



MIGRANT RIGHTS CENTRE IRELAND ANNUAL REPORT 2014



Reflection from Bobby

Thirteen Years of Welcome and Action

Migration was hitting the headlines in Ireland in 1999. However, it wasn't the kind of migration that Ireland had experienced for more than 150 years. That type of migration was emigration, involuntary economic migration. It seldom made media headlines because it was too painful to admit a national failure - the inability to offer citizens access to the economy by way of a job.

It became clear the vast majority of newcomers to Ireland were economic migrants similar to Irish emigrants in Britain and elsewhere. Many were coming from outside the European Union, invited here by both public and private enterprise.

There was general misinformation that these new arrivals were getting all kinds of benefits. There were the age-old anti-immigrant accusations of taking jobs, housing, and draining public services. These racist remarks were similar to those directed against Irish people in Britain. This was cause for concern which would lead to isolation, marginalisation and ghettoization.

On reflection, Ireland having developed a culture of departure found it difficult to cope with the experience of arrival. In some instances the hostility directed was palpable.

It became obvious that these immigrants needed information. However there was no agency that offered objective information to economic migrants. A group of us decided to put in place an organisation to enable immigrants to relate to the networks of Irish life, contribute to and benefit from the economy, integrate and settle.

The ethos of such an organisation would be rights based, empowering immigrants to be the subjects of their own destiny rather than the objects of other's needs. Migration is the human heart on a journey of hope. To be effective this organisation would match the hope in immigrant eyes and walk with them in their journey of hope.

The staff and volunteers brought energy and creativity as well as a spirit of welcome. Essentially, non-verbally, they sent out a message to the immigrant coming in the door that "you are welcome and not out of place." This message is counter cultural in an Ireland and Europe that for centuries treated the outsider as different and in deficit.

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland has a clear motivation to empower immigrants, using objective information, community work, advocacy and networking. Working in solidarity with trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, the government and others to create an atmosphere of respect, dignity and equality for all has also been at the heart of its work.

Ireland needs to constantly be reminded to treat immigrants in Ireland the way it wishes other countries to treat Irish immigrants. Welcoming the stranger is as challenging today as it was in biblical times and is a critical message that MRCI has carried through the years.

Fr. Bobby Gilmore SSC

Foreword

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is my privilege to introduce the Migrant Rights Centres Ireland (MRCI) Annual Report for 2014.

The annual report highlights the unique role of the MRCI as a community work organisation working with and for vulnerable migrants to advocate for rights and mobilise migrants and their families to take action on a range of issues that affect their lives. Our approach combines front-line services – information provision, access to rights and entitlements, strategic case work, with building the participation and leadership of migrants through action and campaign groups.

As a former domestic worker this is particularly special year for me. I am extremely proud of our work to ratify the ILO convention Decent Work for Domestic Workers. It has been long hard road but what make it so special was the many women involved in the struggle to get there. Coming out at weekends, taking risks, standing up for their rights and making their actions and voice heard has been inspiring. Their spirit, determination and commitment is something that is fostered and valued by all at MRCI.

Much remains to be done and all of MRCI board and team are committed to achieving impact for and with migrants in 2015. We look forward to the challenge together and to working with our partners, allies and migrants to make Ireland a more equal and just society.

We want to thank all our supporters in 2014 for making it a huge year of success.

Hilda Regaspi
Chairperson

Introduction

2014 was a very busy year for MRCI. We saw significant impact in the area of domestic work, the rights of low paid workers, and legislative change for undocumented workers.

MRCI is extremely proud of our work to secure rights for domestic workers over the past 13 years. The ratification of ILO convention 189 Decent Work for domestic Workers was a defining moment for the Domestic Workers Action Group and is a testament to their hard work over many years.

Securing rights for undocumented migrants has been at the core of MRCI's work for over a decade. This year saw MRCI's 'bridging visa' put on a statutory footing. This allows undocumented workers who had held a work permit, and became undocumented through no fault of their own a way back into the system. The Employment Permits Act 2014 also made provision for undocumented migrants to access the civil courts to claim unpaid wages. The Justice for the Undocumented group launched new and ground breaking research into the situation of undocumented migrants in Ireland which put regularisation firmly on the political agenda.

