

# Migrant Rights Centre Ireland Annual Report



2023





# Contents

<b>Message from the Chair</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>Our Vision, Mission, and Values</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>Our Impact – at a glance</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Advancing Rights</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Empowering Migrant Workers</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Growing Reach</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Team, Governance and Funders</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Financial Review</b>	<b>24</b>



## Message from the Chair

**The cost-of-living and housing crisis continued in 2023 putting pressure on low paid migrant workers. The war in Ukraine entered its 2nd year with nearly 100,000 refugees arriving in Ireland by the end of 2023.**

In a year where the National Action Plan Against Racism was launched, a small number of far-right actors continued to spread hate. Politicians and the media repeated their frames amplifying their message. The violent events that unfolded in Dublin on November 23rd, sent shockwaves through the communities we work with. Throughout the year MRCI continued to support the Hope and Courage Collective to tackle hate and disinformation.

By the end of 2023, an additional 28,000 new employment permits were issued. This year more and more people sought our help to change employers due to exploitation. Worrying trends of exploitation are emerging across a range of sectors - mushrooms, metal fabrication, dairy farms, truck drivers and in health care. We continued to provide quality and high levels of casework supports to migrant workers and their families.

This has also led to an increase in Trafficking for Labour Exploitation in assessments. A new issue emerging is people being charged exploitive recruitment fees to work in Ireland. The Sexual Offences & Human Trafficking Bill to reform National Referral Mechanism advanced to report stage and now includes an appeal process. However, the Trafficking in Person (TIP) report saw Ireland stay at tier two.

We continue to advocate for a fairer system for people on General Employment Permits (GEPs). This year we focused our efforts on incoming legislation, Employment Permits (Consolidation and Amendment) Bill, to secure change of employer. This means that GEPs holders will have the right to freely change employer after two years instead of five enabling workers to better challenge exploitation and sub-standard conditions of employment.



This year also saw a greater need to respond to multiple issues and pivot to new campaigns, such as, immigration checks, family reunion and fees. New leaders have stepped up and are driving change in these areas. Over 14,500 people signed our Fair Frees petition calling for a reduction to the extortionate cost of the Irish Residence Permit card fee. Over 500 supporters participated in email action to the Minister for Justice to Stop unjust Immigration checks. All this while engaging and supporting workers in meat factories nationwide to claim their rights.

All these important achievements would not be possible without the amazing work of the staff, team, board, volunteers, community members, funders, donors, and supporters, and we sincerely thank

them all. We want to give special thanks to all who gave so generously in 2023 and took part in the Challenge for Change.

We look forward to 2024 and to advancing rights with work permit holders, including the right to work for dependents and spouses and immediate right to family reunion. We will continue to train, coach and mentor workers to organise in vulnerable and at-risk sectors to claim and uphold their rights.

We will meet the challenges of 2024 head on, with hope and determination.

**Lucy Peprah**  
Chair MRCI



# Our Vision, Mission, and Values

From its inception, MRCI's emphasis on community work has been critical in bringing about the empowerment and participation of migrant workers on issues that concern them.

Community work is concerned with addressing the root causes of inequality through collective action for change. Core to our theory of change is supporting migrants in low wage work to organise, engage in and lead on issues that affect their lives. We operate a sophisticated structure that combines a front-line service, building the capacity of migrant workers by using a community work process, and engaging in strategic public awareness, policy, and advocacy.

## Our Vision



Our vision is for an open, equal, just and diverse society where migrant workers and their families can move, work and live in dignity.

## Our Values



- People closest to the struggle are closest to the solution.
- People acting collectively make change possible.
- People lead when they have the tools to do so.

## Our Mission

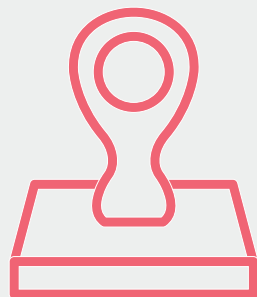


Grounded in social justice, anti-racism and equality, our mission is to empower migrant workers in low-paid and precarious work to secure and advance their rights through collective action.





