



**Submission on Ireland's National Integration
Strategy to the Department of Justice and
Equality**

**Prepared by Forum Polonia and affiliated
groups and individuals**

May, 2014

INTRODUCTION

This is a joint submission from Forum Polonia and affiliated organisations and individuals. These are: the Irish Polish Society (IPS), Together-Razem Centre, The Polish Social and Cultural Association (POSK), the Polish Complementary School in Dundalk, the Polish Complementary School SEN in Dublin, Polonia Razem, and Polish and Irish community activists based at various organisations and institutions (SIPTU, Cairde, the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Dublin, and UCD).

We welcome and appreciate the opportunity to make this submission regarding migrant integration policy in Ireland. In our submission we focus on integration in the following areas:

- Active citizenship and political engagement
- Education
- Health and welfare
- Employment

Between the mid-1990s and 2008, Ireland experienced a sustained period of rapid inward migration. This has resulted in thousands of migrant families making Ireland their permanent home. In Census 2011, non-Irish-born residents accounted for 17% of the population. There are approximately 122,585 Polish people living in Ireland (2.7% of the population), making it the largest national minority. Polish is the second most frequently spoken language in Ireland.

Since Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, the Polish community has established an impressive grassroots-based social infrastructure in Ireland which consists of numerous community groups, shops, churches, media outlets, medical centres, libraries, psychological centres and more. A number of NGOs work on the betterment of the Polish community in Ireland (Forum Polonia, Together-Razem Centre, My Cork, Polish Social and Cultural Centre, the Irish Polish Society, Bridge KPA from Kilkenny, CKU Centre for Counselling and Therapy in Dublin). The Polish community is very culturally active, and there are a number of Polish cultural associations and Polish festivals, including: Polish Theatre Ireland, 50% Male Experimental Theatre, Kinopolis Festival, Polish Art Festival Limerick, and ArtPolonia. Approximately 26 different Polish media outlets are operational in Ireland. In the field of education, there are 31 Polish complementary (weekend) schools.

Notwithstanding these high levels of engagement in Ireland's economic, social and cultural life, there is a clear disconnect between the Polish community and the Irish State. There are very few Polish representatives on any elected State or non-State bodies, steering groups, advisory panels and committees. A professional organisation that advocates specifically for the needs of the Polish community has not been established. This means that there is no direct representation of the interests of the Polish community in Ireland. On a local level, Poles exhibit very low involvement in the life of local communities. Very few are members of clubs, groups, churches, residents' associations, etc. (see research conducted by Fingal County Council). Poles tend to engage with local politics to lesser extent than, for example, residents of African origin (see research conducted by Fingal County Council¹).

¹ *Towards integrated community. Survey of ethnic minorities in Fingal*, prepared by IPSOS MORI. Fingal County Council. 2008

There are a number of Polish community organisations and networks in Ireland. However, their capacity to advocate on behalf of the community at the level of policy is very limited or non-existent. Migrant rights NGOs who advocate on behalf of the wider migrant community (e.g. the New Communities Partnership, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, The Integration Centre and Cairde) do not represent fully the needs of and issues concerning the Polish community. As EU migrants, Poles tend to be overlooked by advocates supporting migrant communities. As a result, many issues specific to the Polish community remain unidentified in the mainstream.

The key constraints of the underrepresentation and limited capacity of Polish organisations to engage include:

- The Polish migrant community is relatively young, both demographically and in terms of the length of residence
- The analysis of stages of immigrant integration places the Polish community somewhere between settlement and adaptation (see research conducted by Fingal County Council)
- English language competency remains a barrier to engagement
- Poor knowledge of the Irish system and a lack of know-how with regards to how to engage and influence the provision of services and the decision-making process
- Low skills, a lack of capacity and knowledge among groups and activists in order to advocate for policy change
- Very few outreach programmes have been implemented by the government and its agencies to target the Polish community.

Forum Polonia is the only example of organised cooperation between Polish groups, Polish media, and individuals working for and advocating on behalf of the Polish community in Ireland. It has led a number of important initiatives that enhance the integration of the Polish community into Irish society.

