a national organisation working to promote the rights of migrant workers and their families at risk of exploitation, social exclusion and discrimination. We believe people should be able to move in safety and work with dignity.

Since 2001, MRCI has been working with migrant workers in unregulated precarious employment - low pay, poor working conditions, and insecure immigration status. Workers have brought into public view, exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion.

MRCI combines frontline support and strategic casework, with research, policy, advocacy and campaigning to achieve change. Our focus on collective action and organising with migrant workers aims to build stronger communities, better workplaces, and a fairer society for all.

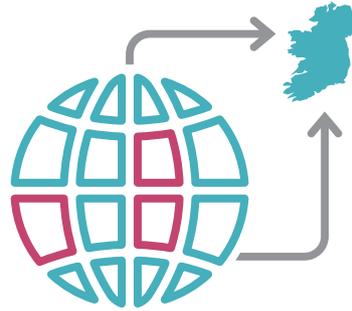
Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to info@mrci.ie

This publication is available at www.mrci.ie

Peer Research carried out by Mariaam Bhatti on behalf of Migrant Rights Centre Ireland - December 2020



An Choimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission



→ Introduction

Migration has always been and continues to be extremely positive for Ireland. The labour market is a key site for integration, and employment offers the single biggest opportunity for people to move out of a cycle of poverty and to fully contribute to society. Research in Ireland and across the European Union shows that ethnicity and nationality impact on access to and progression into the labour market¹.

Unequal or delayed access to the labour market and progression within employment places migrants at risk of social exclusion, and in the long run, undermines their quality of life and that of their families. Issues of labour market segmentation, discrimination, and low pay traps, unless addressed, will lead to poor outcomes for migrant communities.

This report, funded by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, aims to contribute to discussions and policy responses informing the lack of progression, underemployment and discrimination in the labour market, and it complements existing research in this area.

This paper goes behind the data and highlights the direct experiences of people from a migrant background living long term in Ireland, to better understand their labour market experiences and progression. It presents emerging themes on the barriers people face and the strategies employed to try to overcome these. Finally, it sets out key points of intervention, as recommended by workers, to inform better labour market outcomes in the future.



→ Methodology

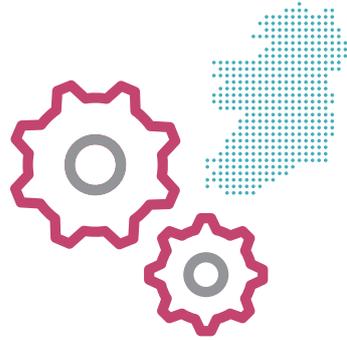
This is a small scale study focusing on the, often overlooked, but crucial contribution of people from a migrant background across a range of sectors in the Irish labour market. It does not claim to generalise, rather it brings to light a diversity of experiences and current data.

This research was carried out with 19 people working in manufacturing, human health and social work, accommodation and food services, administrative and support services. Participants were selected through outreach to migrant groups and networks, community organisations and trade unions creating a snowballing effect. The purpose of the research was explained to participants at the outset, with voluntary participation. The cost of transport was provided where necessary.

Structured in-depth interviews, consisting of 40 questions, were conducted between November 2019 and February 2020, with three additional interviews being conducted in September 2020. This research adopts a case study approach to more effectively capture and present the richness of participants' responses.

An advisory group made up of migrant workers and experts on the labour market, social inclusion, organisational psychology, employment rights and recruitment was established to oversee the research. The research does not take into account the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's working lives.

→ Irish Labour Market



The Irish Census 2016 shows that 17.3 percent of the population in Ireland was born abroad². Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures also show that 14.9 percent of the workforce are non-Irish nationals, with almost half employed in Food Services, Manufacturing Industries and Human Health and Social Work. Nearly half (46.9 percent) are classified as non-manual, manual skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workers, compared to 39.2 percent of Irish nationals³.

This research is situated in a labour market characterised by low pay, underemployment and precarious work, which disproportionately affect migrant workers. According to the Think-tank for Action on Social Change (TASC), one in four people work for low pay in Ireland⁴, and about 44% of workers are 'precariously employed'⁵. The Nevin Economic and Research Institute (NERI) also points to a hidden precarity in the Irish labour market⁶.

It is worth noting that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) identifies a markedly higher rate of underemployment in Ireland than in many other OECD countries, due to the high incidence of part-time employment⁷. Underemployment, however, also results in college-educated workers taking casual or lower skilled jobs that can offer more or continuous hours⁸, which features in respondents' experiences in this paper.

The Migrant Integration Policy Index (2020) identified labour market mobility in the Irish labour Market as below average for migrants, leaving workers much less supported than in any other EU countries⁹. In addition, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) carried out important research into pay gaps faced by migrant workers across 49 countries. It found that in the last five years the migrant pay gap has widened in Ireland to 21 per cent compared to 19 per cent in 2015¹⁰.