# Our Impact — at a glance



9,000

Over 9,000 people have been granted an immigration status through the regularisation scheme by end of 2023



3,711

MRCI's free and confidential Drop-in Centre provided 3,711 information and casework supports to migrant workers and their families.



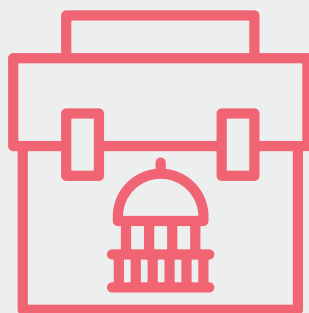
14,500

Fair Fees campaign petition gained over 14,500 signatures

72%



Our supporter network grew by 72%, through campaigns and people taking action



Secured Ministerial Agreement in the Employment Permits Bill to make it easier for general permit holders to change employer



36

Engaged workers across 36 meat factories nationwide, fostering meaningful connections, and establishing supportive relationships



21

Screened, assessed, and assisted 21 people where Trafficking for Labour Exploitation was suspected



# Advancing Rights

## Drop In Centre



During 2023, MRCI's Drop-in Centre (DIC) continued to operate via telephone, website, email, video calls and face-to-face appointments. The DIC continues to be very busy and is a critical access point for migrants seeking support.

## Highlights in 2023



3,711

Information and casework supports on 3,711 cases

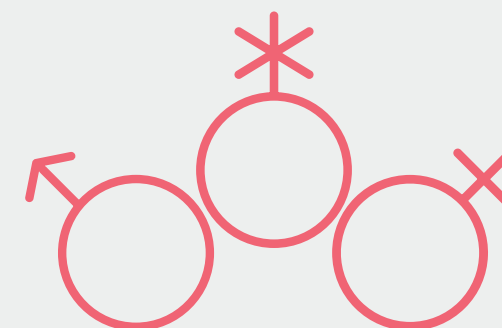


428

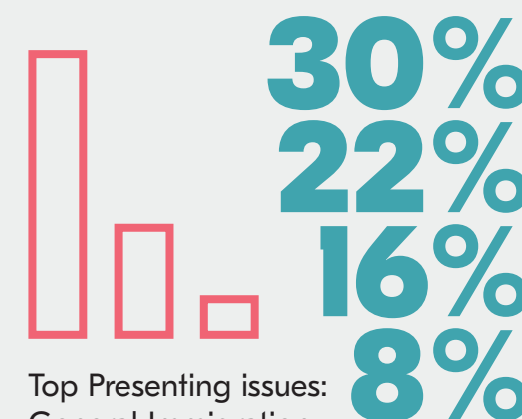
Provided in-depth advocacy supports on 428 cases

123

Supported people from 123 nationalities.



Gender: Female 44%; Male 56% and Non-Binary 0.2%



Top Presenting issues: General Immigration 30%, Regularisation 22%, Employment and Work Permits 16%, Family Reunification 8%



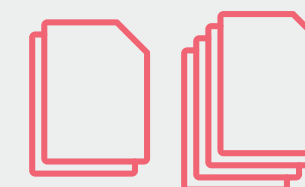
Supported 32 people through MRCI's hardship fund



Provided workers in mushrooms, meat processing, restaurants, metal fabrication, health care, retail and dairy farms with high level supports.



63% of cases were successfully closed



100% increase in people with work permits seeking our assistance with employment rights breaches



# Tackling Exploitation and Trafficking for Labour Exploitation

Exploitation of migrant workers grew in 2023 with high instances emerging in restaurants and the agri-food sector. MRCI saw a 100% increase in people with work permits seeking our assistance with employment rights breaches.

New growing trends in exploitive recruitment of non-EU workers emerged with people paying excessive fees of €15,000 to €30,000 for a permit to come to work in Ireland.



## Highlights in 2023

- Assessed, screened, and supported 21 people who presented with signs of trafficking for labour exploitation.
- Delivered casework and representation support, including handling significant claims before the Workplace Rights Commission and secured thousands of euros in recovered wages.
- Sexual Offences & Human Trafficking Legislation to reform National Referral Mechanism advanced to report stage. The Bill now includes an appeal process and should include only a reasonable grounds standard for identification of victims.
- MRCI provided training to representative bodies of the Roma and Ukrainian communities to identify signs of Trafficking for Labour Exploitation and to raise awareness in their communities.