Recommendations

The Irish government, its departments and State agencies should consult with and engage migrants in policy development and in planning and delivering services. There is a need for the establishment of more structured connections between the State and the Polish community, both on local and national levels. A consultation process is crucial in order to formulate meaningful and effective integration policies and target specific groups. We would also welcome more Polish representatives on State boards and advisory committees in order to ensure that there is a proper exchange of information. Community departments of local government, government agencies, the OPMI, and State-funded NGOs could play a role in this process. Targeted recruitment of migrants to State jobs and migrant quotas in decision-making bodies could facilitate better representation. Migrant communities should be resourced and empowered in order to enable them to fully engage in the two-way integration process. Investment in the process could include: support of capacity-building programmes, mentoring and shadowing programmes, supporting migrant structures. More targeted programmes are required for the integration of migrant communities.

1. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Ireland has a relatively short history of engagement with the language of multiculturalism in public and political life. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism was established in 1998. In 2007, the first Minister for Integration took office in order to deal with issues arising from large-scale immigration to Ireland. However, this office has since been abolished.

- **Reinstate the Minister for Integration**

Currently, integration issues are divided between various government departments. As a consequence, we believe there is a lack of cohesion in the approach to issue of integration. We recommend upgrading the OPMI to departmental level and the reinstatement of a Minister for Integration. This would give migrant issues more recognition and it would also support the development of a cohesive, detailed, strategic and long-term approach to integration.

- **Secure migrant political representation within existing or new decision-making structures**

Migrants are allowed to vote and stand for local election, as long as they have lived in Ireland for more than six months. Despite this, migrant communities currently do not have sufficient representation on city councils. In addition, it is almost impossible to have migrants elected to the Oireachtas. As a consequence, migrants are, in fact, excluded from an important part of the electoral process.

Notwithstanding, under current legislation, there exists the possibility of having migrant representation in the Seanad. It is at the discretion of an Taoiseach to nominate eleven senators. This could be used to ensure that groups on the margins of Irish political life are enabled to have their voices heard in the Upper House of the Oireachtas.

According to research conducted on behalf of Forum Polonia by Professor Bryan Fanning (UCD)², Irish political parties have done little or nothing to reach out to immigrants during elections. Debate about integration has dropped off the political radar and from the programmes of political parties. In the context where a large percentage of the population has no place in the political system, there is a need for a proactive approach to immigrant political incorporation. A diverse republic needs inclusive politics and institutions that reflect the composition of a diverse society. Political parties as well as government bodies and local authorities in Ireland clearly need to do much more than at present to engage with immigrant communities. Unless they do so they are hardly fit to represent Ireland's diverse communities.

Based on the experience of other countries, we recommend the establishment of an ethnic minority consultative committee within the decision-making structure of local authorities. For

² "Inclusive Politics for a Diverse Republic" by Bryan Fanning, Neill O'Boyle, Viola di Bucchanico, UCD 2014.

example, in the UK, various local authorities put in place Ethnic Minority Consultative Committees. Such committees have been given the opportunity to advise on policy; members are co-opted as non-voting members of local authority decision-making committees. This solution supports immigrant participation on the local level and results in local authorities being more representative of diverse communities.

- **There is a need for improved voter registration campaigns and more proactive approaches to engaging with immigrant communities**

In 2009 and 2014, Forum Polonia organised campaigns to encourage immigrants to register to vote and participate in local elections ('Give a voice' and 'Vote! You are at home' respectively). However, there is a need for more involvement from local authorities on this issue. There is also a need to establish dialogue between local authorities, political parties and ethnic minorities and to make parties and other State or local bodies aware of initiatives undertaken by immigrants.

Voter registration campaigns need to be evidence-based and better focused. These need to have access to information on levels of voter registration for different immigrant communities. Many immigrants may be discouraged from registering to vote due to a relatively complicated registration processes that includes having to visit a Garda station in order to get a registration form stamped. The introduction of a simplified, clearly explained, online voter registration system is long overdue.

- **There is a need for ongoing dialogue between political parties and NGOs in order to promote civic and political participation and to address institutional barriers or perceptions that impede this**

Because the political system effectively excludes immigrants, there is an urgent need for proactive and creative ways of fostering immigrant representation in decision-making bodies. For example, political parties could support the appointment of immigrants to boards of State-funded bodies. Local authorities should create consultative committees including immigrants and other stakeholders and involve these directly in decision-making. City and County Councils might set up Diverse City/County Advisory Committees whose members are entitled to contribute to Council meetings. A number of existing initiatives promoted by groups such as The New Communities Partnership and Cairde could be built upon. These include the Dublin City Integration Forum, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Ethnic Minority Integration Forum, South Dublin Migrant Integration Forum, Fingal Ethnic Network and Balbriggan Integration Forum. Such Forums disseminate information to migrant communities in the council areas, provide a link between communities and the local people, promote migrants' perspectives in policy matters within the County, provide a space where County officials can present topics of interest and inform migrant communities on developments in the County, among others. The introduction of a migrant quota in political parties would be welcomed.

