Migrant Communities and the University
Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities for Collaboration

Geary Institute, University College Dublin
November 20, 2009

Sponsors:
Kenan Institute for Ethics, Duke University and
Geary Institute, University College Dublin
Conference Schedule
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1:00-2:00 Lunch and Registration

2:00-2:15 Welcome by Suzanne Shanahan, Kenan Institute for Ethics

2:15-3:15 Keynote Address by Chinedu Onyejelem, Editor and Publisher, Metro Éireann

Responses from Niall Crowley, Independent Equity Consultant, and Steve Garner, Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Aston University

3:15-3:30 Break

3:30-4:45 Panel, Chaired by Dorren McMahon, Geary Institute
Paul Rowe, Educate Together
Sioban O’Brien Green, AkiDwA
Rebecca King-O’Riain, Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

4:45-5:00 Break

5:00-6:00 Focus Groups

6:00-6:30 Informal Reception
Introduction

For migrant and refugee groups the current environment has redefined existing challenges and created a host of new ones. With these challenges also come opportunities. Universities are creative problem solvers in both the laboratory and in the everyday world. Can migrant and refugee organizations and universities develop collaborative and cost-effective ways to meet contemporary challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that accompany these challenges?

This one-day conference allowed researchers, program directors, organizers, activists, students, academics, and government officials the opportunity to come together to address these questions. Following a keynote and panel discussion, participants were asked to work in small focus groups with experienced facilitators. The focus groups identified outstanding needs within the migrant communities, and the organizers committed themselves to developing initiatives aimed at addressing these issues.
Conference Papers
Thank you for inviting me to speak here today on the big challenges facing refugees and migrants.

There is no gainsaying that this is an issue very close to my heart as a Nigerian that has been living here for over twelve years and also with my work in Metro Éireann and as a promoter of many integration projects established by Metro Éireann. I am therefore presenting to you a journalistic approach to the question, What are the big challenges facing refugees and migrants today, who are collectively referred to here as immigrants? I will also strongly touch on the issue of immigration and multiculturalism to enable us to get an in-depth understanding of the issue.

Before the economic crisis, the controversy about multiculturalism in Ireland was ever ongoing. In every modern society where globalisation and interdependency have combined to produce continued economic success and an increased diversity of people, the question of a cultural mix has remained controversial. The issue was therefore not unique to Ireland.

Since the economic crisis, the issue, particularly in Ireland, has become especially fraught. Many of us have lived through the changes here since the mid-1990s and the birth of the Celtic Tiger. Until last year, I would say that most of these changes were exciting and challenging. But with the economic crisis the challenges seem to be both endless and much tougher. We live in changed and changing times, in a different kind of Ireland, where economic uncertainties have not only increased the problems faced by immigrants, they have also forced the locals to start looking for greener pasture elsewhere, once again.

There are many people who think that it’s the end of the world. But I am sure many others would also see the present difficulties as a good thing. They are a reminder of the truth of the old saying that change is the only thing that’s permanent. Change? Yes. What change in particular, one might ask? The same change that turned Ireland from an emigrant country into an immigrant one nearly two decades ago. And the same change that is seeing it turn once again into a country of emigration.

To go back to the issue of immigration in Ireland when the going was good: some of the controversies came from people who were baffled at the way Ireland had changed within a very short while. I remember often hearing comments from people like “We were not consulted” or “No one asked us if we wanted them.” I am sure that some of those posing those questions then would realise now that immigration is like a fraction that can never divide out evenly.

In the context of finding a space for dialogue, many people presented the argument that immigration to Ireland was a new phenomenon. There is neither a yes nor a no answer to that; one can only point out that it’s a global phenomenon that is truly permanent. While its direction may be transient, the effects are eternal.

From what I can see, the true history of immigration here is not being told because it would not be politically correct to do so. But I believe that the inability to do so makes the integration of immigrants here difficult to achieve. For instance, contrary to the general assumption that most of the immigrants in Ireland are asylum seekers, gold diggers, and poverty-ridden individuals, the majority of them, in the early days of the Celtic Tiger era, were “guests of the nation” who came to rescue the economy when labour was scarce. This story is not the same as that of millions of Irish people forced to leave the shores of this country because of famine and starvation in the nineteenth century, or in search of jobs in the early twentieth.

In a recent article in the Irish Times, some of the paper’s online readers reacted to an article on the issue of emigration. One of them, Jay, who said he was born and educated in Dublin but left Ireland in his twenties, had this to say:

My best advice, based on my very varied, interesting and relatively successful life filled with rich experiences and career choices, is to leave now and enjoy your life.

Ireland is a disaster. It is sorely mismanaged and misruled and destroyed by its own absurdity. There is corruption in the Government, banks, business, police, law, and even the Catholic Church (Home Rule was certainly Rome rule).