# Justice for the Undocumented



Many people were unfairly left out or missed the criteria by the smallest of margins for the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants Scheme 2022. In 2023 MRCI focussed on ensuring they were supported to secure alternative channels to regularisation where possible.

The scheme allowed undocumented people who met the criteria (4 years undocumented or 3 years undocumented if you had children, or 2 years in the International Protection process) to get a residence permission (stamp 4) in Ireland.

## Highlights in 2023

- Over 9,000 people had been granted a status through the scheme by the end of 2023.
- Supported over 50 appeals and additional evidence requests from the department.
- Provided support to over 200 people who were unfairly left out or missed the criteria by the smallest of margins of the scheme and provided guidance to solicitors and NGOs.
- In the run up to St Patrick's Day, Justice for Undocumented (JFU) we held a weeklong action where seven members shared their stories of the scheme's impact. This culminated in a strong call for on-going regularisation
- Leaders travelled for the 1st time to the PICUM General Assembly conference in Brussels to speak about the Irish Regularisation.
- Newstalk podcast with former undocumented people highlighted the impact of the scheme.



# Empowering Migrant Workers

## Worker Empowerment in Agri-food

The number of non-EU migrant workers with employment permits in the sector continues to grow. There were approximately 5,000 employment permit holders employed in the sector by the end of 2023. The majority of permit holders in the sector are from Brazil (65%). In 2023 MRCI grew and strengthened its work across the country with meat processing workers.



### Highlights in 2023

- Delivered know your rights training and health and safety training to 58 workers in different factories.
- Actively engaged workers across 36 meat factories nationwide, fostering meaningful connections, and establishing supportive relationships.
- Provided a programme of training to worker leaders to develop their skills and capacity in organising and raising critical issues, setting agendas, engaging groups of co-workers, and addressing health and safety concerns.
- The formation of a new National Meat Workers Alliance was agreed with worker leaders and a committee was set up to engage meat workers in 10 languages.

## Worker Empowerment in Homecare - My Fair Home

My Fair Home (MFH) is the only space in Ireland for migrant homecare workers to connect and organise.



This year, we engaged workers to establish need and provide training on employment rights. The MFH group rolled out a survey to group members, which revealed the main issue as pay and one where newly regularised carers were experiencing

problems with employers refusing to register for tax and PRSI purposes. The perspectives of workers were also linked into the Home Care Coalition meetings and reflected in MRCI's submission on a state funded Home Care Scheme.





## Making Employment Permits Fairer

**In 2023, MRCI continued its work to gain parity in terms of rights and protections for all people who come to work in Ireland on an employment permit. We continued to focus these efforts on incoming legislation, Employment Permits (Consolidation and Amendment) Bill, to secure change of employer in**

**this bill. This would protect people from exploitation by giving them the ability to stand up for their rights or leave their job should they need to. It will also move us closer to our long-term goal of parity of rights.**

### Highlights in 2023

- Employment permit group working towards securing Change of Employer and process for transferability.
- Continued to put pressure to secure commitment made for Change of Employer / Transferability amendment in the Employment Permits (Consolidation and Amendment) Bill
- Advocated for the best process for change of employer possible. Pushed for a notification process with a no fee, very fast processing, and flexibility on the job to which a person can move. Once passed this process will immediately improve the situation for general employment permit holders.
- Met with Minister Neale Richmond and Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment (DETE) staff to advance change of employer.
- Over 300 people emailed the Minister asking for this change to be implemented quickly.
- Made a submission to consultation by DETE on Change of Employer / Transferability and warning against the introduction of Seasonal Permit.
- Pushed for stronger protections for Seasonal workers.



## Fair Fees Campaign

**In 2023, the Fair Fees campaign group was established to call for a reduction to the extortionate cost of the Irish Residence Permit card. The group is made up of migrant workers and international students deeply concerned about the issue and leading the campaign.**

The Irish Residence Permit (IRP) card costs €300, but only costs the state €20.44 to produce and deliver each card. Most people living in Ireland from outside the EU are forced to pay this fee every year, some even more often. The Fair Fees campaign group is calling for a reduction in the IRP card fee in line with similar services, such as a passport (€75) or driving licence (€55).

