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# Language and Migration in Ireland



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The Immigrant Council of Ireland was established by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy in 2001. It is an independent human rights organisation that advocates for the rights of migrants and their families and acts as a catalyst for public debate and policy change. The Immigrant Council of Ireland is also an Independent Law Centre. The work of the Immigrant Council of Ireland is underpinned by the belief that immigration is a permanent and positive reality in Ireland and that individuals' human rights must be respected, protected and upheld.

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# 1. Introduction

This report looks at the linguistic landscape in Ireland in 2017, using the words of migrants to describe their experiences in a changing and multilingual context. According to the 2016 Census, 612,018 people in Ireland speak a foreign language at home and this report gives a platform for some of these voices to be heard. It bases its findings on the stories recounted by migrants in surveys, focus groups and interviews to understand the reality of being a non-native speaker in Ireland. It examines the place of language in the migrant experience and questions whether the policies regarding languages and integration are having their desired effect. The migrant experience is often studied from a sociological, economic, psychological or political viewpoint but the linguistic aspect of migration is rarely taken into consideration. This report seeks to address this lacuna and to highlight the importance of language in the migrant experience and its impact on the daily lives of those who function in a multilingual context.

The stories to be told are multiple and the experiences varied; the many people who contributed to the surveys, focus groups and interviews paint a picture of a diverse linguistic landscape:

- Take for example respondent RS70 who is aged between 45 and 54 and has been living in Ireland for less than a year. His parents spoke Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian and Bulgarian and he is proficient in Serbian, Slovenian and Croatian. He is working as an agricultural technician-gardener and uses English at work but prefers his native language for social media. He has not had any difficulties in communicating with institutions in Ireland but at the same time he is sometimes feels that he doesn't speak English well enough.
- Or respondent AR4 from Moldova who has a university degree and works as a food serving assistant/psychologist. She is proficient in Romanian, Italian, English, Russian and French and strongly agrees that her language is linked to her nationality.
- Or respondent OS11 who speaks Russian and Ukrainian at home, Polish and English at work and who has been attending English classes in Ireland and having conversation evenings with friends.
- Or finally respondent A4444, aged between 18 and 24, working in the health sector, who is proficient in Pashto, English, Urdu and Hindi. She uses more than one language every day at work and strongly disagrees with the statements: my language is my culture/ my language is linked to my nationality. She has had difficulties in the past in communicating with institutions in Ireland and is taking English classes in an adult education centre.

This report and the research project provide an opportunity to listen to these voices, for their concerns in certain areas to be raised and their challenges to be identified. It looks at how culture is affected by this multilingual diversity and how welcoming Ireland is of different and new voices. It is the hope of the report that all future integration initiatives will take account of language as a central aspect of communicative systems and identity constructions.

## 2. Context and Rationale

This report is the culmination of the “My Story – My Words: Language and Migration,” project which was funded by the Irish Research Council under the New Foundations scheme. It brings together language researchers from NUI Galway and the Immigrant Council of Ireland to investigate the language experiences of migrants in Ireland. In an increasingly multilingual and multicultural Ireland, it is important to examine the role that language plays in the communication of cultural identities. This research project has examined how migrants have to translate themselves into new words and new socio-cultural contexts in order to become part of a new society. It aims to bring migration and language into the public sphere in order to question models of citizenship and language policies.

The project addresses how migrants can tell their stories in a multilingual world and how the language experience of the single immigrant is key to greater societal understanding and inclusion. It views the individual story of mobility and language learning as a source of insight about intercultural communication in its everyday dimension. It therefore highlights both the relevance of individual stories and the role that language plays in the communication of cultural identities. Migrants can often be perceived as homogeneous blocks of people, a threatening mass; the telling of stories can individualise the migrant experience and help achieve greater societal understanding of the migrant situation.

In the rhetoric about migration in society, the migrant’s story is often lost. This project aims to create a space for the visibility of these stories, so that by sharing their experiences, migrants can engage in fruitful conversation with Irish society, ultimately encouraging inclusion and recognition. The project builds on recent work by scholars from different disciplines (linguistics, literature, anthropology) investigating links between language, cultural identity and narration. The research acknowledges the creative potential of multilingual and translingual forms of expression and uses current research on multilingualism to engage with multilingual society in the making.