Our work in relation to human trafficking for criminal exploitation; specifically in cannabis cultivation, continues to be recognised by the state and civil society actors. The launch of MRCI report on this brought to light the potential miscarriage of justice of 70 people incarcerated for cannabis production, who may themselves be victims of a crime.

MRCI continued to work with the trade union movement to mainstream migrant rights into union activities, policy, structures and practice and to lend support and show solidarity with their campaigns across the year. The partnership between MRCI and the trade unions was strengthened by our involvement in the Paris Bakery sit in, using our combined strengths and expertise to bring about an incredible result with these workers.

Our commitment to ensuring a high level of participation and engagement of migrants impacted by a range of issues remains a cornerstone of our work. The continued recognition of MRCI's model of community work is an accomplishment we are proud of and in 2014 we have been asked to share and showcase our approach at national and EU levels.

MRCI is committed to being part of and promoting a strong, autonomous and vibrant civil society at national, EU and International levels. MRCI continues to play a lead role in this area which includes an active role in the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the Platform for the International Cooperation of Undocumented Migrants, the European Network Against Racism Ireland, the Community Platform and others. In a time of decreasing resources and increased competition maintaining solidarity is critical.

The achievements of 2014 will have real and lasting impact on the lives of migrants at risk of poverty, social exclusion, exploitation and discrimination. We have been privileged to meet amazing people in 2014, to walk with our leaders, activists and group members on a journey of change. We look forward to 2015 to continue together to bring about social change.

Edel McGinley
Director

About MRCI

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland is a national organisation working to promote justice, empowerment and equality for migrants and their families

Our Aim is advance the rights of all migrant workers and their families. **Or Belief** is that lives can be improved when individuals act collectively. **Our Vision** is for an open and inclusive Ireland where migrant workers and their families participate fully and equally. **Our focus** is on promoting the empowerment and inclusion of migrants as at risk of poverty, social exclusion, exploitation and discrimination. **Our Efforts** are inspired by a community work approach which seeks to advance social justice goals by challenging the root causes of poverty, inequality and exclusion.