### Highlights in 2023

- Fair Fees Group was established with a core group of 17 people and 400 members.
- Group coached and mentored in campaigning, framing, and messaging and strategy developed with the group.
- Videos of three stories of those affected shared across social media.
- Launched a petition calling for a reduction in IRP card fees which eventually gained over 14,500 signatures.
- Held petition handover event where Minister for Justice representative accepted the petition on her behalf.
- Both petition launch and handover gained substantial media coverage and created pressure for change.
- Secured agreement from Minister of Justice that the Fee structure would be reviewed in Quarter one of 2024 by the Department of Justice.





## Family Reunion Campaign

**The Family Reunion campaign group was established in 2023. It is made up of people who are living and working in Ireland but who are currently denied the basic right to have their immediate family with them. Group members want to see change happen, so that families**

**can stay together. This means removing the barriers that are keeping families apart - scrapping the salary check and waiting period for workers. This will enable all workers to have their family with them from the start.**

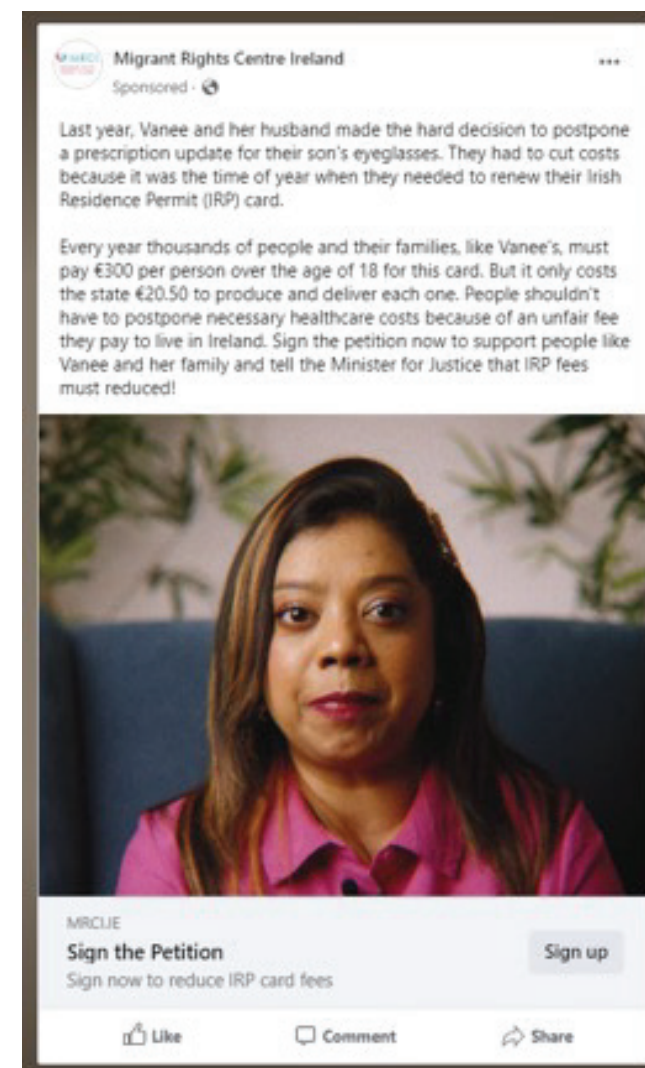
### Highlights in 2023

- Group established at the end of 2023 and quickly gained over 300 members.
- Research conducted and campaign position established.
- The group began to document stories and developed a letter writing action aimed at local elected representatives from affected families.
- Secured support from 20+ ally organisations who wrote to the Minister in support of the campaign.
- Advanced the right to work for spouses and dependents of general employment permit holders, as a complementary measure to family reunion.
- Secured agreement on a review of the right to work for spouses and dependents of general employment permit holders.
- Family Reunion Policy Brief submitted to Department of Justice as part of an ongoing review of Family Reunion Rules. To be concluded in early 2024.