### Key Recommendations

The report makes the following key recommendations:

- View multilingualism as an asset to Irish society, and not a problem to be fixed.
- Create cultural spaces for the expression of multilingual experiences.
- Create greater opportunities for linguistic interchange in Irish society.
- Provide accessible English language classes for all levels and in all educational contexts.
- Examine the diversity of staff in the public service.
- Support language teaching, particularly of ‘heritage’ languages.
- Publish a national Foreign Languages Strategy and establish a Languages Advisory Board.
- Professionalise, test and monitor interpreting services in Ireland.

### 3. Methodology

The research involved an online survey, focus groups and interviews.

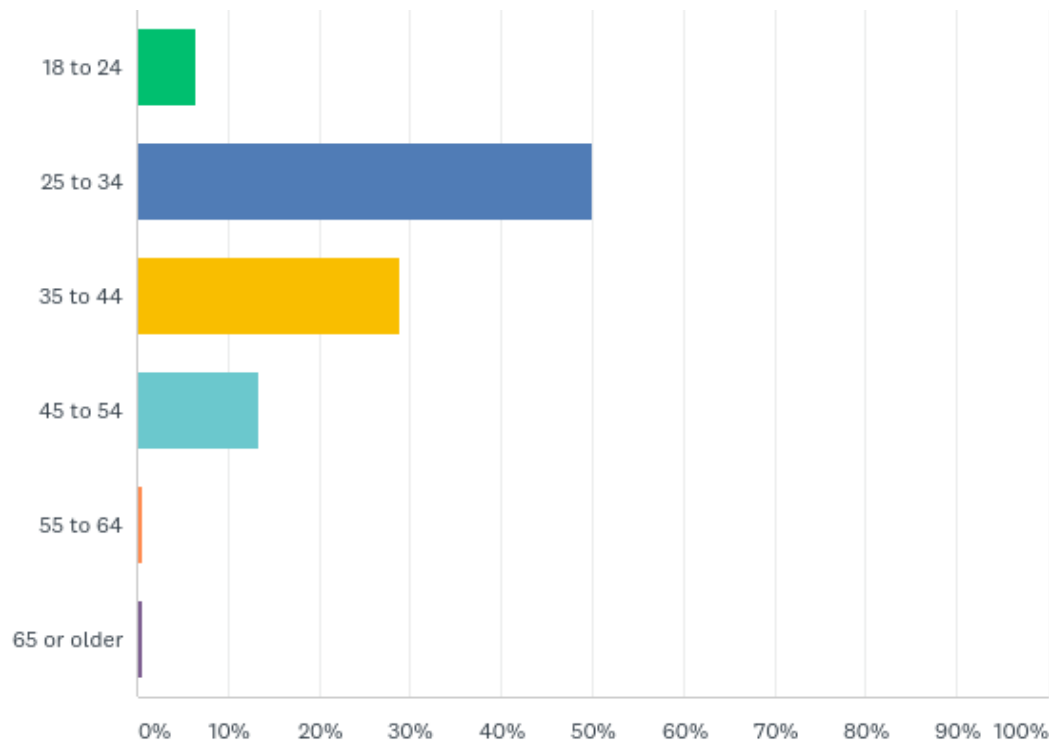
#### 3.1 The “My Language” online survey

In June 2017 a national online survey “My Language” was launched. It targeted adults living in Ireland whose first language was not English or Irish and investigated:

- The language backgrounds of immigrants
- The way in which they learned English
- The use of their first language and of English in different contexts (workplace, home, streets, social media)
- Their attitudes to the English and the Irish languages
- Their use of professional translators and interpreters
- Their dealings with institutions in Ireland