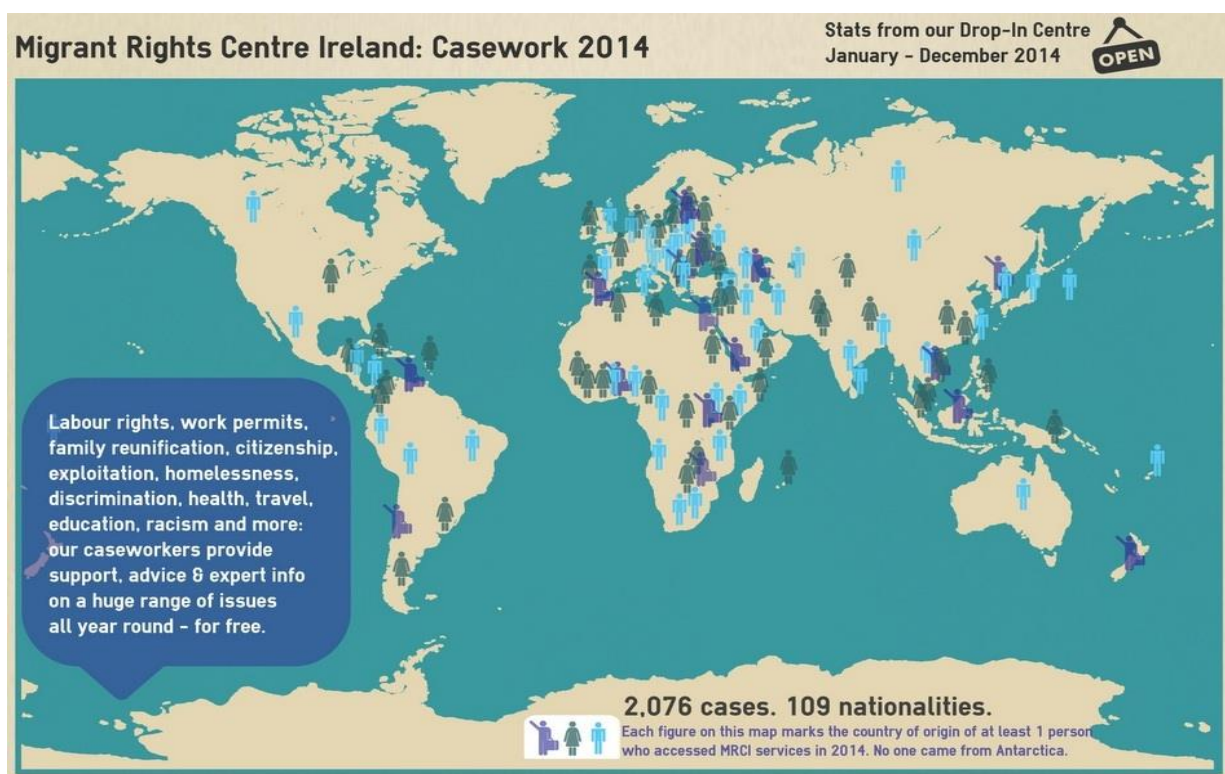
Policy priorities for 2014 included (1) securing a regularization for undocumented migrants, (2) providing a legal framework for the identification and protection of victims of trafficking for forced labour, (3) advancing employment rights, protections and enforcement for vulnerable workers in hidden or precarious sectors, including migrants in diplomatic households, au pairs, carers, domestic workers and restaurant workers, (4) addressing discrimination in recruitment practices and in the workplace (5) advocating for transparent and coherent labour migration policy(6) supporting a strong and autonomous civil society advocating for change.

Drop in Centre

MRCI operates a drop-in centre that opens to the public Monday, Tuesday and Thursday; People come from all over the country to seek advice and information and the office is always busy with people coming and going. The drop-in centre is an important part of MRCI's work and often our first point of contact with our migrant activists. This work allows us to build a credible evidence base and link it to campaigns, policy and advocacy work.

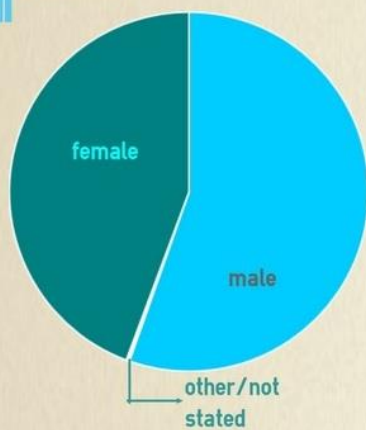
MRCI provides information and advice in the following areas:

- Employment permits
- General immigration and residency matters
- Workplace rights
- Trafficking for forced labour
- Undocumented migrants