In tandem, a person's point of entry to the labour market and their immigration status can further compound precariousness. It is well documented that this has a significant impact in determining labour market outcomes¹¹. Despite some positive advancements prior to Covid-19, people still face many barriers in accessing and progressing within employment¹².

Research carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute into the impact of Ethnicity and Nationality in the Irish Labour Market showed that Black non-Irish people are 0.4 times as likely to be employed as White Irish and five times as likely to experience discrimination when seeking work. Black Irish people are twice as likely to experience discrimination seeking work and just under three and a half times as likely to experience discrimination in the workplace as White Irish people. Both Black Non-Irish and Black Irish people are much less likely to hold a managerial or professional job¹³.

It went on to identify that White EU-East nationals had no difference in employment rates, but that this group is more likely to experience discrimination in the workplace. Members of this group are also considerably less likely to occupy managerial and professional jobs.

The research also showed that Asian non-Irish groups do not differ from White Irish in terms of their overall employment rates but they are less likely to be in the top jobs. Amongst the reasons were lack of progression, inequality and underemployment which is consistent with the experiences of workers presented below.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, shortages in both skills and labour were becoming a feature of the Irish labour market, and vacancies remained high across all health and social care disciplines and in essential work such as retail, meat processing and in horticulture.

The full impact of the pandemic on the economy and labour market is yet to be fully determined and its long term impact understood. What is clear is that it is needed to correct mistakes of the past and that the State and employers must address structural inequalities that continue to exist in the labour market and shape people's lives.

→ Research Findings



Respondent Overview

The 19 participants have all lived in Ireland for a long time. The average length of residence in Ireland for participants was 12 years, with some people living for over 20 years in Ireland. 53 percent were female and 47 percent were male.

We spoke to people working in manufacturing, human health and social work, accommodation and food service, administrative and support services. All the participants had permission to work in the State. Nine were EU citizens, seven were naturalised Irish, and three were stamp four holders - all with full access to the labour market.

68 percent of the people who participated in the study live in urban areas. 32 percent were based in rural or semi-rural areas. 47 percent lived in the greater Dublin area, and the remaining lived in counties Clare, Waterford, Wexford, Cavan, Cork, Monaghan, Louth and Limerick.

The participants come from 12 different countries: Czech Republic, Kenya, Latvia, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka and the USA. Eight people held Master's Degrees, four had Bachelor's degrees (two of whom had two Bachelor's Degrees each), one person had a PhD, five held vocational qualifications and one had a secondary school certificate.

→ Emerging Themes



The research focused on participants' experiences in the labour market and their progression within it. We spoke to people who have lived in Ireland for many years and that have a diverse range of working experiences. The case studies illustrate the uniqueness and richness of people's working lives, the barriers people face, and the strategies employed to navigate the Irish labour market.

The research shows that many respondents have adapted and shifted their ambitions in response to the circumstances they find themselves in. Underemployment - working in jobs that did not fully utilise their skills and qualifications - was a key feature of people's experiences. Respondents expressed a lot of frustration at the lack of progression despite their best efforts and seeking additional support. Some respondents felt they had to "work twice as hard to get ahead".

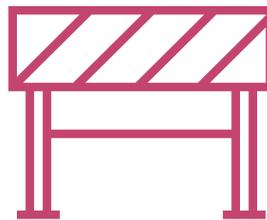
Lack of recognition of qualifications and experience (from outside of Ireland) by

employers, pay rates, terms and conditions, lack of promotional opportunities, and social capital, were recurring themes in people's ability to get ahead, whether at work, or when getting a foothold on the housing market or setting up a new business. The experience of discrimination was a common theme across the majority of respondents, both racially and in terms of gender, which people expressed as "something to be put up with".

It was very evident that whilst people struggled to find ways to realise their potential, all of the respondents were resilient and had a lot to offer. Interestingly, people pointed to important points of intervention - education and training, national and local employment support services, and significant people who made a difference in the trajectory of their working lives.

Carrying out meaningful work that people enjoyed also featured in their responses, which manifested as voluntary work for some. Work-life balance featured as a key factor in remaining in jobs that were flexible, but not highly paid. Feelings of being respected and valued at work were also a common theme in building self-confidence, feeling recognised and it influenced retention in workplaces.

→ Barriers to Progression



Immigration Status

Point of entry into the labour market is critical for migrant workers as it determines and shapes experiences and career progression. In turn the right to access the labour market is dependent on the immigration status a person holds. Many of the respondents are now Irish Citizens, but their immigration status has shifted and changed over time, which is not uncommon.

One respondent lived in Direct Provision for the first five years and was not economically active; another came on a tourist visa and later changed it to a student visa, followed by a work permit; others came via the work permit system; while some people had full mobility as EU nationals; finally, one person was undocumented for a 12 month period after arriving in the State. Immigration status is a constant worry in the lives of respondents and for some, it limited their negotiation power for better terms and conditions of employment. Some respondents identified problems such as work permits that tie you to an employer.