As modern Ireland is a diverse republic with a significant representation of various ethnic and migrant groups, there is a need for State institutions to reflect the composition of this diverse society.

2. EDUCATION

Ireland's linguistic landscape has changed radically in the past fifteen years. In schools, there are pupils from over 160 countries and up to 200 languages are spoken. For approximately 70-75%, English is not their first language (Department of Education and Skills, 2011). We are writing this submission as advocates for the support and maintenance of the multilingual abilities of our youngest citizens, in particular the mother tongue (L1). International research points to the centrality of both the acquisition of the language of the host society *and* the maintenance of the L1 for successful integration outcomes.

Across education, there is an imperative to support and capitalise on the multilingual abilities of young people, not only because of the currently much mooted economic benefits, but also because of the undeniable social, analytical and psychological benefits. The maintenance of the L1 is particularly important given the fact that international research data point to the positive benefits of L1 proficiency on the development of a second language (L2). This has been articulated by Professor Jim Cummins (1981) as the Linguistic Interdependence Principle. L1 maintenance is also important for the maintenance and development of intergenerational relationships, friendships at home, as well as for community solidarity, social capital and cohesion purposes. In cases where migrant families decide to remain in Ireland more permanently, it is very important to maintain the L1 because of the educational and familial benefits to the individual as well as to Irish society as a whole.

There is little to no provision across the mainstream schooling sector for the support and development of the L1. At times, there is also a lack of awareness on the part of educators in mainstream education of the importance of maintaining the L1. However, outside of mainstream education, many communities have established, what are termed, 'complementary schools'. In this submission, we wish to provide some information on the complementary school sector in Ireland which is growing relatively rapidly. We focus in particular on the Polish complementary school system.

The Polish complementary schools

Complementary schools (also known as community language schools, heritage language schools or supplementary schools) run at weekends, for the main part, and provide tuition in subjects such as history, geography, the mother tongue (e.g. Polish) and (sometimes) maths. In Ireland, numerous communities run complementary schools, e.g. Polish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian. The Polish school system is the largest. These schools play a vital role in the long-term maintenance of bilingual abilities, yet they do not receive official recognition by the Irish State. Currently, there are 31 Polish complementary schools³ which cater for more than 4,000 Polish children. The first Polish complementary school was set up in 2005 and since then the sector has seen exponential growth – there were

³ A full list is available here:

http://www.dublin.msz.gov.pl/pl/info_konsularne/polonia/szkolnictwo_i_oswiata/szkolnictwo_i_oswiata

See also "The Polish complementary schools and Irish mainstream education. Past, present and future" by Niamh Nestor (UCD), 2014.

11 schools in 2009 and this number had increased to 24 by 2012. The smallest school enrolls 15 pupils while the largest enrolls 829. Staffing numbers also vary, from two staff members to forty-three. On Saturdays and Sundays, pupils follow the Polish school curriculum in Polish (language), history and geography (and sometimes maths and other subjects and activities).

Provision for languages in mainstream education

On the part of the Irish State, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has made some provisions to support the maintenance and development of the L1. Since 2005, the State Examinations Commission has also made it possible to sit a Leaving Certificate examination in, what are termed, “non-curricular EU languages”. This means that these subjects are not taught during normal school hours nor is there a curriculum available for them. There are fifteen such language examinations on offer: Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Modern Greek, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovakian and Swedish. Students may opt to sit a non-curricular EU language exam if they meet the following criteria: (i) be from a member state of the EU; (ii) speak the language of the exam they would like to take; (iii) have followed a programme of study leading to the LC; (iv) be sitting LC English; (v) not be sitting any other non-curricular EU language exam.

Table 1 (below) outlines the numbers of students who have sat Polish at LC level since it was introduced in 2005. The total number of students sitting non-curricular EU languages has also been provided as has the percentage of these who sat Polish only. The final column shows the percentage of those who achieved an A, B or C grade in Polish.