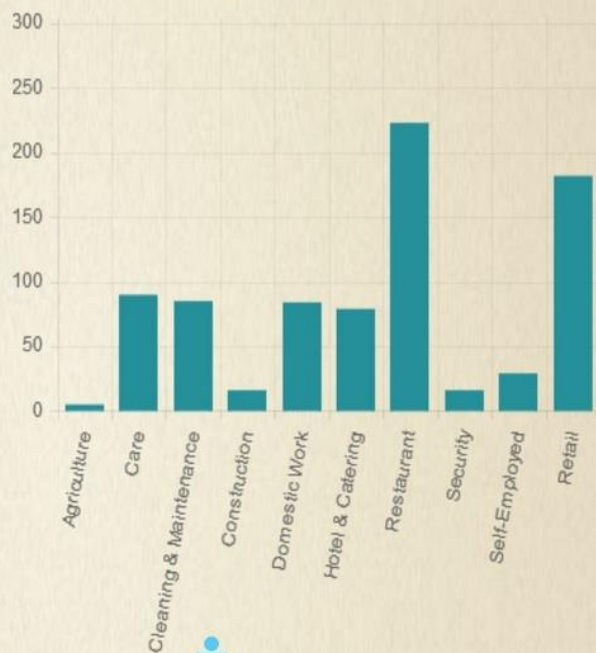




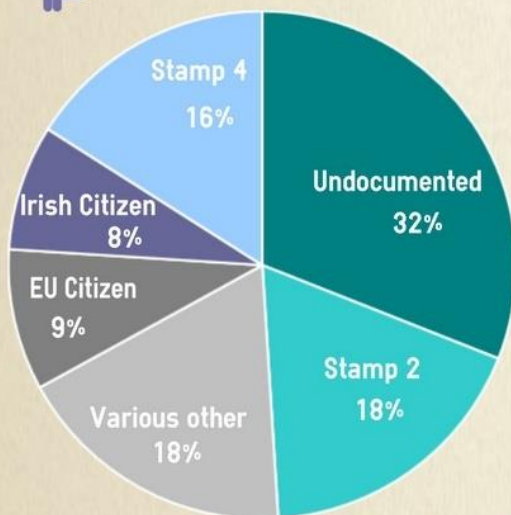
Gender



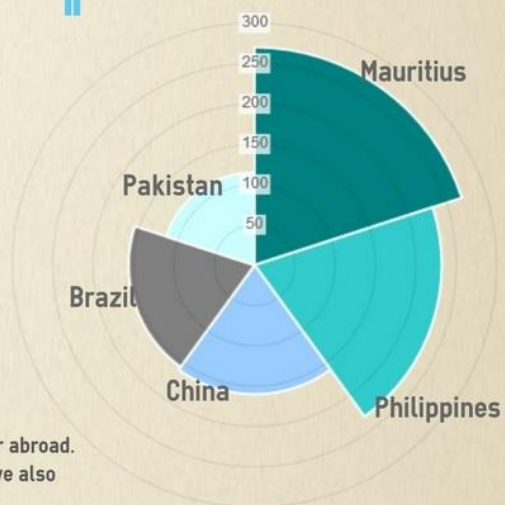
Top 10 job sectors



Current immigration status



Top 5 countries of origin



Many of the people we assist are parents, working to support children here or abroad. In 2014, the parents of 917 children in Ireland accessed MRCI services, and we also assisted the parents of a further 607 children living outside the State.



In 2014, most new cases (1,252) first made contact in person in MRCI's Drop-In Centre.



A further 532 reached us by phoning our national helpline (01 889 7570).



129 got in touch via email (info@mrci.ie) or Facebook.



Others were referred to caseworkers through MRCI campaign groups or partner organisations.

80% of cases opened in 2014 are now completed, thanks to the hard work of our caseworkers Jehan, Paloma, Qinfei, Camilla, Gemma, Hélène and of course Sancha.

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Migrants Forum



Meet the EU & local candidates teachers club Dublin

We held a hugely successful forum to meet EU and local political candidates. Over 150 people filled the teachers club. Many MRCI leaders assisted with this forum and many had a huge amount to say about their situations here. For many undocumented people, it was their first time voting and the energy was exciting.

Two more migrants' forums were held in relation to the new Employment Permits (Amendment) Act. This first was to influence the act, and the second later in the year was to inform people of the implications of the Act, including the introduction of a 'bridging visa' for people who became undocumented through no fault of their own.



International Migrant workers day



Migrants Forum, employment permit campaign

In December, a migrant's forum was held in the Mansion House in Dublin, to mark International Migrant's Day. This year's theme Journeys of Change and we heard inspiring speeches from many MRCI leaders.

Forced Labour and Trafficking

MRCI launched a new report, -Trafficking for Forced Labour in Cannabis Cultivation: The Case of Ireland as part of an EU project RACE in Europe with partner Anti-slavery International. MRCI held a seminar for the legal profession on these issues and highlighted the potential miscarriage of justice of people who are currently detained in prison despite being potential victims of trafficking for forced labour.