And it seems we learn nothing. The UK is also in dire economic straits and offers nothing much different from Ireland (how could it?), only with less corruption. North America, New Zealand and Australia (where I now live) are all beautiful, and are happy to welcome people from our islands, their ancestral home. It’s all out there for you. Go now while you are young.
I really like Jay’s story. It’s a nearly comprehensive account of the benefits of immigration. But there is also a lot that is missing from it. There is no doubt but Jay would certainly have a lot of challenges in his daily life outside the comfort of his own home country—challenges that in this instance he has not shared publicly.

Unlike Jay though, it’s doubtful if many immigrants to Ireland would be as positive when telling their own stories. Don’t get me wrong: I certainly know many non-Irish people here who laugh at the mention of some of the daily challenges facing their fellow countrymen and women, or other immigrants. This set of people may not have ever had it so good. For others, however, it’s a quite different story.

When, on the eve of the 2004 Cabinet reshuffle, Fine Gael TD Gay Mitchell—now an MEP—called for the appointment of a minister of state to coordinate immigrant affairs across all departments, his main reason for doing so was, in my view, simply to score a cheap political point. Nevertheless, his statement described the situation very well: “This Minister could proactively combat racism, ensure that the health, education and other needs of immigrants are addressed and promote integration policies. This would mean having programmes in place to educate both the indigenous and immigrant population on the dangers of racism.”

One could ask, Why was this necessary? According to Mitchell, “a significant number of people, when they do not receive what they consider are their entitlements, complain to TDs that they would get them ‘if they were immigrants.’ Most do not distinguish between bogus asylum seekers and real asylum seekers or other immigrants. This bad feeling, if it is allowed to fester, will eventually give rise to conflict and possibly violence.”

Mitchell’s statement, made over five years ago, remains an indication of some of the big challenges facing non-Irish people in Ireland, including asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants, depending on their nationality, gender, age, language, and immigration status. For instance, immigrants from the Horn of Africa tell me that their biggest challenges are using the English language, getting work, coming to terms with culture shock, and working out how to bridge the gap between themselves and the Irish community. Many of them know very little about the Irish community, even after living here for over a decade or more, because of the difficulty of bridging this gap.

Residency

The universal challenge for asylum seekers is their legal status. Their inability to work and contribute meaningfully—apart from living in boring hostels where they receive full board and accommodation and about €19 a week—rests on the almighty decision of the minister to grant them refugee status, or humanitarian leave to remain, et cetera.

For those who are legally here as refugees, finding work, hanging on to this work, and career progression all remain very difficult. Migrant workers and parents of Irish-born children who gained residency because of their Irish-born children also have their own peculiar problems. While it’s true in the case of parents of Irish-born children that a few of them have no intention of joining the employment market, and not just because of the present economic crisis, many more of them have serious difficulty gaining employment and renewing their residency.

But for most immigrants who are legal residents here, and who are entitled to apply for naturalization, and who want to do so, gaining citizenship is certainly a big problem. The problem has recently been compounded by the government’s decision to allow penalty points from driving offenses to count against citizenship applications. This is not only a flawed decision but will seriously work against integration.

Cultural Barriers/Orientation

It is well documented that cultural barriers also pose a strong challenge to immigrants in Ireland. Traditionally, many immigrants to Ireland already have set, culturally grounded patterns for doing things. For example, not making eye contact with seniors/elders is a challenge to immigrants in the context of socialisation and integration and their development in Ireland.

A recent encounter I had with a Muslim woman in Dublin may serve as a helpful example for understanding this issue. Almost at close of business one day last week she walked into our office, full of smiles. When she met me at the door, she told me she was looking for my colleague Catherine Reilly (our deputy editor) to tell her story. What story, I asked? She said she wanted to make it known that you can be Muslim and still participate in social life in Ireland. When I probed further, she told me she had recently participated in a beauty pageant and was proud to be herself at the show despite the fact that her religion does not allow her to wear a swimsuit—a requirement for one of the rounds at the contest. She said she did not break the law and instead put on her own traditional evening wear during the swimsuit session—and she was very happy with how it worked!

Not everyone would have the courage to do something like this. But her story is also a salutary one of the kind of isolation that can be brought about by cultural differences. It can also work the other way round. Youth workers in Dublin are increasingly encountering immigrant youths who are turning away from their own culture because of the difficulty it presents for them in socialising. Some of them want to eat, sleep, and wake up Irish, despite being born outside of Ireland. This set of people now resents the cultures they were born into. There is an assumption that this problem is caused by
increasingly dysfunctional families among immigrant groups. Some believe that this problem could lead to the youths’ becoming social misfits in the future.