Table 1. Polish at Leaving Certificate level, 2005-2013

Year	Polish	Total no. sitting non-curricular lgs	% sitting Polish of non-curricular lgs	% A/B/C grade in Polish
2005	<10	71	<14%	n/a
2006	20	150	13%	95%
2007	53	254	21%	92.4%
2008	171	541	32%	94.7%
2009	328	817	40%	90.5%
2010	451	1,050	43%	95.8%
2011	574	1,262	45%	88.7%
2012	707	1,370	52%	91.8%
2013	769	1,470	52%	91.2%

(Source: State Examinations Commission)

As is clear from Table 1, the number of students sitting Polish has risen rapidly since 2005. In 2012 and 2013, more than half of all students sitting non-curricular EU language exams have taken Polish. Of these, a consistently high percentage have been awarded an A, B or C grade, indicating high levels of proficiency in Polish.

At the individual school level, there have also been numerous initiatives and supports put in place to develop and maintain bilingual abilities among students. A small number of schools

have engaged in providing language classes for their students. This is a school-based initiative as schools in Ireland are not obliged to provide mother tongue classes for students whose first language is not English. Examples of this at primary level come from the two Dublin-based Muslim schools which have been providing Arabic classes for pupils (without State support) since their establishment (one since 1993 and the other since 2001). Other schools take different approaches. At post-primary level, language classes are mainly offered to help students to prepare for their LC exam. Schools offering Polish include: Arklow CBS (Co. Wicklow), Errigal College (Co. Donegal), Hartstown Community School (Dublin 15), Coláiste Bríde (Dublin 22), Moyle Park College (Dublin 22) (Dublin 22)⁴

Recommendations

It is clear that the Irish education system and the complementary school systems work in parallel. Although both systems share the same clients (children and parents) and have shared interests, actors within each system remain unaware of the activities of the other. This absence of interconnectedness creates a system which is less efficient, less productive, and, ultimately, less beneficial for the children it purports to serve. In this section, we make some recommendations as to how this gap could be bridged as well as other recommendations.

NB: Child Protection:

The complementary schools would benefit from inspections, similarly to Irish mainstream schools. Checks should be in place to make sure that all staff are Garda-vetted and that child protection guidelines are being adhered to. Currently, the complementary school system is not under the auspices of the DES. As the schools function on the territory of the Irish State, it is important to ensure that procedures in place for mainstream schools are also being followed in complementary schools.

- *State recognition:*

State recognition of the complementary school sector needs to be forthcoming. The complementary schools play a crucial role in Irish education. They form part an integral part of the education sector and contribute in a myriad of ways to the educational outcomes of our young people. However, this contribution is generally overlooked and undervalued. One form of recognition (also suggested by O'Mahony (2013) should be the provision of suitable spaces in which the complementary schools could be run with costs borne by the State. These would ideally be school buildings which would be offered to communities for use as complementary schools at weekends.

Further State recognition should come in the form of stronger partnership in policy implementation. At a time when the DES is striving to improve and increase literacy levels in Irish schools, migrant-led schools play a very important support role in this work. The maintenance and development of the first language (e.g. Polish) can play a vital role in the successful acquisition of the second language (English/Irish). One of the organising pillars of Polish schools is the fostering of the Polish language, and, in the implementation of DES policy, this makes their role crucial. In this and other areas, a strong partnership between

⁴ This list may not be exhaustive.

educators in both the Irish and Polish (and other migrant) communities will bring positive social benefits for all.

- *Building links between the mainstream and complementary school sectors:* Kenner et al. (2010) recommend the building of links between the mainstream and complementary school sectors for various reasons. They found that mainstream teachers, who may previously have held negative opinions about complementary schooling, benefitted greatly from visiting their local complementary school. They witnessed and acknowledged the professionalism and commitment of their peers in the complementary school and they recognised the strong cultural ties that existed between the teaching staff, the young people and their families. Furthermore, the return visits by the complementary school teachers to mainstream schools benefitted the children by bringing together their two previously 'parallel' educational worlds. Kenner et al. (2010) encourage both mainstream and complementary schools to make links whether it be through partnerships around curriculum, cultural events or the joint assessment of pupils. The DES should house statistics on the complementary schools in Ireland and make these available to mainstream schools. Further, the DES should recognise the contribution of the complementary schools to Irish education and should explicitly encourage the development of links between mainstream and complementary schools.