In 2014, more and more cases come before the courts in relation to cannabis production and potential victims of trafficking. MRCI prepared a number of expert reports for these cases.



The Forced Labour Action group (FLAG) met with Chief Commissioner of the IHREC Emily Logan, on December 2nd Anti-Slavery day.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Immigrants Are Being Kept as Slaves in European Grow Ops

By Rachel Browne

May 5, 2014 | 6:27 pm

Members of FLAG also spoke out in the media about their experiences to highlight the ongoing problems with identification of victims of trafficking for forced labor.

Employment Permits Amendment Act 2014



Worker Justice Group at Dáil Éireann: May 2014

In the lead up to the enactment of the Employment Permits (Amendment) Act, MRCI and leaders presented to the Oireachtas committee for Employment and Jobs. This came into force in September 2014 and contained a numbers of legislative changes MRCI has been campaigning on for a number of years.

Activation Scheme – ‘Bridging Visa’

For over eight years MRCI has been campaigning for the introduction of provision in legislation to enable undocumented workers who lose their work permit through no fault of their own to have a bridge back into the system. The Act put MRCI’s ‘bridging visa’ on a statutory footing through the Activation Scheme.

Access to legal redress for undocumented workers

The issue raised in the Amjad Hussien V Labour Court case, where the high court ruled that an undocumented migrant worker could not seek compensation, has been addressed under this legislation. Access to the civil courts has now been granted.

Care Work Provision

The Act also makes provision for a care work permit where there are medical grounds and where there is a pre-existing connection with the employee.

Paris Bakery



Paris bakery workers meeting June 2104



Protest outside Paris bakers employers 2014

MRCI supported Paris Bakery workers to lead a big, visible and successful campaign to get their stolen wages. 30 young migrants were locked out of their place of work and owed over €100,000. With the support of OPATSI, the plasterers union, the workers began to protest on Moore Street. They started a social media campaign. MRCI met with the group to offer our support. It quickly became clear that their situation was exactly the kind of exploitation we've been combating for years.

In a strategy meeting in MRCI the workers decided to occupy the building if necessary to prevent the employers from stripping assets from the premises. After a human chain blocking the exit failed to get results, the workers with the support of MRCI, Mandate and OPATSI began a sit-in. For the next 19 days, MRCI team provided legal advice, media support, facilitation skills, campaigning expertise, moral and practical support. MRCI staff handled casework for individual workers and the team took turns to sleep at the Bakery overnight with the workers. The campaign call focused first on the owners to pay and eventually turned its attention to Government to step in and wind up the company. After 19 days workers received a notice that the company would be put into liquidation and that they would be able to access the insolvency fund.



Rally at the Dáil calling for government to step in



Victory day for Paris bakery workers

Participation and Representation of Migrant Workers



Justice for the Undocumented training session on Hill of Tara June 2014

Throughout 2014 MRCI continued to create the conditions for a broad range of people to participate and take action in our work. Leadership development was supported in a number of ways through the provision of training, participation and active doing. MRCI provided English language classes, communications training, campaign & strategic planning training. Leadership development continues within campaign and actions groups. Justice for the Undocumented and Domestic Workers Action Group (DWAG) developed new skills in the area of outreach and recruitment, fundraising, group work, research and media.

DWAG, au-pairs, the Worker Justice Group, and JFU met regularly throughout the year. A JFU fun family day and barbeque was held in August. A number of mass meetings were held with undocumented migrants about the campaign. Two training sessions were held with DWAG - SIPTU self-advocacy and Barnardos child protection. DWAG supported Greyhound workers and a delegation of leaders presented them with a cheque. MRCI participated in many rallies throughout 2014.



DWAG overnight training January 2014



Workshop with US organiser Jane McAlevy



May Day Rally 2014



End Direct provision campaign solidarity march

Justice for the Undocumented Campaign

In 2014, the Justice for the Undocumented group went from strength to strength. Highlights included social media actions, launch of new ground-breaking research, increasing its membership significantly deepening the leadership of its core members mass meetings, and highlighting the plight of the undocumented in the media with actions and events across the year.