For the majority, movement or progression in the labour market was extremely difficult until people either successfully secured a stamp four or citizenship. When people had a more secure immigration status, they chose to leave poor employment. However, having EU citizenship, a secure immigration status or citizenship did not improve the job prospects of some respondents, as a range of other barriers existed. All of these varied experiences shaped how people engaged with and progressed in the labour market and are significant contributing factors to their labour market outcomes.

Working Conditions

Terms and conditions of employment also featured strongly with pay as a recurring theme. Some workers were salaried and others were paid per hour or per weight of production. A common feature was working long term in entry level roles or being paid low wages, despite years of experience, leading to deep frustration.

For some workers, as they progressed, their wages increased, but, for many, this was still below average wages for Ireland. For some, this resulted in not being able to get onto the property market and making sacrifices in other areas of their lives, leading to a direct and negative impact on their life.

In terms of job security, there was a range of experiences. This included long spells of underemployment, working on temporary contracts and, for some, a cycle of unemployment. Those in public sector jobs had better contracts and job security, with some attributing this to being a member of a trade union.

Some workers have been with their employers for a very long period; three respondents have been with the same employer since they came to Ireland. Long-service recognition was a recurring issue for people in the same job for many years. Others have struggled to get work beyond repeated temporary contracts. Some of the respondents have not progressed regarding pay, or promotion, and see no opportunity for such in the future.

Sector specific barriers also came to light. In restaurants, it is common for workers to be employed in low paid positions whilst carrying out managerial tasks for long periods without being recognised as such in terms of pay and job title; in food processing and horticulture, where pay is generally low, there are high incidences of bullying and discrimination and a lack of recognition for years of service; and in healthcare, where work is generally low paid, precarious and with poor progression routes.

Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination featured in all respondent interviews and emerged as a key theme across the majority of case studies. More specifically, racial and gender discrimination featured alongside perceived favouritism and bullying. This was experienced across all sectors and to varying degrees of impact. Racism and sexism were identified as a common occurrence that was often justified as 'teasing' and 'joking'.

Some respondents reported being passed over for promotion, and not receiving pay parity with other workers in similar roles. However, not many workers followed up with official complaints. Worryingly, people felt that this was just part of their working lives and while some addressed the situation to varying degrees of success, others felt that it was not worth it, which included leaving their places of employment to find better work. One respondent was particularly concerned about the intersection of race, gender and age discrimination in finding future employment.

Social Capital

Some of the respondents felt that in the early years of their working lives they had very limited social capital: connections to people to find out about 'the good jobs', and social networks that are built up over time were absent. Long standing relations or family ties which bring advantages and privileges are not there when a person moves countries. Coupled with the absence of networks, this places people with a migrant background at an inherent disadvantage and was evident in respondent's early experiences.

Underemployment

Despite their experience and qualifications, 70 percent of the participants were underemployed - working in jobs that did not fully utilise their skills and qualifications.

People qualified in humanities and social sciences, health sciences, economics, information technology and human resources, were working in social care and healthcare, cleaning, food processing, hospitality and administration, unable to fully utilise their skills and qualifications. There was an evident discrepancy between the qualifications held by workers and those required in their jobs or the sectors they worked in.

Recognition of Skills and Experience

While every worker interviewed had different experiences of the Irish labour market, for the majority, the skills and experience acquired in their home countries did not translate to the Irish jobs market.

However, of those with trade-specific qualifications or vocational training, two thirds worked in the sector they were trained in and in a role that matched their qualifications. This might suggest that vocational training offers hands-on experience that equips people with 'work-ready' experience.

Language Acquisition

Speaking English was identified as a barrier to progression at work, to negotiating better terms and conditions, to accessing information and training, and it was a perceived barrier to moving into managerial or supervisory roles.



→ Dana

Horticultural Worker



Dana first came to Ireland 19 years ago from Latvia on a work permit to work in a farm as a mushroom picker. Five years later Latvia joined the EU and she no longer needed a permit to work.

Dana currently works six days per week. Her hours depend on the work required and could vary from six hours to a max of 16 hours depending on the harvest. Dana is on the same pay as other workers in a similar role. She is paid per kg which varies depending on sizes of mushrooms and speed of picking. Her last pay rise was three years ago when her employer paid a few more cents per punnet.

Favouritism and discrimination existed in Dana's previous work place. The supervisors were more helpful towards people of their own nationality, who rarely got warnings whereas other nationalities got warnings all the time for the same mistake.

"I did not complain as I felt I would not be listened to."

Despite feeling that she has not progressed regarding pay, training or promotion, she is satisfied with her current job.