There is a further imperative for mainstream and complementary schools to cooperate. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that when a child presents with, for example, reading difficulties, mainstream teachers are often uncertain as to whether the child has a literacy difficulty or if the difficulty is simply that the child is not yet sufficiently proficient in English/Irish to access the curriculum successfully. At present, there are few supports in place in mainstream education for children (whose first language is not English/Irish) who may be experiencing literacy difficulties. These children may be inappropriately diagnosed (or not diagnosed at all) with literacy difficulties because of a lack of resources, knowledge and appropriate training⁵. It is not beneficial or desirable to assess the child *only* through the language of the mainstream. At the very least, the child must be assessed in her/his mother tongue as well. Very often, complementary schools employ speech and language therapists. In order to create a full and accurate picture of students' learning experiences, both mainstream and complementary schools should join forces. Likewise, ongoing training, both at the pre-service and in-service stages, is vital in order to equip mainstream teachers to fully deal with the needs of children whose first language is not English/Irish.

- *Non-curricular EU languages:* It is encouraging to note the increasing numbers sitting non-curricular EU languages, in particular Polish, at LC level. It is also reassuring to hear the recent discussions around the introduction of foreign languages as short courses in the revised Junior Certificate cycle. The Post-Primary Languages Initiative is currently preparing a short course in Polish as an L1. The benefits of the introduction of these languages earlier in the education cycle cannot be overstated. These include the maintenance of literacy skills at an earlier age as well as the

⁵ Research has been conducted on this internationally, e.g. Peer & Reid 2000; Martin-Jones & Jones 2001.

gains to be had from institutional recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity and the concomitant social, psychological and economic benefits.

There are a number of issues to be addressed around the availability of Polish and other non-curricular EU languages at LC level. Firstly, students are restricted to taking one non-curricular EU language exam only (see section 4 for the criteria), and the fifteen non-curricular EU language examinations are run concurrently. This inherently fails to recognise that a child may come from a bilingual home where more than one EU language is spoken. Secondly, there are no oral or aural (listening) components to the non-curricular EU language exams. It is worth noting that curricular languages, such as Irish and French, award a substantial percentage of the total grade for oral and aural components (50% at both higher- and ordinary-level LC Irish; 45% at both higher- and ordinary-level LC French). Whether the lack of an oral and aural component for the non-curricular EU languages is due to issues around resources is unclear. However, the introduction of these would bring innumerable benefits. The availability of a written exam only may marginalise those who may not have had experience of writing or reading in their mother tongue for some time as well as those who may have literacy difficulties in their mother tongue. If these young people are not receiving some form of formal preparation either at home, through private lessons or through a complementary school, the exam may prove challenging.

The issue of the recognition of qualifications is one area that needs to be addressed if qualified Polish teachers are to be employed to teach, for example, short courses at JC level. Currently, a teacher qualified to teach Polish (or any other non-curricular language) at post-primary level is unable to register under Teaching Council Regulation 4 (which refers to post-primary level) because Polish is not a “curricular” subject (see The Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations, 2009, pp. 13-15). In this case, the Teaching Council should consider redefining the terms “curricular” and “non-curricular” as they are used within their Registration Regulations. After all, these “non-curricular” languages already receive institutional support in the form of an LC examination. An extension of this support to allow teachers to register in the manner appropriate to their profession would be a positive step forward.

- *Raising awareness of the importance of L1 maintenance*

It would be unrealistic at present to expect L1 maintenance to take place in the school. However, one way of tackling this would be by getting information to parents *through* the school. For this purpose, it is essential that all educators be made fully aware of the cognitive benefits of bilingualism. In addition, there should be a good communication system between home and school (e.g. through Home-School Liaison Officers), and user-friendly information needs to be provided to parents in their mother tongue where parents and school cannot communicate effectively due to language difficulties.

- The DES should issue a Circular on the importance of maintaining the L1.

- Principals, teachers, early childhood care workers, home-school liaison officers, and school completion officers must be fully convinced and informed of the benefits of bilingualism and of the importance in encouraging both L1 and L2 literacy. This can be facilitated through the Inspectorate, training colleges, in-service, pre-service, teachers’ unions’ publications, and the education centres.