JFU Shamrock Solidarity Action for St Patricks Day

JFU Research

Action research with over 540 undocumented migrants was carried out by the JFU leaders group. This approach yielded strong data, built relationships with undocumented migrants and resulted in membership increase.

The publication of the Ireland is Home – briefing paper and infographic on the situation of undocumented in Ireland provided ground-breaking new data on undocumented migrants in Ireland and gave a strong rationale for the introduction of a regularisation scheme. This publication was extremely well-received by civil servants, politicians and members of the Oireachtas Justice Committee.

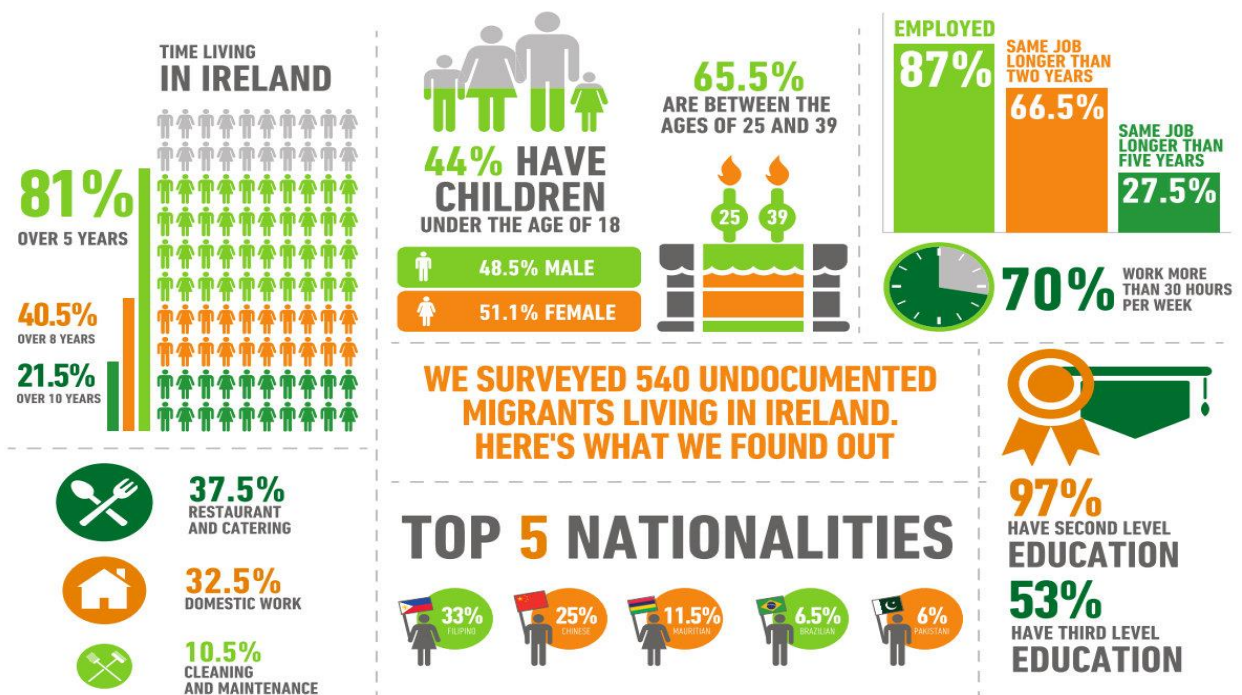
To advance this work MRCI also met with Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald to outline this practical proposal to her.



President of ICTU John Douglas launches report, with Prya & Jayson



Former Minister for Justice Alan Shatter with Helen Lowry



Ireland is home infographic of 540 surveyed

Relationships continued to strengthen with our coalition of endorsers in Ireland and immigration reform movements and organisations in the United States. MRCI increased engagement with Justice Committee members and met with a number of politicians. At Christmas, MRCI held a number of actions to draw attention to families separated at Christmas time. A card was sent to all TD's, carols sung at the Mansion House Dublin and an action held outside the Dáil.