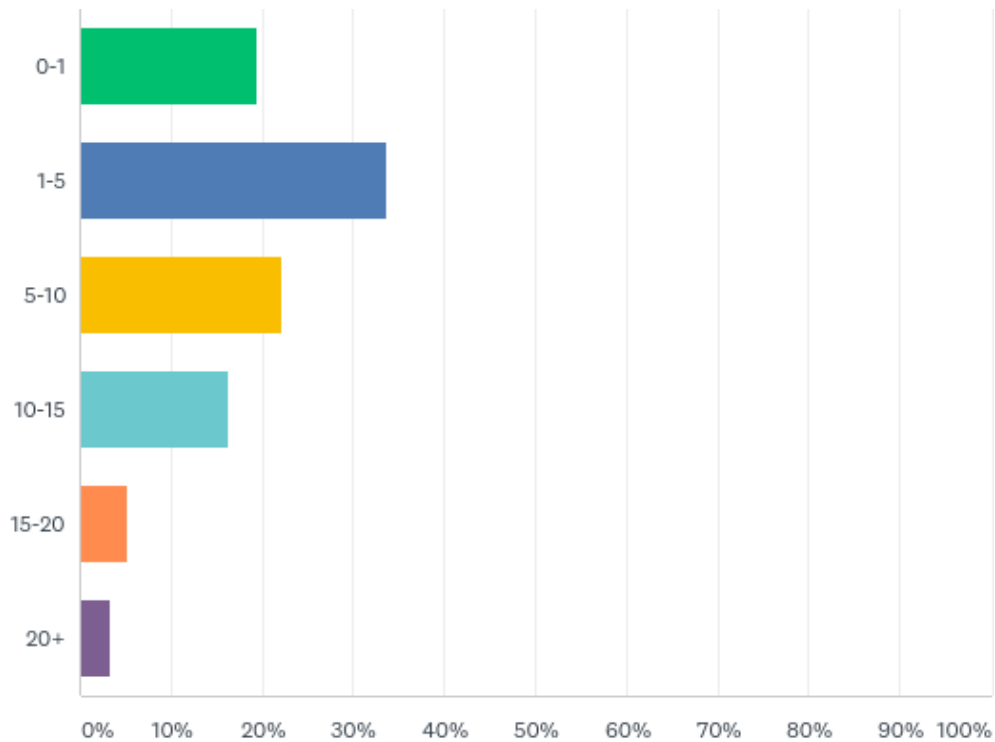
The survey was available at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/mylanguage](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/mylanguage) until October 2017.

158 people responded to the online survey. 81.29% of respondents were female. The age profile was distributed as follows:



As can be seen, the largest group was the 25-34 age category. Respondents were asked the amount of years they had been in Ireland:





### 3.2 Focus Groups

Two focus groups were carried out between August and September 2017, one in collaboration with Cultúr Migrant Centre in Navan, Co. Meath (<http://cultur.ie>). The goal of the focus groups was to discuss at greater length the same topics explored in the online survey, in conversation with migrants residing in Dublin and in a smaller urban area.

There were nine participants to the first focus group (from India, Pakistan, Italy, Spain, Bolivia, China and Poland) and ten participants to the second (from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Syria, Lithuania and Poland). Discussions lasted between 77 and 81 minutes, and were moderated by NUI Galway staff in collaboration with staff from the Immigrant Council and Cultúr.

All participants were asked to contribute their language experience and their point of view on linguistic integration and language learning opportunities in Ireland. In terms of structure and topics, focus groups loosely followed the same structure as the survey, discussing the participants' cultural background, their difficulties (if any) with English, their preferred language learning techniques, and their experience with Irish institutions and society. In comparison to the online survey, they had a chance to discuss in more detail their relationship with English and with their first languages, as well as sharing language learning practices and experiences of overcoming difficulties.

### 3.3 Interviews with migrants involved in cultural production in Ireland

From July to September 2017, researchers conducted interviews with migrants who are involved in various forms of cultural production in Ireland. The interviews discussed the contribution that individuals from different backgrounds make to Irish culture, as well as the challenges and opportunities for newcomers to the sphere of cultural production in Ireland.

A total of six interviews were conducted, and included artists working in several fields: visual arts (Marta Golubowska), literature (Nita Mishra, Christodoulos Makris and Ozgecan Kesici-Ayoubi), film (Jijo Sebastian) and theatre (Kasia Lech). Interviews were conducted in person, or via phone/Skype, or via email.

The interviews offered the chance to explore the topic of language and migration while focusing on the impact and visibility that artistic and cultural production offer individuals who relocate to Ireland. It also offered a chance to discuss the change of perspective that migrant art can generate in Ireland.

While the interviews shared some similarities with the online survey and focus groups (the importance of linguistic background, the difficulties inherent to using a new language), the focus was mainly on impact and culture. With discussions focusing on the issues and stylistic challenges relative to each art form, with a deeper exploration of translation, and with a special consideration to the relationship with Irish audiences, the interviews provided different insights on the research topic. Talking to migrants who are making an impact on Irish culture underlines migrant agency and representation that are visible and tangible, in a sector – the cultural sphere – which is crucial for a definition of identity, but not often included in integration policies.