- Schools and classrooms should be places where bi- and multilingualism is celebrated as part of an intercultural school curriculum. This in turn would underpin the development of an appreciation for multilingualism and multiculturalism among all pupils.
- Schools should have an explicit policy on support for the development and maintenance of the L1.
- Parents should be able to draw on an established advice network, e.g. the internet (one example is Bilingual Forum Ireland, www.bilingualforumireland.com), or through Home-School Liaison Officers in the school. It is important to note that information must also be provided for parents in the L1.
- Both statutory agencies and voluntary bodies who deal with migrant issues should be encouraged to include an 'Information for Parents' section on their websites where the benefits of bilingualism would be outlined (for example, NALA; in addition, the SEN Polish complementary school runs a campaign aimed at encouraging parents to foster bilingualism: Kampania Informacyjna Dzieci website⁶)

Conclusion

International research has shown that positive integration outcomes occur as a result of a number of factors, including the maintenance of the L1 and acquisition of the L2 (see Berry et al., 2006). Census 2011 suggests that migrants and their families are remaining in Ireland for a variety of reasons and are not, as media speculation often tends to suggest, returning or planning to return home. Ireland remains attractive for many reasons other than economic benefits. The centrality of language cannot be overstated in the process of integration and we strongly recommend that particular attention is paid to this area in the forthcoming Integration policy. We recommend that you focus in particular on migrant children, the development and maintenance of multilingualism, migrant education, and the contribution of complementary schooling to Irish education as a whole.

3. ACCESS TO HEALTH AND WELFARE SERVICES

The integration of migrants is only possible if their basic needs relating to health, security, shelter and human dignity are met. Therefore, the ability of migrants to access relevant services is crucial. Access includes the right to access, pathways of access and the quality of service.

The right of Polish people to access health and welfare services is regulated by relevant EU and Irish laws, including habitual residence conditions, ordinary residence and the right to reside. People who do not fall into these categories fall between the cracks in the system and this jeopardises their ability to obtain crucial help in order to contribute to society and to integrate. An individual's ability to engage with and receive quality service is highly

⁶ <http://www.helpmykidlearn.ie/activities/0-2/detail/two-three-languages> and <http://kid.whitefactory.eu/>

influenced by a provider's linguistic and cultural competence as well as clients' command of English, knowledge of existing services and pathways to accessing them.

The Polish community welcomes efforts by the Irish State and the NGO sector to educate Polish migrants about services, including translation and interpretation services and the funding of the State and non-State agencies that support migrants in the integration process and in their negotiations with the system. Nonetheless, the needs of Polish migrants are becoming more complex and require the State to adopt new solutions that are more targeted and inclusive. The provision of services within a 'one size fits all' approach is exclusionary by nature and marginalises vulnerable cohorts with specific needs and challenges.

Current situation

Grassroots and community groups and services working with Polish clients are reporting an increase in the numbers of clients presenting with psychological issues relating to the social determinants of health, including long-term unemployment, the language barrier, stress arising from acculturation and isolation, family issues such as marriage breakdown and custody, bereavement, illness and disability. These issues, if individuals are not in receipt of support, may escalate and develop into more serious social and psychological difficulties, including mental and somatic illnesses, addictions, homelessness, criminal behaviour, learnt hopelessness syndrome, child protection issues and domestic violence.

Mental health and addictions

Mainstream addiction and community mental health services do not register many Polish clients. There are very few trained interpreters who are experienced in working sensitively with clients that are vulnerable or experiencing mental health difficulties. Moreover, three-way counselling is deemed unacceptable by some mental health professionals. The experience of Polish people who use ambulatory and inpatient mental health services includes the experience of crisis and involuntary detentions, a language barrier when it comes to accessing talk therapies, poor social supports and a poor ability to engage with a community-based mental health service. Individuals who are not able to engage with a mainstream service thus rely on Polish-speaking professionals. Polish-led grassroots psychological supports are overwhelmed by demand. For example, in 2013, the CKU Centre for Counselling and Therapy Dublin which specialises in addiction provided support to 463 clients; Together-Razem Centre had 138 crisis interventions and supported 71 clients suffering from addictions. Depression, emotional crises, mental illnesses, addictions, suicides, and relationship issues are the most commonly occurring psychological difficulties. Targeted programmes that support Polish people who are long-term unemployed are extremely rare. There are few Polish-speaking psychological services. Generally, they are private practices or under-resourced community organisations. This situation creates access barriers for clients and hinders sustainability which leaves the most vulnerable individuals without support.

Protecting families - Child protection and domestic violence

The rights of women with a poor record of employment in the Irish State (often due to their role as homemaker) are not fully recognised. This impedes their right to access support services and subsequently undermines their ability to live independent lives and leave abusive relationships. Services which provide culturally and linguistically appropriate support for victims of domestic violence are extremely rare.