JFU supporters outside Mansion house December 2014



JFU supporters outside Mansion house December 2014



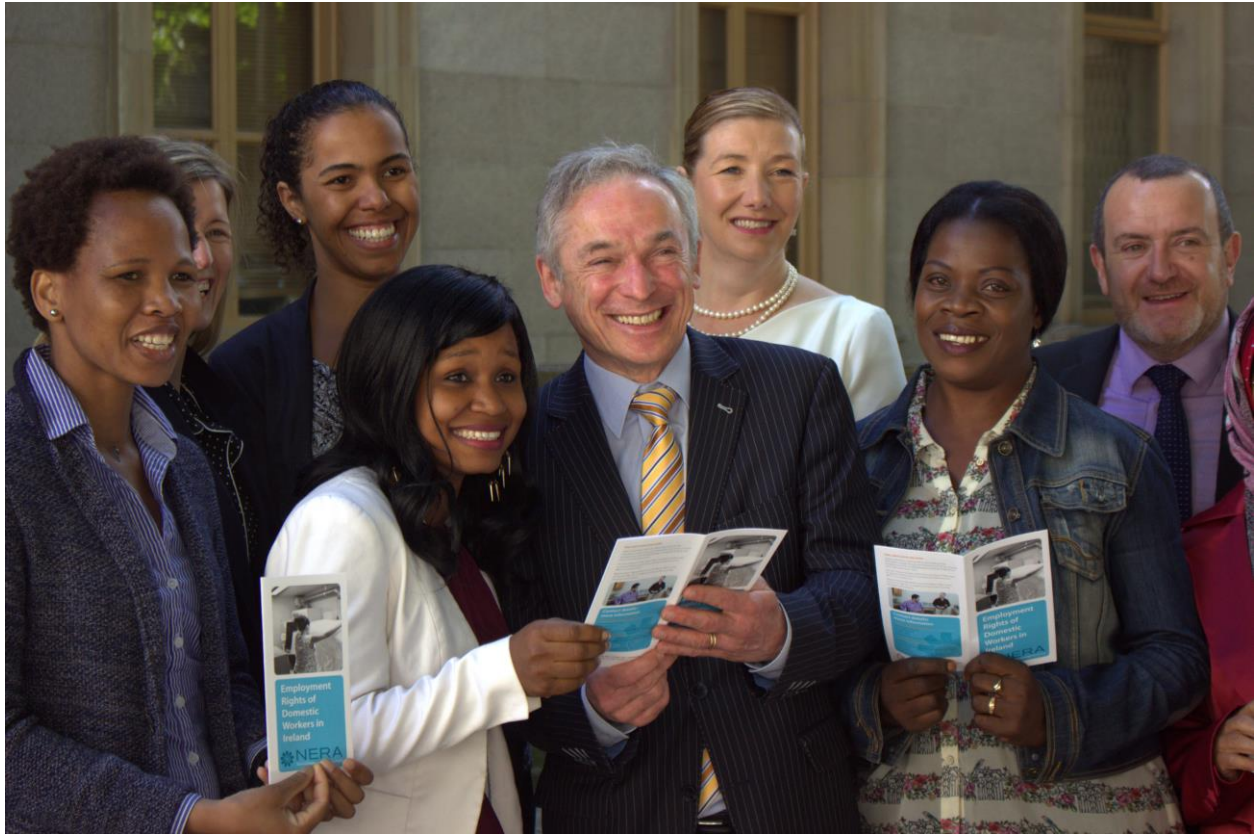
JFU action outside the Dáil December 2014



JFU action outside the Dáil December 2014

Domestic Workers Action Group (DWAG)

2014 was a year of results for DWAG. The ratification of the ILO 189 Domestic workers convention was a highlight of the year.