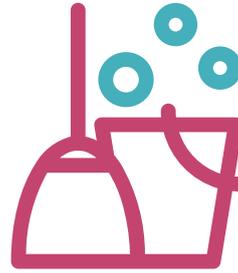
"This job gives me flexible working hours, its 20 kilometres from my home in a car. I work with just five other people where there are five mushroom houses, each on two levels. This is better compared to previous jobs where I worked with 150 people in mushroom houses on six levels, which was physically and psychologically hard."

Dana has not had gaps between jobs, which she attributes to being experienced and understands the mushroom sector.

Dana feels respected in her current job, but it has taken her time to get this place. Her employer doesn't make many demands and allows her to structure her work in the way that works best for her. This flexibility has allowed her to take classes to improve her English.



→ Peter Cleaning Team Manager



Peter came to Ireland in 2004 from Poland. For the past 15 years he has worked mostly with the same employer- ten years as a cleaning operative and for the past five years as a team supervisor.

In 2010/11 Peter trained as a security guard as he hoped to change employment. He found it hard to do so and thinks it was because of his low level of English. Three years later he eventually got a security job, but left after seven months as he found it repetitious and slow and he did not like night shifts. Peter was able to return to his original job as he had worked occasional shifts.

Peter realised that he needed to improve his English to find different work. In 2017 he took English classes at weekends and was promoted to team supervisor.

“I think this was due to the fact that I had been in the job for such a long time and understand the role and its requirements enough to be able to supervise and manage a team.”

Peter is happy with his pay and role as it offers him flexibility. He drives a company van which he can bring home, reducing costs on transport. His last pay rise was three years ago. He feels that he has progressed well and wouldn't change his career path.

He had some poor experiences in employment, such as being asked to do extra work or getting a last minute call at the end of his day to work late. Initially he did as asked, but later learned to refuse when he noticed the demands were becoming more regular. When he raised the issue, his employer issued a memo to all workers that in some cases workers may be asked to do extra work. He was however no longer asked to do things at the last minute.

“I realised then that if workers don't stand up for themselves at work, some employers try to squeeze out as much as they can out of workers.”

Peter has experienced subtle racism in the workplace.

“Irish colleagues, including some senior people at work, make jokes that don't sit well with me, making jokes about Poland lacking certain basics. In these cases I have always been able to tell people who make such ill-informed or prejudiced comments that they are wrong to think the way they do about Poland or Polish people.”

At other times, Peter decided not to pursue the argument because it happened so many times.



→ Mary Social Worker



Mary, originally from Nigeria, has lived in Ireland for 17 years and worked as a social worker for the last eight years. She is an Irish Citizen. She lived in Direct Provision for five years without the right to work, and kept busy volunteering with the Tidy Towns project.

Mary has a Bachelor's Degree in Guidance and Counselling from Nigeria but has not used her qualifications in Ireland. She has worked in retail and in care after completing a social care course. She has always been strategic in her approach to finding work, researching ways to increase her earnings. She was never fixated on a particular career in her life, but wanted to earn what she considered to be a decent salary.

While working in the care sector, she completed a one year higher diploma in Social Policy. Mary attributes her breakthrough to social work to a recruiter coming to her college to give a talk about jobs in the public sector, including social workers and explaining the qualifications necessary, the pay scale and the application process.

“Upskilling might not be possible for many migrants while they are working, especially if you earn the minimum wage and have families. But I was determined to increase my earnings, so I made this sacrifice.”

“There was also an element of luck for me as the government had just introduced a new policy that required every child in State care to be assigned a social worker, resulting in new opportunities right at the time when I was finishing my studies. I had also gained relevant transferable experience from the social care industry where I worked as a carer for four years.”

Mary came fourth in the interview out of hundreds and her career as a social worker began.

Mary feels that she has progressed well. She is happy with her current position as she has flexibility in her current job and thinks a higher role will take a toll on her family life, which will keep her from doing other things she finds important outside work. She set up a food business a year ago. She states that she is happy with her current work-life balance.

She attributes her success and finding her career to not being fixated on a particular profession, and, therefore, regards herself as open minded. She also says she was determined to get a secure and well-paying job and could have ended in any job that would give her that. However, she made sure to find passion in whichever job she would end up in.

Mary says she has experienced the 'go back to your country' kind of racism, but has learnt to live with it and does not see it as having impacted on her professional journey. She does, however, feel that the first five years when she was not allowed to work as an asylum seeker was a form of discrimination, as it impacted negatively on only one group more than it did on others.



→ **Ramy** Healthcare Assistant



Ramy is originally from Sri Lanka and has lived in Ireland for 14 years. He holds a BSc. in Human Resources Management and a postgraduate qualification in Computer Applications.

When he arrived in Ireland, he sought work in the field he is qualified in but was unsuccessful.

“I discovered through my community that I could do short training courses in care and start working straight away. I realised that there were many jobs in the care sector and that I just needed to find a good company.”