**Lack of Participation in Irish Community Activities**

Another major challenge facing immigrants, especially immigrant youths, is a lack of participation in community activities. In my many interactions with immigrant youth workers across Ireland, I have been told that immigrant youths are shunning youth activities due to family issues, religion, and negative perceptions of community centres and activities. Some parents “don’t want their kids to smoke at the age of 12 simply because it seems that it is being condoned by Irish people.”

**Racism**

Apart from that, there is also the fear of bullying and racism. There is well-documented evidence of bullying and discrimination in the workplace. It is a major problem, especially given the present economic situation, in which the loss of work or the threat thereof is incredibly consequential. Generally, racism and sentiments against people who are not Irish among Irish people, as noted in the statement from Gay Mitchell earlier in this piece, are common problems for most migrants.

Earlier this week the world marked International Tolerance Day. The ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) used the occasion to launch its 2008 report on hate crimes. It said the issue remains a serious problem in many states, including Ireland. It stated that there were numerous instances of intimidation, threats, vandalism, assault, arson and murder during 2008. It also stresses that the full extent of hate crimes remains obscured by a lack of reliable data. Ireland is a good example of a place that gathers little or no information and data on this issue.

The report states that there were 170 instances of hate crime recorded by Garda in Ireland in 2008, compared with 210 in 2007. While 85 cases were prosecuted in 2007—with twenty-two sentences being handed down—there were only 45 cases prosecuted (three of which resulted in sentences) in 2008. Could it be said that racist incidents are decreasing because there is now an increased awareness of diversity in Ireland? No. That cannot be true.

In the meantime, immigrants in Ireland continue to be targeted. Of late, there has been an increase in racial profiling of immigrants, especially black people. There is also concern among immigrants about lack of Garda respect for their rights when they carry out raids, including in born-again churches. Unfortunately, there is little willingness on the part of the government to find a lasting solution to the problem of official racial profiling.

But that is not to say that only the present government is to blame for the lack of proper programmes and policies to promote multiculturalism in Ireland, which would address some of the challenges that immigrants face here. It is political rather than government inaction that has bedeviled real progress being made in creating a diverse society. This is a societal problem that needs proactive and urgent attention. Ireland will not see the real benefits of diversity if it continues to operate ad-hoc immigration policies and programmes.

**Language Barriers/Learning Difficulties**

People from non-English speaking countries are finding it extremely hard to adapt to the educational system, their local communities, and their work environments due to a lack of basic knowledge of both written and spoken English. Most of the time, this group of immigrants also finds it difficult to find jobs. The end result of this is that they end up having no social contacts beyond their countrymen. There are many immigrants who speak extremely good English but who find it very difficult to hold a pen. They also need help. While it would be a great thing to help this set of immigrants acquire more English language skills, it is important to note that such development could also help them create opportunities for themselves and Irish people, as many of them are talented people.

For immigrants who are running their own organisations, capacity building is a serious challenge. Often this works against them in applying for grants and tenders. As a result, most of them will continue to struggle for their survival in spite of the fact that their projects have the potential to be extremely successful.

One other thing I would also like to mention here is the lack of real support for immigrant entrepreneurs. I believe that immigrant entrepreneurs have a strong role to play in helping Ireland to achieve a smart economy. The talk about a smart economy as the next thing for Ireland merely means exporting goods and services to the home countries of immigrants in Ireland. I believe that no one knows those target countries better than immigrants and their families at home and abroad.

**Health**

Maintaining health standards is also a worrying issue for many immigrants. In the past few months, mental health issues seem to have come to the fore as a problem for African people, especially women, including those seeking asylum and refugees. In a bid to come to terms with this, many of them are turning to AkiDwA—the African Women’s Centre—for
support rather than the health services. One of the reasons for this is that available services are tailored for Irish people and therefore do not really fit newcomers to the country.

Ladies and gentlemen, I cannot honestly stand here before you today and say that nothing is being done to engage and help refugees and migrants overcome some of their challenges. However, I owe no apology to anyone by saying that most of these actions are not good enough. I will rest my case by looking at three main areas—political participation, media, and education.

**Political Participation**

It’s all well and good that the major political parties except Sinn Fein ran immigrant candidates at the last local election. Ten percent of the Green Party candidates were ethnic minorities. Isn’t that a good development, a serious engagement with immigrants? However, the very poor showing of the immigrant candidates makes one wonder what type of support the parties gave to those candidates. I covered the local elections, and I can authoritatively say that there was no commitment on the part of most of the parties to get them elected. I know one of these immigrant candidates was—because of boundary changes that he was not aware of but party officials were—even allowed to campaign outside his constituency while party leaders with knowledge of the boundary looked on. This is not engagement. Indeed, engagement without commitment amounts to nothing.