There also is an increase in children of Polish nationals and other migrants who are being taken into care by the HSE. In these instances, migrant parents or carers are often left without support. Migrants lack information on child protection policies and procedures. Similarly, State social workers experience a cultural gap. There is also a lack of foster parents of similar cultural background to some of the children in State care who would understand better children's needs and could speak in their native language in this stressful situation. This is not in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that a child has the right to be brought up by his or her family and to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, and his or her family relations.

Access to welfare services

Polish nationals who seek information and experience issues with accessing State services often rely on information from advocacy services with Polish speaking staff and volunteers. However, there are limited options, including certain citizens' information centres, NGOs (including Cairde and Crosscare) and Polish grassroots organisations (e.g. Together-Razem Centre). As an example, Together-Razem Centre supported 1,771 Polish clients to access information in 2013.

Reported and anecdotal instances of discrimination are a serious issue with respect to the right to access. They include institutional barriers and instances of the personal views of decision-making officers influencing the decision-making process. Reporting incidents can be hindered by a lack of knowledge on how to report and the fear of the effect of the report on the final decision.

There are also issues relating to the application of EU migrant mobility directives with respect to the process of assessment of applications for welfare payments between EU states. The expertise of relevant agencies is increasing; however, the process is decentralised and there is poor information available with regards to the procedures that apply.

Recommendations

- Increase the linguistic and cultural capacity of State and State-funded services in order to provide quality services to non-Irish nationals and non-English speaking clients; recognise the value of cultural mediation provided by bilingual professionals and advocates; increase the linguistic and cultural capacity of frontline and managerial staff in the public and community sector; promote bilingualism and the recruitment of Polish-speaking professionals, including Polish community workers, community officers and social workers.
- Targeted initiatives, outreach programmes, tailored methods of access and response to migrant communities. Provide English language learning opportunities. Increase cultural sensitivity in the area of child protection. Migrant families should be encouraged to train to become foster parents. Interim cultural mediation solutions should be adopted as well as improved cooperation between (Polish/other-Irish) State authorities.
- Tackle racism and discrimination in State institutions; improve the reporting system to ensure anonymity and the effectiveness of complaints.
- Encourage cooperation between mainstream and Polish grassroots organisations as an example of best practise; support Polish-led organisations that provide information and advocacy services and that liaise between Polish-speaking clients and Irish services by providing adequate funding and introducing capacity-building solutions; support Polish-led organisations that provide psychotherapy, counselling and other supports to vulnerable

sections of the population, including the long-term unemployed, people in crisis, the mentally ill, and victims of domestic violence; reimbursement of services for vulnerable clients in receipt of State support in the form of medical card and social welfare.

- More coordinated and client-orientated system of processing welfare applications within the EU.
- Bilateral cooperation with regards to tackling certain social issues between State agencies of relevant countries.
- Establish European networks to share examples of best practice.

4. EMPLOYMENT

One of the biggest opportunities to create positive integration outcomes is in the workplace, a place in which workers usually spend 8 hours a day, 40 hours per week or one-third of their adult lives. The workplace is one of the best places to implement strategies to improve integration, especially in light of the fact that many workplaces have employees of various nationalities. Migrant workers, including Polish people, are employed in almost every sector in Ireland. Migrants have greatly contributed to Ireland's success and they have equally suffered through the economic recession side-by-side with Irish workers. Many Poles are highly qualified, well-educated and work in high-skill professions. However, there is still a large group of people who are employed in low-skill jobs, even though they are highly educated. Generally speaking, the issue is language. These migrants often do not speak English well and thus are vulnerable to exploitation or to have their rights infringed at the very least. Positive steps should be taken to tackle such issues, particularly given the fact that the workplace is an important environment in which integration may be promoted.