After retraining, he was able to work as a healthcare assistant. He has never used his prior qualifications in the Irish labour market. He has worked as a Healthcare Assistant for the last 12 years.

Ramy has accepted this situation as his work gives him flexibility for family life.

→ **Vivienne** Social Care Worker



Vivienne came to Ireland 17 years ago. She has worked in the social care field for eight years, as a social care team leader for four years, and as a project worker for four years before that. This experience enabled her to go on to study social work, pursue a career in the sector, and become a team leader three years ago.

Although she is now settled and happy to be in a secure job, she shared the setbacks she faced after graduating. She became unwell and lost a year applying for jobs and found that the gap between her and people she graduated with was widening as the majority had found work. It took her another two years to find the work she wanted, during which she did voluntary work.

“As a result I’m behind in the rate of pay with my colleagues who got work straight away. Had I not searched for work for a further two years I probably would be only one scale behind. The pay bracket is really important when looking to qualify for certain things such as a mortgage.”

She feels that her breakthrough came when she sought assistance from her community welfare officer who helped her with coaching and guidance. In tandem, her employment came at a time when there was a change of policy and the government mandated recruitment of social workers. She recognises that being in the care sector, which was professionally close to social work, helped her to eventually get the training and job she wanted.

→ Labour Market Strategies



Agency of Workers

All respondents employed a range of strategies in their labour market journey to respond to their situations. While the case studies show the agency, resourcefulness and resilience of migrant workers which played an important part in their professional progression, the structural barriers that many encounter are proof that government policies and interventions are key to help determine outcomes in the labour market.

Although facing many limitations that were out of their control, these workers went above and beyond to progress in their careers, and had to make personal sacrifices in terms of private, family and working lives. Some of the respondents were satisfied in their employment, but this satisfaction was despite just pay and promotion and was linked to flexibility at work.

Upskilling and Retraining

While some respondents had limited strategies, others were more strategic in their approach to finding work and a career path. Goals were initially set and re-defined throughout people's working lives. Some researched pay and conditions, got advice and sought out knowledgeable people about what the best sectors were to work in and how to make a move to a better job. This was to varying degrees of success.

Education also played a key role in people's strategies to navigate the labour market. From learning English, to re-training as social workers, health care assistants, as security personnel, doing courses in manual handling, occupational health and safety, interview and CV preparation, all of which demonstrate a group of people eager to get ahead with an adaptable approach to the labour market.

Changing Jobs and Sectors

Some of the respondents made reference to the need to be flexible in response to the labour market and to being open to change and utilising skills in a transferable way, to either move sectors or jobs. For some this worked well as their skills were in demand, but for others, this initiated a cycle of unemployment or underemployment.

Some people re-trained for a specific sector, but when they took up work, it was not what they had envisaged. Many ended up returning to their previous sector as they realised their experience and skills were more valuable there. Others understood that changing sectors meant that they would go to the bottom of that sector in pay and position, and favoured staying where they were.

Work-Life Balance

Respondents are all working a long time in the Irish labour market and have built up connections and experience and developed their social capital. Therefore, there was a greater emphasis on work-life balance and additional kinds of recognition. For many workers there are trade-offs between pay, promotion and progression.

Proximity to work, having flexibility in their working arrangements, working in smaller versus larger companies, being valued at work, and other benefits, for example having access to a company car, meant that people took decisions not just based on salary, but on a range of other factors that facilitate their work-life balance, family lives and responsibilities. For some, fulfilment meant taking up volunteering jobs, caring for family, or starting a new business.



→ Lisa

Pastry Chef



Lisa, originally from Mexico, has been living in Ireland for 12 years. She first came to study English. Two years later, she changed to De Facto status and now holds Irish citizenship. She had a culinary degree from Mexico and pastry chef qualification from Spain.

Lisa has over eight years' experience working as a pastry chef in Ireland. She has held five jobs since arriving in Ireland, spending a maximum of two years in each one, changing jobs that would provide better pay and conditions. Lisa currently works Monday to Friday, for an average of 42 hours a week and earns €32 euro per hour, the third on a five-tier pay scale.

Lisa feels she has progressed and has more responsibilities now compared to when she started or in previous jobs and attributes this to her "keenness to learn new things and adding new things to the menu". She has taken extra responsibilities because "it is different kind of work and that it is not uncommon to be asked to stay three or four hours longer on busy days".

She deals with suppliers, deliveries and food costings and has managerial responsibilities without extra pay. She has not had a pay raise in her current job due to a change of ownership.

Lisa has experienced discrimination and bullying at work. She finds it difficult, however, to define her experience as discrimination because it happened so often and she grew used to it.

"The first five years in particular were not easy due to my low levels of English, but it later got better with experience."

Lisa was often teased and made fun of at work because of her low level of English.