## Growing Reach

### Growing our Supporters Network and Communications

**In 2023, MRCI delivered information to thousands of people with regular updates and changes in laws, policy, and practice. We communicated via all our channels on news, updates and information with weekly posts across all our platforms, with the use of videos, images, graphs, social media advertising.**



### Highlights in 2023

- Developed new petition and email to target system in the organisation with Digital Revolutionaries.
- Over 14,500 people signed our petition calling for the immigration fees to be reduced.
- 500 people took action with us and sent an email to Minister of Justice protesting against unjust immigration checks.
- 300 people took action with us calling on Minister for State with Responsibility for Employment to make the employment permit system fairer.
- Send 105 Mailchimp's to our supporters across the year.
- As a result of this work, our supporter network grew by 72%.



# Submissions, Consultations and Oireachtas Committee Presentations



- Submission on the Review of the Civil Legal Aid Scheme.
- Submission re Consultation on Seasonal Employment Permit and Transfer of Employment Permit.
- MRCI Recommendations for Review of Family Reunion Policy.
- Submission to the consultation on the National Strategy for Migrant Integration.
- Submission re Non-EEA Sea Fishers in the Irish Fleet – General Employment Permit Observations on the Consultation Document and Permit Application Checklist.
- MRCI Opening remarks to Joint Committee on Children, Disability, Equality, Integration and Youth, on Integration and Refugee issues.
- MRCI Pre-Budget Submission 2024.
- Submission to Department of Justice Review of Operating Model.
- Submission to Children’s Rights Alliance Report Card

# Networks and Solidarity



MRCI supports and engages across a range of progressive civil society spaces. MRCI is a member of the Children’s Rights Alliance, Community Work Ireland, Community Platform, European Anti-Poverty Network (Ireland), Irish Network Against Racism, Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed, National Youth Council of Ireland, National Women’s Council, Ukraine Civil Society Forum and the Platform for the International Cooperation of Undocumented Migrants and the Trans Equality Together Coalition. MRCI participated in ICTU Solidarity gathering in November.

MRCI sat on the Migrant Integration Strategy Monitoring and Coordination Committee and on Anti-Human Trafficking Stakeholder Group and National Referral Mechanism subgroup. MRCI participated in Community Work Ireland and All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work, Education and Training meetings. Participated in National Women’s Council All-Island Forum, and the UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty.



# Organisational Development

**The team agreed organisational priorities for 2023 and held four quarterly planning sessions. A review of 2023 and planning for 2024 with the team and board was held in November. A team and board social, team building day in July and end of year party were held. Two staff members started high level professional development courses.**

This year, MRCI reviewed and updated several policies, including the Health and Safety Policy, Fire Safety policy, Use of Laptops/PCs and other computer equipment policy, and mobile phone policy. The Staff Handbook was updated with staff and board engagement. The team attended Fire safety training. A new quiet room in the basement was redecorated as a space for reflection, prayer, and meditation.

Supported by the Equality Fund of Rethink Ireland, MRCI engaged external two external consultants Piquet and Threadable to carry out a review of our social media and data automation needs.

MRCI continues to provide organisational supports to the Great Care Co-Op, The Hope and Courage Collective and Amal Women’s Association.

# Team, Governance and Funders



## Our Team

Our small but mighty team has been key to achieving everything we did in 2023. With commitment and passion, our staff works tirelessly for migrant rights, community empowerment and collective action.

This year, we said goodbye to Karina Jelisejeva, Caroline Franca, Elsadig Ishag and Niamh Curren and wish them all very well in their careers.

We welcomed Andres Bloom to the team. Two new Fellowships began, and we welcomed Mauricio Lino, and Simon Okello. Emma Flanagan and Vanessa Paszkowska joined us from Maynooth University on their placement for 14 weeks.

In 2023, the people involved in the work were from 17 nationalities and a range of backgrounds. Amongst the many things that unite us, we are all passionate about justice and equality.







## The Board

MRCI's Board is a source of strength, helping the organisation navigate difficult periods and remain focused on our goals and strategic objectives. Our Board met five times in 2023, including the AGM.