Recommendations

- Employers should be encouraged to provide English classes for workers with low English language proficiency. Such classes could be encouraged by the provision of tax relief for employers.
- Access to government services that support workers should be provided in various language and should be more user friendly. In the context of the forthcoming reform of the Workplace Relations Dispute System, it would be appropriate to provide an advisory service in a language(s) easily understood by complainants. Additional financial resources should be provided for NGOs which provide assistance to migrant workers. In addition, documents such as grievance and disciplinary procedures and anti-racism policies should be translated into appropriate languages.
- Employers should create opportunities for integration of the migrant workforce with local workers. State bodies which fund business start-ups or subsidise companies or provide any funding for business development should ensure that such companies commit to challenging racism and discriminatory behaviour. This should be a condition for the provision of such funding.
- The State should support and promote best practice in employing migrant workers, providing equal access to rights and to workplace integration.
- Another way to ensure that integration is really taking place is to promote collective bargaining in the workplace where workers, in unity, could combine efforts in order to

improve terms and conditions in the workplace through their chosen union. In the present situation, Irish law allows employer not to enter into collective bargaining. Thus, workers are discouraged from being involved.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Should you so wish, we would be more than happy to meet in order to discuss our submission further. Please contact us at

info@forumpolonia.org

Forum Polonia: www.forumpolonia.org

CKU www.ckudublin.org

Irish Polish Society www.irishpolishsociety.ie

POSK www.en.poskdublin.org

Together-Razem Centre www.together-razem.org

Polish Complementary Schools from Dublin and Dundalk

www.polskaszkoladundalk.com

www.polskaszkolawdublinie.com/en

Polonia Razem www.poloniarazem.com

and various Polish and Irish community activists employed in various Irish organisations and institutions:

***Artur Banaszkiwicz** (Forum Polonia, employed at the Trade and Economic Department of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Dublin, coordinator of “Vote! You are at home” campaign, Complementary School SEN Board member, education consultant), **Wojciech Bialek** (Together-Razem Centre), **Barnaba Dorda** (Forum Polonia, IPS, POSK, organiser at SIPTU, coordinator of “Vote! You are at home” campaign), **Piotr Gawlik** (Forum Polonia), **Sylwia Gołębiewska** (Polish Complementary School, Dundalk), **Tomasz Kostienko** (Polonia Razem, Forum Polonia, Polish Scouting Association, Parents’ Council of Polish Complementary School SPK in Dublin), **Emilia Marchelewska** (Cairde, CKU Centre for Counselling & Therapy, Forum Polonia), **Agnieszka Matys** (Polish complementary School SEN, Dublin), **Niamh Nestor** (UCD, Forum Polonia, IPS, Bilingual Forum Ireland), **Jarosław Plachecki** (IPS), **Katarzyna Walkowska** (Together-Razem Centre).*

About

Forum Polonia is a cooperative platform that brings together representatives of various Polish community organisations, the media, and individuals involved in projects relating to the Polish minority and its links to Irish society as a whole. The Forum operates through information exchanges, mutual supports, social integration, and promoting and developing the interests of the Polish community in the Republic of Ireland.

Cairde is a community development organisation working to tackle health inequalities among ethnic minority communities by improving ethnic minority access to health services and ethnic minority

participation in health planning and delivery. Cairde's programmes include Health & Advocacy Centre, Balbriggan Integration Initiative and Be Aware. Be Well. Migrant Mental Health Initiative.

CKU Centre for Counselling and Therapy works to meet the psychosocial needs of individuals, couples and families. CKU is an organisation that provides professional psychotherapeutic and prevention help for people addicted to alcohol, drugs and gambling as well as co-dependents, adult children of alcoholics and people from dysfunctional families.

The Irish Polish Society is the main organisation in Ireland for Polish people who want to learn about Ireland and Irish people who are interested in Poland. It has been in existence since 1979. IPS is an active organisation that promotes contacts and exchanges between Irish and Polish people. Activities include musical evenings, poetry and literature readings, film screenings, talks by local and visiting high profile lecturers and social meetings. It provides advice to Poles in Ireland and host lectures on integration issues. The IPS also celebrates the main cultural and religious festivals of both Ireland and Poland. The IPS committee is made up of Irish and Polish people who work together to promote the best from each country and culture.

POSK (The Polish Social and Cultural Association) is an organisation for Poles who live in the Republic of Ireland. Its aim is to preserve the bond among Polish people living in Ireland, to promote Polish culture, art and Polish traditions, and to cultivate and develop national identity. POSK is run by a committee consisting of 9 members, whose work is entirely voluntary. The organisation runs a Polish Library and Polish language classes. POSK organises meetings with Polish people from many walks of life, such as: culture, art, science and politics; and organises a variety of events including the celebration of national feast days, anniversaries, etc.

Together-Razem Centre is a charitable organisation that supports Polish nationals who find themselves in difficulty when confronted with issues connected to family, homelessness, addiction, mental health, integration, information provision and advocacy.