"I have the accent of a 'woman from Latin America' and I realised that in Ireland people make jokes about that. I think this was a combination of Latin America not having a good reputation, and my colleague being a 'macho-man type' who often made jokes when he heard my accent. I felt bad at first, like I was being victimised and bullied and it made me unhappy, particularly because of the amount of time you spend at work, there is little opportunity to avoid it."

Lisa had a range of different experiences across the restaurant sector. Victimisation, bullying and looking for better pay, were the main reasons she has left jobs in the past.

"There are many chef jobs in Ireland, so it never took me long to find the next job."

Lisa feels respected in her current job and overall would not change her progression path except maybe taking more courses in restaurant management.



→ Susan Healthcare Assistant



Susan, originally from Nigeria, has lived in Ireland for 18 years and is an Irish citizen. She holds a BA in Mass Communication with seven years' experience in Nigeria. She was unable to find work in this area in Ireland as she was told that she was not qualified or had enough Irish experience.

Susan is the primary breadwinner for her family and has found work in the social care sector. She graduated over five years ago with a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation and Disability Studies but has worked as a Healthcare Assistant ever since. She has been in an entry level job for the last 15 years. She describes herself as able and steadfast and notes that her employer is aware of this.

She has talked to her manager about opportunities to grow within her company.

"I feel I am trained to think critically and want to fully utilise my skills in research and policy, but I was told there were no opportunities for that. There are few opportunities for carers or healthcare assistants to progress or grow regardless of their years of service or any upskilling they may have done. I am one of the best caregivers my employer has."

Susan earns €16 an hour due to trade union negotiations, and would like the sector to adopt a promotion system after years of service, which would make a huge difference. Susan works part time hours (20 hours a week) to provide care for a family member. As a result she has stopped looking for full time roles, but occasionally looks for suitable roles that can accommodate her caring duties in the same way that her current job does. She has a good work-life balance, which helps her situation.

Susan sought advice from a range of people, including a senior disability expert, a Senator, people in human resources, and Job Clubs for CV advice to advance her career. Overall, however, she does not feel that she has progressed well professionally. On one occasion she was overlooked for a promotion when applying for an internal higher paying role. The job was offered to someone from outside the organisation with less experience.

"I did not understand why this had happened, I was not given feedback that I was not doing well in the job. I decided to leave after that."

To better utilise her skills, Susan volunteers with a women's organisation.

"This gives me the opportunity for the personal growth that my job does not provide, so I feel I have progressed personally."



→ Julie Office Administrator



Julie, an American-Iranian, came to Ireland 10 years ago. At the time of our interview she was working as an administrator in a research unit of a university. She has a Master's Degree in Public Health with seven years' experience in the public health sector in the United States.

Julie held various immigration status in Ireland - tourist, volunteer and student visas. Julie moved back to the USA and returned to Ireland a year later on a work permit with a non-profit organisation. She gained Irish citizenship in early 2020.

Julie found it difficult to find work that matched her qualifications and experience.

"In my last role I received lower pay than my peers who were considerably younger than me, with very little experience. My manager voiced disdain for my graduate training from the US and told a colleague in my presence that people with 'her' training shouldn't be able to practice public health in this country."

She was not able to raise the issue with her manager as scheduled meetings were repeatedly cancelled until the situation reached a point where Julie felt she had to leave.

Her manager from another job did not treat women in general with respect. She found it challenging to work in an environment that was not safe psychologically. Julie looked into filing a bullying complaint, but was discouraged and dissuaded from it because it did not seem worth it, as nothing had been done with previous complaints.

Julie doesn't feel that she has progressed in the way she would have expected to. She has had a number of temporary roles due to funding constraints. She has not been promoted despite applying for roles. Although she has no concrete evidence that she has been discriminated against, she suspects she has lost out on roles because of not being Irish or not having a personal connection to the job applied for. She also finds it interesting that even though she grew up Muslim, she is often asked whether she is Jewish but can't say whether this has any bearing.

Julie has employed a number of strategies to improve her employment prospects. She has availed of numerous free training opportunities, consulted many job coaches, attended CV workshops with the local employment services, got advice from recruitment agencies and a therapist, all of which she has taken into account. She also takes on voluntary work between jobs but still thinks her employment prospects don't seem to improve.

Now in her late 40s, Julie raised concerns and worries about age-ism, which could be a barrier to employment. She wants to progress in her career and is applying for more senior positions, with greater responsibility and better pay but this has not proved successful so far.

Julie feels that she has had a great work-life balance in particular in the last four years, however, she thinks this has had more to do with her husband's support. She generally feels that she was respected by colleagues and now she volunteers with the Education and Training Board, which brings more fulfilment to her life.



→ Jack

Agri-Food

General Operative



Jack has been living in Ireland for over two decades. He first came as a trainee supervisor in food production. At the time he was working as a welder in Southern Africa and had vocational training in this area. He moved to work permit before later qualifying for citizenship.

Jack has been working as a General Operative since he arrived in Ireland.