Most politicians and public representatives would easily use the former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern’s slogan “a lot done, more to do” when discussing the issue of engagement with immigrants. Well, that does not hold any water in the present circumstances when the support and equality pillars that were there for diversity have been either scrapped or reduced to almost nothing. I am talking about the NCRI (National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism) and the Equality Authority. (Ladies and gentlemen, I would like you to give Niall Crowley, the former CEO of Equality Authority, a round of applause for the great work he did there to ensure that ethnic minorities were truly engaged.)

The elimination of these support pillars along with institutions designed to build equality indicates that we do not care. This has therefore raised the possibility of race riots in the future. I know I could be accused of scaremongering for raising this issue, but it’s certainly possible. Why am I saying so? Look at the damning report by the Children Ombudsman about the appalling living conditions of asylum seekers in Reception Centres run by the HSE (Health Service Executive) across the country. One would like to know if that has any link to the growing level of mental health problems among asylum seekers and refugees. The revelation illustrates that Ireland is failing these children. Can anyone who is being treated badly have a positive view of the person who is responsible for his or her suffering? These children are abandoned by the HSE, which also allows them to wander around like headless chickens. It is difficult to act rationally when one’s confidence and self-esteem have been taken away. However, we still have the opportunity to engage with them and help them turn their anger to good use. If Jacob in the Bible could turn his disadvantages into advantages, certainly most of these children could also do so. Otherwise, they will surely one day vent their anger on someone—the society!

**Media**

Do not get me wrong: there also positive stories about immigrants’ engagement with Irish people, but we need to both multiply and deepen such positive engagement. Not enough of that is happening at present. Ordinarily, one would have expected the agents of socialisation and social change like the mass media and educational institutions to bridge that gap. Unfortunately, they have also not been proactive in engaging refugees and migrants. While I do not agree that it is the work of the media to campaign for a better life for immigrants, I have a strong conviction that the media should be responsible in its approach to information dissemination. And that means accuracy and balance. Also, refugees and migrants need to be represented, not misrepresented. Therefore, such media headlines as “Refugees on the Rampage,” “Free Cars for Refugees,” and so on, as read in the past, are not justifiable. Indeed, they only help to highlight and hype negative stereotypes that feed our negative attitudes and ensure that inequality continues. We must challenge the negative portrayals by ensuring that the media reflect the cultural and racial diversity of Ireland’s population in both staffing and content. This could also be achieved by providing cultural and diversity training for media students and practitioners.

**Education**

Unfortunately, the educational system does not have the commitment to provide such support. From my perspective education has failed in supporting the course of immigrants. Universities are more keen to get fee-paying immigrants than to help those already in the country acquire new skills or sharpen their old skills for future leadership positions in their chosen fields. To me it is counterproductive that immigrant residents in Ireland—both asylum seekers and migrant workers for over a year—are prevented from studying in our universities unless they pay exorbitant non-EU fees. In most cases, asylum seekers are not allowed to study even if there is someone ready to pay the non-EU fees for them.
There are also cases of bullying and discrimination against immigrants in universities. How does one explain a college’s inability to give a proper work contract to an immigrant lecturer after nine years when people with whom he began temporary teaching are now senior lecturers? This needs to change, because a diverse university would not only enrich academics but would also help people to have social contacts.

In primary and secondary schools, some teachers are obstacles themselves. Recently in the midlands, a school organised an intercultural day for only immigrants in the school and their families. There were no Irish students or parents invited. That’s not only appalling but shows that there’s a serious problem. Sadly, the school principal is defending that as a best practice. What of the curriculum and teaching methods? Are they friendly to refugees and migrants? The list of questions is endless.

Let me end by acknowledging the wonderful work done by many people in their personal capacities, and that of different community and voluntary groups and NGOs and churches, who have gone beyond the call of duty and against all odds to engage newcomers in Ireland. Those are the unsung heroes. Many of them are here today, and they deserve our appreciation.

We don’t need rocket science to understand that integration is possible. Common sense, however, demands that we do it the right way, for the sake of our present and future society.
1. A context of economic recession.

The European Union Eurobarometer survey for 2009 highlighted that 67 percent of Irish people think that policies promoting equality and diversity will be considered less important and receive less funding in the current context. Across the EU 57 percent of people think that the economic crisis will contribute to increased discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin.

The United Nations Human Development Report 2009 states that the current downturn provides an opportunity to institute a new deal for migrants. The UN emphasizes the need to liberalise and simplify channels for people with low skills to seek work abroad, to ensure basic rights for migrants, to reduce costs associated with migration, to improve outcomes for migrants and destination communities, and to make mobility an integral part of national development strategy.