Special thanks to our Board of Directors, Anastasia Crickley, Angelisa Zerpa Andara, Bobby Gilmore, Champika Wanniarachchi, Dee Lowry, Francis Njógúna, Ian McArdle, Lucy Peprah (Chair), Michael O'Sullivan and Raluca Anucuta.

### Finance Sub-group and Audit Committee

The Finance Subgroup met four times during 2023. A big thanks to our Finance Subgroup, Cathal McAllister, Francis Njógúna, and Michael O'Sullivan. The overall purpose of the Finance Subgroup is to, on behalf of the Board, monitor the financial management of the organisation and ensure best practice is maintained.

### Employment Sub-group

The Employment Subgroup met four times in 2023. A big thanks to the Employment Subgroup members Lucy Peprah, Angelisa Zerpa Andara, Raluca Anucuta and Dee Lowry. The Employment Subgroup aims to, on behalf of the Board, maintain and develop excellent employment practice within MRCI.

## Compliance

MRCI complies with the Charities Governance code for Community and Voluntary organisations in Ireland and the Statement of Guiding Principles for fundraising. MRCI has a dedicated section on company governance on our website to

ensure full transparency in our operations. MRCI is fully compliant with the annual requirements of Revenue, the Charities Regulatory Authority and Companies Registration Office.

## Our Funders and Donors

A special thanks to all our donors and funders in 2023, without which our work would not be possible:

- Columban Missionary Society
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth — National Integration Fund
- Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government - Scheme to Support National Organisations
- Department of Justice- Ireland Against Racism
- Department of Justice - Victims of Crime
- European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM)
- Fórsa Trade Union
- Lakeside Fund
- One Foundation
- Open Society Initiative for Europe
- Order of Discalced Carmelites
- Rethink Ireland - Equality Fund
- Robert Bosch Foundation
- Rowan Trust



**Special thanks to all those who gave one off and recurring donations to assist the work of MRCI in 2023 and to all those who took part in the Challenge for Change. Without your support, our work would not be possible.**





# Financial Review

The financial outcome for 2023 is set out in the audited financial statements.

Our income can be split into four broad categories: Philanthropic, Government Grants, Small Grants and Fundraising and Donations Income.

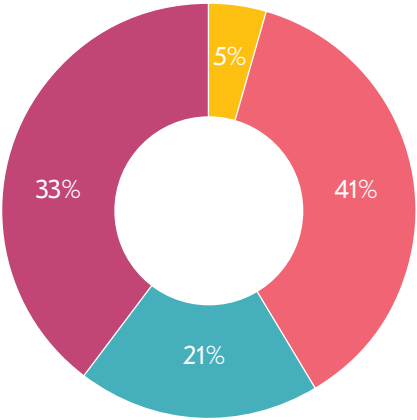
In 2023 MRCI had an income of €907,088. Overall, in 2023 our total income decreased by €142,380 compared with 2022.

Our expenditure can be categorised in four broad headings: Community Work, Services, Programmes and Organisation costs.

In 2023, MRCI's expenditure was €897,218. Overall, in 2023 our total expenditure decreased by €252,827 compared to 2022.