"I work Monday to Friday between 35 and 40 hours per week or until the work allocated for the day is finished. I currently earn a living wage. I have just had an increase of a couple of euros this time. When I asked for a raise, I was told that you 'are being paid enough for your country'."

He feels he should be on the highest band or level of pay based on his years of service.

Jack feels that he has not progressed in his work. He has never been promoted, and he feels that there are few opportunities to become a supervisor. Over the years in this job, he has trained some people from other countries who were later promoted to supervisory roles. He thinks that not having enough supervisory experience and 'the colour of our skin' are the main reasons he hasn't progressed. He feels favouritism plays a huge part in who becomes a supervisor. He did professional development training at work and applied for a position he thought matched the training but did not get it. Someone else with less experience in the company got it.

Jack feels that to date 'everything has been a battle' and that he has not had an opportunity to progress despite being proactive, upskilling with evening classes, and asking for a raise or a promotion.

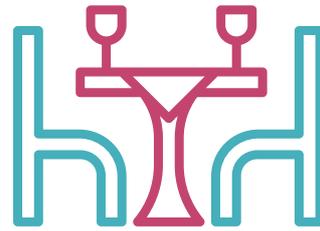
"In retrospect, based on my experience of work, I think I should have sought a job that would have allowed me to continue metal work, something I hope to eventually get back to. I'm upskilling in welding to get an Irish qualification. This move I feel will help me reduce the stress levels."

Jack has not engaged any professional career advisors or local employment services. He says this is mainly due to the hours he works.



→ Juma

Restaurant Manager



Originally from Morocco, Juma worked as a travel agent before moving to Ireland. He arrived on a work permit to work in a busy family-owned restaurant. He has worked in this restaurant for 20 years in a couple of roles. Juma is now an Irish citizen. He holds a BA in Linguistics and a BSc in Project Management.

Juma initially worked in the back office for the first two years, supporting staff to solve issues. He was given responsibility as a manager although it wasn't official until 10 years ago. Juma is happy with his annual salary, which is commensurate with his experience and industry pay for his role. Juma works in an environment with a mix of many nationalities and feels that it is inclusive.

His working hours are flexible and he feels he has a good work-life balance, as it works well for his family circumstances. Juma says his restaurant 'does not have that structure' on promotions and pay rises, but he is rewarded with bonuses when his creativity or innovation increases sales. He feels fortunate that he has not had to send a CV in a long time.

Juma has thought about changing jobs when he saw some of his friends in IT get a higher salary. He would be able to save more. But he decided the trade-off was not worth it, as his current job offers him flexibility and opportunities to showcase his ideas, and, most importantly, he realised that the entry-level salary would be less than what he is currently earning.

With the experience of running a restaurant accumulated in the last 20 years, he feels ready to set up his own restaurant to secure a future for himself and his family. He is 20 years in the rental market, and feels the only opportunity to own a home is to start a business.

However, Juma feels 'helpless' when it comes to securing finance for a start-up business although he says at one stage he got a business plan together and applied for a loan, which was approved by the bank based on his and his prospective partner's combined income.

"My income alone would not qualify, especially as landlords require 15 to 20 year leases. It is risky if the business doesn't work out unless I get another partner."

He identifies the main barriers to setting up a business as "needing to have good money to set up a restaurant in a good location.

I think my lack of familial and social networks for things such as guarantor, and that I don't own property in Ireland means it's hard to raise the seed capital."

→ Conclusion



This research aimed to go behind the data to make a useful contribution to understanding the experiences in the labour market of people from a migrant background living long term in Ireland. It shows the range of factors - ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, recognition of qualifications by employers, underemployment, gender, language acquisition, along with inherent labour market inequalities – low pay and discrimination, all coalesce to impact on progression.

The research also shows adaptable and flexible workers, who have shifted their personal goals, retrained and upskilled to respond to the dynamics and structural inequalities of the labour market, illustrating their resilience and drive. But frustration at the lack of progression despite best efforts also came to the fore, with underemployment a key feature of people's experiences.

The experience of discrimination was a worryingly common theme both racially and in terms of gender. Harassment and bullying are also areas of concern. The lack of recognition of experience and qualifications by employers; poor pay rates and structures including long service recognition; lack of promotional opportunities; and limited social capital, all contributed to feelings of not being able to progress and thrive in work. Work-life balance featured as a key factor in remaining in jobs that were flexible, but not highly paid.

All respondents had a huge amount to offer and were committed to their work and invested in their lives in Ireland. Having employment that is decent and fulfilling is what all workers aspire to. However, realising rights does not just happen; it needs laws, policies, interventions and intention. This research presents important insights and lessons for employers, recruiters, support services, migrants and the State to enable people to progress and thrive in work and their lives.

→ Worker Recommendations on Interventions and Supports



The labour market offers both solutions and problems and navigating it can be complex. Creating inclusive workplaces includes a working environment where all workers feel valued and listened to and are given the opportunities to grow and develop. This enables workers to be more productive, innovative and improves retention.