2. The Irish context.

In Ireland recent policy changes include restrictions on migrant work permits that block access to jobs paying under €30,000; the compromising of basic rights, with both the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission rendered unviable by disproportionate budget cuts; increased transaction costs for migrants, with new charges for long-term residency applications; and the ending of the National Action Plan Against Racism and proposals to reduce staff in immigration services and to close the Office of the Minister for Integration. These policy changes reflect the direct opposite of the new deal recommended by the UN.

3. Migration and recession.

Migrants have been hardest hit by the recession in Ireland. The sectors and occupations where migrants have been employed have experienced the greatest loss of jobs. Migrants have become more vulnerable to exploitation, with increases reported in cases taken under the Employment Equality Act on the race ground and increases in investigations by the National Employment Rights Authority in sectors employing significant numbers of migrants.

Fewer migrants are coming to Ireland. Some migrants are leaving Ireland. Most migrants are staying in Ireland. This reflects the complexity of decision making by migrants and matches experience in recessionary times in other jurisdictions.

We need to recognize that policy cannot be predicated on migrants leaving and that policy should not impel migrants to leave. We need the new deal for migrants in Ireland recommended by the UN.

4. Migrant communities and the university.

This recession marks a low point in the experience and situation of migrants in Ireland. Equality as a value does not have significant traction in public opinion and in political discourse. We need the voice of academia to champion equality.

Academia should be a source of new knowledge about the impact of recession on migrants, about the impact of current policy approaches on migrants and migration, and about effective policy responses to migration in a context of recession.

Academia needs to be part of a wider social movement seeking a new deal for migrants, a more equal society, and a new model of development to emerge out of the current economic downturn.
Chinedu depicts the Irish situation as one in which the wave of immigration, generated in part by the rapid growth of particular sectors of the economy, has broken on the beach, and we are now experiencing the “backwash” as the tide runs out to sea again, leaving a new arrangement of sand and shells on the beach.

I’d like to walk you metaphorically along the beach on the other side of the Irish Sea and pick up on some of the most pertinent issues facing people involved in antiracist work. Some of these issue are quite similar to what Chinedu has referred to, and others are embedded in the different history of the UK. I’ll then come onto the challenges facing universities, particularly the social sciences, and hopefully end on a positive note about how this complex period of change can actually provide an opportunity for minority groups aiming to find allies within higher education.

Like Ireland, the UK has been the site for a diversification of immigrant networks over the last decade and more. The old postcolonial links have been overlaid with properly postcolonial ones: people coming as migrant workers, asylum seekers, and students from countries that Britain had no colonial relationship with, leading to what Steven Vertovec has labelled “super diversity.” This is the result of changing immigration regimes at the EU level, where the new frontier is no longer the British Commonwealth and Irish on one side, everyone else on the other, but EU versus non-EU.

The complexification of immigration rules; the proliferation of legislation on the previously separate areas of “asylum,” “immigration,” and “nationality”; and the political necessity to appear “tough” on immigration have generated a focus on non-EU immigration as threatening or, at best, ambiguous.

The knock-on effect of this is that when there is fieldwork on what white British people think, they confuse the various statuses, overestimate the proportion of minorities, and often amalgamate everyone who isn’t white into one category.

But we also have other interesting phenomena. There have, for example, developed new Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) middle classes. These new middle classes are made up not just of the long-standing groups but contain professionals brought into specific niches in the economy (health, civil engineering, and computing) and new arrivals, such as Somalis and new white immigrants (here again, like Ireland) from Eastern and Central Europe.

The post–London bombings discourse has seen a new development: everything bad is blamed on multiculturalism. There is an onus on British Muslims to constantly reaffirm how British they are, and a securitisation of policing (and its unfortunate repercussions for the government-funded PREVENT initiative).

One of the key obstacles to any social movement claiming civil rights or equality is the fragmentation of its potential membership. It is never easy to organise groups with different experiences of migration and racism who have different religions, immigration statuses, and so on. The situation in Britain is further complicated by the fragmentation of the concept of blackness since the 1980s into subgroups—partly the outcome of activism.

People no longer organise under the strategic umbrella term “black” but instead organize under labels like British Muslim or African–Caribbean. A similar implosion into constituent parts has occurred within other groups—British Sikh, Indian (Hindu), Pakistani, Chinese. Even the term “British Asian” has imploded into smaller units since 7/7.

We have “multicultures” in some parts of urban UK, as described by academics such as Les Back, Paul Gilroy, and Roxy Harris. I teach at a university located in inner-city Birmingham: in every class the student body is comprised of at least 40 percent BAME students, and in some specialised modules, more than 80 percent. This is an interesting context for a white scholar to teach on “race,” believe me.

However, these new locations coexist with darkest white Britain (which I have been investigating for last five years), in which often the only information about anyone who is not white comes from newspapers and television. This is true even of some parts of urban provincial Britain.