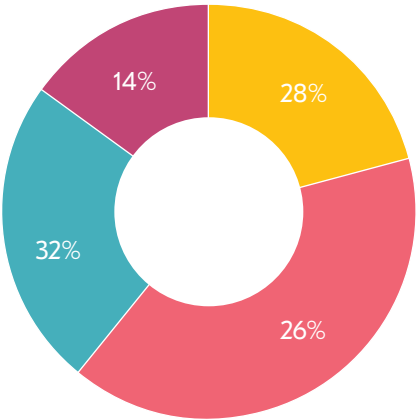
## 2023 Income €907,088

- Philanthropic
- Small Grants
- Government Grants
- Donations & Fundraising

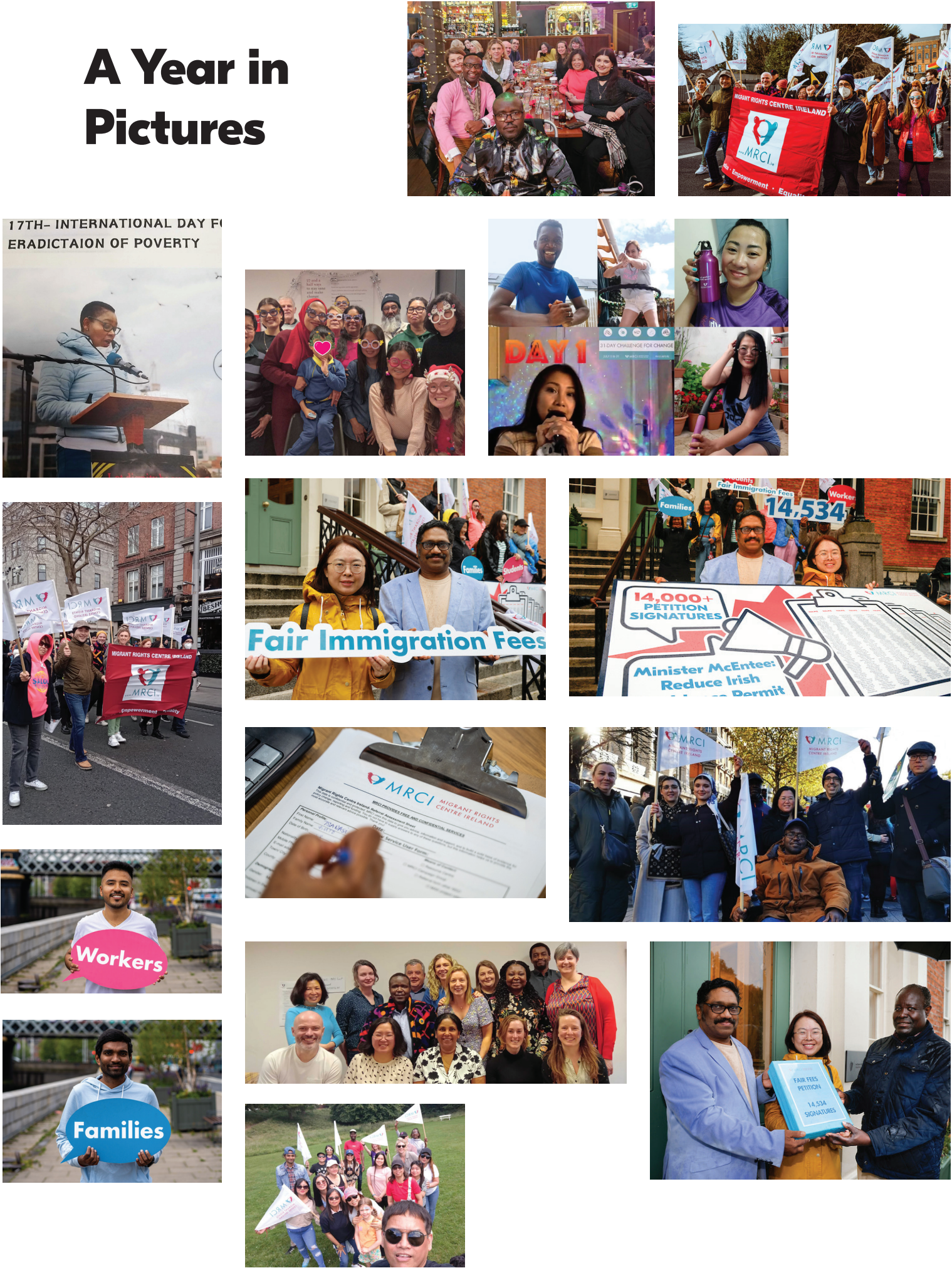


## 2023 Expenditure €897,218

- Community Work
- Services
- Programmes
- Organisational cost



# A Year in Pictures





# Migrant Rights Centre Ireland Annual Report 2023

MRCI is a non-governmental organisation and a registered charity (CHY17071), governed by a board of directors. Our work is made possible by a number of donors and funders, including core funding from The Rowan Trust, Open Society Foundation, Scheme to Support National Organisations 2022-2025, and the Columban Missionary Society.



An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development



Columban Fathers  
Missionary Society of St. Columban