Minister Richard Bruton with DWAG members

In July, as a result of a 5-year campaign with MRCI at the forefront, Ireland ratified ILO Convention 189. The day was marked with a photocall with Minister Richard Bruton. DWAG celebrated in style at the Hub in Temple Bar with friends, supporters and allies. Emer Costello, SIPTU and ICTU were all in attendance in recognition of their contribution to this very important convention. DWAG made history this year.



DWAG celebration of ratification of ILO convention 189



DWAG celebration of ratification of ILO convention 189

Domestic Workers and Au Pairs

It was a very busy year for DWAG. They continued to build and to deepen their work with Au-pairs in 2014, with a focus on ensuring they are recognised as workers. Casework involving au-pairs, domestic workers and migrant care workers continues. The DWAG Gala was another success this year and a key moment to reflect on the achievements of the last number of years and celebrate the success of the ratification of ILO C189. MRCI also initiated a project with the Equality Authority to address standards for workers in the provision of home care.



DWAG overnight, training and planning



We love au-pairs & domestic workers



DWAG Gala 2014



DWAG overnight

Diplomatic immunity

In September, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) launched the long-awaited Guidelines Relating to the Employment of Private Domestic Employees by Accredited Members of the Mission. MRCI has been campaigning for a solution to the exploitation of domestic workers in diplomatic households for 6 years and highlighting ongoing abuses and impunity. A landmark judgment was made by Employment Appeals Tribunal against the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates for unfair dismissal of three domestic workers.



Jennifer & Laylanie

EU and International Work



PICUM General assembly 2014

Pablo Rojas Coppari was elected to the Fundamental Rights Agency's Advisory Panel in 2014 for a two-year period. Edel McGinley was re-elected to the board of Platform for the International Cooperation of Undocumented Migrants (PICUM). Pablo was also elected chair of PICUM's Labour Rights working group. Virginija Petrauskaite is also a member of PICUM's legal strategies working group. MRCI was part of the OSCE alliance against trafficking meeting in Vienna in December 2014.

MRCI's made a number of submissions in 2014 including a submission to the half day general discussion on "Workplace Exploitation and Workplace Protection" as part of the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW). MRCI made two submissions under International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), one to the Free Legal Aid Centres to feed into the Irish shadow report on ICESCR and one directly to the UN committee.



PICUM Annual Conference 2014



PICUM legal strategies working group

Organisational Development

As part of our sustainability plan, MRCI moved offices with the Irish Refugee Council to 37 Dame St Dublin 2. The IRC and MRCI have a shared drop in centre where migrants, refugees and asylum seekers can access information and support.

In September, President Michael D. Higgins opened the building. The President highlighted in his speech the situation of asylum seekers living in direct provision and the plight of the undocumented in Ireland.



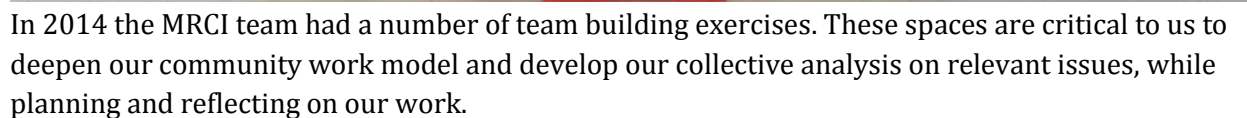
Leaders evening after move to new building



MRCI & IRC meet President Higgins



JFU leaders meet President Higgins and his wife Sabina Higgins



Special thanks are offered to the interns, volunteers and students from NUI Maynooth, who contributed so much to MRCI during 2014 including, Camilla De Patoul, Gemma Gibbins, Helene Bourry, Jehan Ashour, Paloma Viejo Otero, Qinfe Zhu, Kate Nolan, Mariaam Bhatti, Lorelei and Lynette.

Special thanks also to the support and dedication of MRCI's Board. Bill Abom, Anastasia Crickley, Bobby Gilmore, Kevin Glackin Rudy Montejo, Michael O'Sullivan, Lucy Peprah, Hilda Regaspi (Chair) and Pat Raleigh.