There is also the resurgence of the Far Right, as evidenced by its share of the vote at the EU elections in June 2009 and its relatively successful policy of targeting Outer London wards as well as North-Western towns.

Chinedu mentions the “cry of entitlement”: immigrants are getting what we are not. This is one of the messages that comes very clearly out of my own fieldwork. There is a palpable sentiment of abandonment, of feeling that the good days are behind us (proper pensions, jobs for life, trade unions, council housing available for most people). This is a major hurdle given that most people think there is a finite pot for the white working class and that this is diminished by giving money to immigrants.

How do we move to a point where minorities are not viewed as competitors—across the board—as agents of capital, but instead as potential allies, as agents of labour?
For universities these are also strange times. The new political landscape, as we head into a general election year, is one where the parties are queuing up to prove they are tough on expenditure, tough on the causes of expenditure.

When even the Liberal Democrats (supposedly the friends of higher education) are calling for “savage cuts” in public services, you know you’re in trouble!

However, more germane to the university’s engagement are the almost Thatcherite questioning of the rationale for and value of social sciences implied in the new “Impact” agenda and the rumbling closures of sociology departments in the UK (cf. the expansion of criminology as a subject—that’s another story that maybe goes back to the nineteenth century, let alone the twentieth!).

In this scenario, universities have to demonstrate they have precise and measurable impacts, that they are value for money. And here is where the good news comes in: community engagement (or public engagement) is something the social sciences have been leading the way in for some time. Social science models of “service learning,” social enterprise, “public sociology,” and the process of bringing the academy into the commonwealth and the commonwealth into the academy provide exactly these kinds of indicators. Community engagement is a way to tick two boxes at the same time: compliance with the new necessity to demonstrate impact outside academia and the opportunity to develop links with community organisations without it being seen as a luxury activity.

However, this type of work will require effort: there is not enough engagement. Minority organisations will have to be proactive and petition the universities for a seat on the bus. The reception they will receive is also contingent (universities’ investment in community engagement varies by history and subject matter, by the people providing leadership in community engagement and their disciplinary roots).

Personal contacts count here.

Minorities’ alliances with progressive forces in higher education are potentially extremely useful, but it requires some imagination and action to get the ball rolling properly.

Universities are, on the whole, white male middle-class places of privilege, and if there is one thing that I have learned, it’s that the dominant seldom surrender their privileges without a fight, especially when they think they are doing you a favour!

Finding a way to bind the claims for equality by minority communities to those of disadvantaged local white people and progressive thinkers in higher education is the way forward . . . on condition that racism is not glossed over as being the same as economic disadvantage: universities are a space for these movements but you have to take the initiative, with the allies you have.

In conclusion, to get where people interested in social justice and equality want to go, you’d never start from here if you had the option. To finish with the words of an old dead white man, wise words that never get old: “We make our own history, but not in the circumstances of our choosing.”
Feedback from Focus Group Discussions

Note: The following presents the three research questions pursued in the hour-long focus group sessions conducted during the conference and lists the emerging issues and topics addressed in the ensuing discussions along with some of the important discussion points. The final section here lists some of the more recent initiatives developed to address the challenges discussed at the conference.

Research Question 1: How have those challenges identified in the keynote panel or other challenges impacted your experience or your work in the community or research or teaching?

- Irish culture. Misunderstandings of the intercultural process in Ireland were identified as one of the challenges facing focus group participants. It was cited that the exclusion of ethnic children from religious and school events occurs—with school celebrations being mostly Catholic-led, one of the main reasons for exclusion. Some other Irish cultural challenges identified included the lack of capacity for collaboration in services for migrants, including Polish migrants and other Eastern and Central European migrants.

- Economic situation. The changing economic environment at present was mentioned as having a significant impact on the level of funding available for academic research as well as staffing of NGOs. In the groups it was stated that the “negative effect of the economic situation will increase the vulnerability of immigrants to racist attacks, there may also be possible scapegoating of immigrants,” or in other words, immigrants are being blamed for the current economic situation.

- Political system. A certain level of confusion exists regarding the responsibility of the government and minister departments with regard to integration of immigrants. In one focus group it was stated that “there is no Minister designated solely to the integration of new communities.” Since 2007 the Office of the Minister for Integration has been set up under the auspices of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with responsibility for integration policy. It may be the case that those in attendance are aware of this ministerial office but are confused by the role of the office.

- Integration and immigration system. The integration system in Ireland was identified as one of the main challenges for immigrants in the focus group sessions. Rising living expenses for immigrants were referred to in the focus groups, in particular asylum seekers. One participant highlighted the accommodation costs faced by asylum seekers having entered the country: “Ninety percent of asylum seekers are jobless and on rent allowance, some landlords demand this payment plus the same again from the person’s weekly dole payment.”