#### **Note on linguistic levels in English:**

8,669 people in the recent Census in Ireland (2016), or 0.2% of the overall population, said that they were ‘not at all’ able to speak English. It is important to point out that our research focused on people who have at least some level of English language competency, people who were willing to engage in surveys, interviews and focus groups. A minority of migrants in Ireland do not speak any English but they only feature in this report anecdotally through the words of others. There are two reasons for this: firstly it proved very difficult to contact non English-speaking migrants because of their relative isolation. Secondly, as we did not have a budget for interpreters, we would not have been able to interview them, even if we had been able to make contact. This group deserves attention in their own right and it is hoped that future research might address this lacuna.

### **3.4 Methodological Background**

There are several theories, connected with each other, that focus on language in the contact zones of culture. They have names like *translanguaging* (Garcia and Wei 2014), *polylingual languaging* (Jørgensen 2008) or *metrolingualism* (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010). What unifies them is the attention to the individual’s way of understanding and then acting in the world, the

"creative, dynamic and transgressive language practices" of real life interactions rather than "fixed and stable borders between discrete languages" (Otsuji and Pennycook 2011, p.414). It does not measure the speaker's performance against a standard, but in terms of the strategies employed in different contexts to achieve different goals. Translanguaging research also has an emphasis on new learners of a language (Garcia and Wei 2014). This made this type of paradigm particularly useful for investigating the many strategies that migrants employ to negotiate their presence on Irish soil.

In a political and social landscape where the recent waves of migration have re-opened the debate about the legitimacy of multilingual presences in Europe, we are focusing on the everyday dimension of such presences, as bilingual individuals navigate opportunities and challenges, expressions and silence. In his recent *Language and Migration in a Multilingual Metropolis: Berlin Lives* (2017), Stevenson interviewed individuals living in a multicultural neighbourhood of Berlin to ascertain the role that language learning played in their life trajectories, and understand the "ways in which they have developed their own '(socio)linguistic regime' as a means to find their own place in the social worlds they move into." (p. 154) The methodology for this study has drawn on ongoing research on bilingualism, and how bilingual individuals use the languages at their disposal to make sense of the world and communicate. In recent decades, research on bilingualism has gone beyond the idea of a bilingual person as the union of two imperfect monolinguals. Rather, they are individuals who generally make the best out of the linguistic resources available to them, and who exist in a specific society, with specific needs.

Moving from the general (multi)linguistic situation of Ireland to the individual, and to individuals who are using a new language to have an impact on Irish culture, we have followed paths of possibilities and resistance that originate in the individual, but go beyond. Literary scholars have discovered how writing in a new language may have helped migrants deal with trauma (Hron 2009, Steinitz 2013), and how translingual narratives have helped migrant women address gender constraints (Karpinski 2012, Wilson 2012). We have looked at Irish society as a place where individuals use different languages to negotiate their presence in Ireland, and where some individuals use their languages to have an influence on the cultural landscape.

#### **Notes:**

- When we refer to foreign languages in this report, we are speaking of languages other than Irish and English.
- In this report the word 'migrants' is often used as a generic noun to describe non-native speakers of the English/Irish languages in Ireland. It must be pointed out, however, that many of these people are Irish citizens who have made their home here in Ireland. These issues are further elaborated in Section 10.
- In the transcriptions from interviews and from the survey, mistakes in English have not been corrected, neither has the convention [sic] been added. These are the words of the people who participated in the research, with their own expressions and constructions.

## 4. The linguistic landscape: Ireland

### 4.1 Census Information

It is a reflection of the increased presence of foreign languages in Ireland that questions on languages now form part of the Census. The 2011 Census was the first to ask questions about foreign languages spoken in Irish homes and it confirmed that Polish was the most common foreign language in Ireland, followed by French, Lithuanian, German, Spanish and Russian. The 2016 Census asked a variety of questions on language use and ability and has provided a rich source of information on this subject.<sup>1</sup>

The 2016 results show that 612,018 Irish residents spoke a foreign language at home (up 19 per cent from 514,068 in 2011). Polish was the most common language, followed by French, Romanian, Lithuanian, and Russian. Other commonly spoken languages are Spanish, German, Portuguese, Chinese and Arabic.