Workers have identified a set of recommendations below, which they believe would make a real and valuable difference to their working lives. These are relevant to employers, educators, trainers, recruitment specialists, local employment services, migrant workers and the State.

Preparation and Activation for Work

1. Recognition of Experience and Qualifications

Respondents felt it is unfair that employers did not recognise experience and qualifications attained in another country, leading to a loss of skills and potential. This was a recurring theme and one that people felt needed to be addressed, so as to address underemployment and so that workers coming after them would not be in the same position.

2. Early Career Guidance

For many people initially, it took them time to figure out the Irish labour market and whether they should pursue their career based on their skills and experience, or if they should go on a new career path. Workers recommended identifying early on what is useful to the Irish jobs market, through better information on career advancement and outcomes targeted at migrants at early stages in their professional development.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of being able to present their experience and skills in a relevant way when applying for jobs and at interview stage. It was identified that this was a specific skill which people needed assistance with which would enable progression.

3. Mentorship and Coaching

Many respondents identified the importance of being strategic in searching for work, but that this was linked to getting additional advice and support on what was strategic for each individual's circumstances.

Workers identified the need to invest in mentorship programmes. This included matching both newly arrived migrants and people living long-term with mentors across a range of sectors and not just in

higher skilled sectors. Mentorship programmes could provide a match for people who had progressed and had insights into their sector or industry across a range of nationalities.

4. Education and Training

As the majority of workers did not work in the field they had initially trained for, people saw the need for retraining and skill development. It was also identified that this should be strategic and informed, so as to ensure investment in the right courses and learning opportunities. While acknowledging a wide range of courses and training on offer, it is important to be able to match future desires with courses that supported a specific career trajectory.

5. Immigration Status

People need to be able to move quickly within the Immigration system to have full access to the labour market. This is key to labour market progression and requires a full overhaul of the work permit system so people can move from temporary to secure immigration status with better rights at a faster pace. It is also critical for employers to understand immigration status and right to work entitlements.

6. Employments Services and Recruitment Agencies

People noted that they often received conflicting advice from recruiters and recruitment agencies on how to present themselves. Some were told to omit certain aspects from their CV, particularly their country of origin, referencing that employers don't care about this experience or languages spoken. Workers recommended the need to raise awareness of the value and skills people have, along with information about immigration status and rights.

Progression, Advancement and Inclusive Workplaces

1. Pay Scales and Long Service

Where pay scales and structures did not exist, respondents identified an urgent need to have these developed with workers, with a clear and transparent process in place.

Long service was also a feature, and workers wanted to be recognised through pay, time off or other forms of recognition, if promotion and advancement were not available. Having this at a sectoral level was thought to be a good idea, so that it could take in both smaller and larger workplaces, which would involve trade unions.

2. Employer Support for English Acquisition

Many workers highlighted the need to learn English and to have specific English for the workplace. Often due to long working hours and in workplaces where English was not the main working language, some workers found it was difficult to attain a good level of English.

Workers felt that this should be supported by employers through time off for training. For many, attending English language classes further connected people to their local communities, and they found this to be beneficial on a number of levels, but needed better support.

3. Skills in the Workplace

Many people felt that developing skills in the workplace happened in a number of ways, through on-the-job development and through training. Having a specific focus on sectoral specific training which was supported by both the State and employers was recommended, so that workers were given time off and supported to complete training courses.

4. Progression and Management

Workers felt that some people in managerial and supervisory roles were not properly trained in equality practices and that this led to discrimination and unequal treatment of workers. Workers felt that the approach taken was not one of development of staff but of scrutiny. Having structures and processes which enables people to talk through and resolve issues was one aspect that people felt would enhance their working lives.

Workers wanted to see the introduction of specific in-work supervisory and management training and development programmes, to support progression. This would go some way to addressing the imbalance of migrants and diverse representation in a supervisory and managerial roles and structures in workplaces.

Where workers take on extra responsibility this needed to be recognised by pay and title and that employers need to make this explicit in workplaces.

5. Transparency in Internal Recruitment and Promotion

A common theme was the lack of opportunity for promotion, which is a feature of some sectors as opportunities do not open up regularly. Where and when they do, workers want to see more transparency in the recruitment process, and if unsuccessful, procedures for getting feedback on areas for improvement. Without this, it leads to long term job dissatisfaction and in some cases people choose to leave the company, which impacts on retention.

6. Addressing Discrimination

Where discrimination, racism, bullying and harassment were experienced in people's work places, they wanted to be assured that this could be raised and that it would be dealt with in a fair manner. They wanted to have clear, transparent and accountable processes, that people knew how to trigger, and they would not be further victimised for this. Workers wanted to see mandatory training on this for all workers during their induction and in an ongoing way.

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