Some examples of difficulties with the current integration system given are:

- “After five years in Ireland you can apply for Irish Citizenship, then you are on a waiting list for approximately three years, at which time you have to submit a large fee. This is integration!”

- “Ireland is now a site for long-term immigration. In light of Ireland’s history, this will prove challenging. Should be happy to integrate . . . but not, also closed to it!”

- “Lack of family settlement programmes or guidelines for Irish culture and policies for (new immigrant) families.”

- “Lack of outreach support and services for health and housing for migrants with disabilities, e.g., a migrant who is blind will not be visited by support services, they must make their way to the services premises to request support!”

- “Networks—bring together integration representatives from university in community groups and vice versa.”

- Myths and misconceptions among the university and migrant sector. Many myths or misconceptions exist between the migrant community/NGOs and the university sector. Such misconceptions, such as suspicion among the migrant sector or mistrust among the community groups, were mentioned in the focus groups. This was specifically referred to as “slash and burn.” Before any successful collaboration between the migrant community and the University sector can take place it will be necessary for these misconceptions to be effectively addressed.

- Education. The education system was highly criticised in the focus group sessions for reasons such as accessibility difficulties, costs, and lack of support provided once a person leaves the education system. It was stated that lone young adults have no educational support to progress to third level and that the “state would rather see them on the dole rather than accessing further education.” A European or even wider system of recognising academic awards from different countries needs to transpire to ensure that those migrants who are adequately qualified or educated are not marginalised further.

Bringing together resources and promoting funding opportunities either in the private or public sector will “promote independence in society through education rather than (relying on) a welfare state that ghettoises people.”
• **Funding.** Funding challenges between NGOs and academic institutions remain, particularly the challenge of competition for funding. It was stated that creating networks or a system of universities approaching NGOs and vice versa for assistance will create new approaches to funding.

• **Research collaborations.** In order for research collaborations to be successful, the focus groups identified the roles of each party involved in the collaboration and some of the challenges existing. First, it was stated that research needs to be supervised when students are on internships/placements. However, when students are on placements it is common for them not to be used to their full capacity. Such partnerships provide a cost-effective and practical resource in carrying out research on important issues but are rarely used in Ireland. The possibility of these partnerships needs to be revisited.

In such partnerships it was stated that there is a need for organisations and universities to have a two-way agreement or to draw up learning contracts with students. This would ensure that a better service learning environment was provided for the student. It was mentioned that the university has a role in ensuring that civic engagement takes place, leadership and engagement with the migrant community/organisations. Also universities need to be aware that this should be a reciprocal relationship with migrant organisations, and they offer up skilling or use of university resources to these organisations.

• **Resources.** It was stated that material and research on migrant issues is scattered and not always carried out in the same place. Resources therefore need to be collected and managed. The diversity of groups is one issue, but “different groups, organisations, and bodies should be brought together for efficiency and to raise awareness of the issues” while taking cultural competence (capital) into consideration.

In terms of available data in Ireland it was stated that Ireland has little official data migrant issues and as a result signifies a “heightened need” for academic research in this area.

**Research Question 2: What might be the opportunities or pitfalls in this collaboration?**

• **Opportunity for greater successful collaboration.** It was stated that there is a need for a “stronger voice with more collaboration.” Also the benefits of a small country were mentioned. According to one participant, this means it is easier to reduce fragmentation due to the smaller area. How this relationship can be improved and made more efficient was discussed, and it was agreed that academia and social and community workers should all make contributions. Additionally, it was stated that NGOs and migrant organisations should use outputs from research and constructively utilise research from universities.

• **Role of universities and migrant communities.** Universities can help NGOs not just to identify issues but also to “identify how issues are spread and provide confirmation” that there is an issue. Universities are important in determining or evaluating the costs and benefits of programmes. Also, universities bring together vast amounts of information via the Internet. Universities can provide education on how to use these Internet resources. The university has a huge amount of human resources available, and one participant stated that it can provide a “big brother, big sister” relationship to the migrant community. Additionally it is important that any academic research undertaken in collaboration with the migrant community should be useful to both parties.

The provision of internships and volunteering opportunities for student placements in migrant organisations is one such example of a successful collaboration. One participant stated that it is necessary for community workers to meet with students before they start their placements or internships. It was suggested that a university guide for practitioners and interns along with others connected in the association be provided. It was stated that migrant organisations and universities should open up and be more willing to address wider issues in such research collaborations. One suggestion would be to develop an undergraduate module that can be brought into second-level schools to highlight and promote intercultural awareness-raising.

• **Access to education.** “What are the opportunities for access to third-level education within this collaboration, within this group of participants (universities and migrant communities)?”

• **Networking.** Networks are important as they provide knowledge on how to develop and integrate Internet resources, technological and human networks. Participants stated that meeting people and gathering e-mail addresses provides ongoing communication between the two sectors. Additionally it was stated that parents of school-aged migrants can provide a resource for networking.

• **Future.** For the future, the experiences of first-generation and second-generation migrants need to be analysed. It was stated that it may be the case that second-generation migrants will exceed first-generation expectations. However, as “immigration is a relatively new phenomenon” the expectations of third-generation migrants are a little less clear. One participant asked, “What happens then? Will they be more Irish than the Irish themselves?”

The three-way dynamic between the state, NGOs, and universities provides a synergy and offers more communication between all. It was suggested that we should go “back to basics—keep in touch, be more casual and informative.”

It was further suggested that we provide more workshops and develop some measures of progress.
• Pitfalls.
  • Universities are “encircled” and difficult to access
  • “No shortage of money, no shortage of people, and the problem is connections!”
  • Lack of structure for volunteers, interns
  • Lack of NGO involvement in education: “Decision makers in the NGOs need to be here and involved,”
    “How many NGOs are involved in education?”
  • Misconceptions and suspicions: “There are people here who are a bit suspicious, weren’t going to come”
  • Universities and migrant organisations can be protective of research areas
  • Lack of collaboration from umbrella organisations or “one that is willing to come down to the same level”
  • Miscommunication within workplace environments: “People in positions who would not tell you what they do!”
  • Failure to have proper agreement between third-level sector and NGOs
  • Underestimation of both parties in collaboration

Research Question 3: What are relevant issues and topics that could be the basis for workshops in 2010?

• Ghettoisation. The springing up of ghetto areas across Ireland was identified as a pressing issue. One participant noted,
  “Integration reflects the importance of people mixing together rather than creating a situation of numerous ghettos.”
  Ultimately it was stated that this points to the greater conscious effort needed to tackle this phenomenon.
• Integration and intervention. It was suggested that the various models of integration be analysed. It was noted that some
  models are superior to others. Offering a comparison of models and their strengths was suggested as an opportunity to
  offer some original and interesting findings.
• Diversity. Theology was identified among a number of factors reflecting the different backgrounds of migrants: “problems
  however permeate all.”
• Networking. This could take the form of human and Internet networking, which should incorporate democratic aspira-
  tions and activism.
• Exploitation. In the context of the focus group discussions, exploitation was used to reflect mistreatment of workers by
  employers and tenants by landlords. It was stated that immigrants can experience numerous communication difficulties
  in these situations and may lack accurate knowledge of information relating to rights and permission.
• Education. International exchange students should be involved more in NGOs through internship programmes. Numerous
  suggestions were made for the provision of service learning opportunities and internship programmes to work within
  the migrant community, created in university sector courses such as Community Development, Equality and Citizenship,
  The suggestion was made of using a “participatory education” approach to address these and other education topics.

Moving Forward: From Feedback to Action

Education was a prominent theme in the keynote address. Education also emerged repeatedly throughout all the focus
 groups. In the months since the conference a number of organizations and communities have developed a cluster of initia-
 tives designed to address contemporary education challenges in Ireland. Specifically, this collaborative effort has focused
 on disseminating basic information about the educational system and improving access to third-level education.

Three specific initiatives have been developed thus far:
• Discover University, an intensive week-long college preparation program in June 2010 for second-level students from un-
  derserved and migrant communities developed by the National College of Ireland, the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke
  University, and migrant community partners.
• Discover University Summer Enrichment Program, an eight-week college preparation program in June-July 2010 for second-
  level students from underserved and migrant communities developed by the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University,
  National College of Ireland, and migrant community partners.
• Third-Level Education Information Evening for second-level students and their parents, July 12, 2010, at National College of
  Ireland. The program will include presentations on preparing for and financing third-level education. College students
  and staff will be available to talk to students and their parents and answer questions.
The Kenan Institute for Ethics is an interdisciplinary “think and do” tank committed to understanding and addressing real-world ethical challenges facing individuals, organizations, and societies worldwide. We foster students’ capacity for ethical decision-making and develop ethical leaders. We conduct interdisciplinary research that has practical implications. We shape public policy and institutional practices through partnerships with businesses, think tanks, nonprofits, and policymakers. We promote ethical reflection and engagement through our research, education, and practice in three core areas: Moral Education & Decision-Making, Organizational Ethics, and Civic & Global Ethics.

www.dukeethics.org

The UCD Geary Institute conducts leading edge research on life course issues and the way public policy affects life outcomes. The hallmarks of the Institute are a unified methodology and cross-disciplinary perspective; and research translation through effective solutions to economic, political, epidemiological and social questions.

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