The Census also reported that the number of Irish residents born outside Ireland has continued to increase and stood at 810,406 in 2016, an increase of 43,636 on the 2011 figure. In April 2016, persons born abroad accounted for 17.3 per cent of the population, up from 17 per cent in 2011. The groups which showed the largest increase were those already well established in Ireland. The fastest growing groups in absolute terms were Romanians (up 10,707), Brazilians (up 6,498) and Spanish (up 4,806). Other smaller groups showed large increases in percentage terms such as Croatia which increased by 431 per cent to 5,202, Venezuela (increased by 259% to 1,729), Afghanistan (increased by 212 % to 1,729) and Syria (increased by 199% to 920). In total non-Irish immigrants who arrived into Ireland in the year to April 2016 came from 180 different countries. The fall in UK- (-8,1%) and USA- (-4.5%) born residents means that an even greater percentage of foreign-born population in Ireland speaks a foreign language at home on a daily basis.

The Census tables also show that the linguistic landscape in Ireland often reflects complex flows, issues and phenomena that do not originate in the island; simple indications like “French”, “Russian”, “Chinese” are hardly indicators of homogeneous groups. When it comes to French, for example, we learn that of those who spoke French at home 75.1 per cent were Irish nationals, only 16.2 per cent were French nationals while 3.7 per cent were of African nationality. Of the 21,707 persons who spoke Russian at home only 8.9 per cent were Russian nationals, while 29.5 per cent were of Irish or dual Irish nationality, 23 per cent were Latvian nationals, 9.1 per cent were Lithuanian, 4.0 per cent Estonian and 2.5 per cent Ukrainian.

It is worth noting that 30% of those who claim speaking a foreign language at home are born in Ireland. Being a foreign language speaker means less and less being born outside of Ireland: for example, while the number of Polish speakers has not risen significantly, the number of Polish speakers who were born in Ireland has almost tripled from 2011 to 2016 (10,573 vs. 27,197). Of

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter\\_5\\_Diversity.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/population/2017/Chapter_5_Diversity.pdf)

the Irish-born multilinguals, 19,743 were pre-school children (aged 3-4 years), 54,693 were primary school children and 31,078 were secondary school children. Together, these accounted for 57.4 per cent of all Irish-born speakers of foreign languages. French was by far the most popular language spoken by those born in Ireland, with the majority of those speaking it aged 13 and over (86.5%). Polish and German were the next most popular languages. Overall the most spoken languages for Irish born multilingual people were French, Polish, German, Spanish, Romanian, Lithuanian Russian, Chinese, Italian and Arabic.

Table after table, the Census shows us patterns and trends of identity and mobility – Romanian taking Lithuanian’s place as the third most spoken foreign language in Ireland, the appearance of Portuguese in the top ten. The data shows that all languages apart from French (which went from 56,430 speakers to 54,948 over the last five years) have grown their numbers. It is clear from the 2016 Census that Ireland is becoming increasingly multilingual with 13% of the population speaking a foreign language at home.

## **4.2 English Language Proficiency**

Of the 612,018 people who spoke another language at home 508,016 (83%) indicated they could speak English ‘well’ or ‘very well’, while 86,608 people (14.2%) indicated ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’. Respondents who answered “not well” or “not at all” are unevenly distributed for country of origin and age group. The groups that reported the highest English proficiency were children of school age: 95.5% of respondents aged 13-18 reported speaking English “well” or “very well”, together with 94% of respondents aged 5-12.<sup>2</sup> The groups with the lowest English proficiency are children aged 0-4 (42.3% indicated as speaking English “not well” or “not at all”) and adults over 50 years of age (27% of respondents aged 50-64 and 19% of respondents aged 65+ speak English “not well” or “not at all”). While persons from Poland had the highest absolute number of persons who spoke English ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’ (21,316 or 18.8%) those from Afghanistan had the highest percentage (466 or 44.4%), followed by persons from China (2,234 or 28.5%). The nationalities which showed the highest ability in English were Swedish, German, Dutch, Filipino, French, Nigerian and Indian while those showing the lowest ability were Polish, Brazilian, Romanian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Chinese and Afghan.

### **4.2.1 ESRI Report on Integration**

The challenges outlined by the Census in terms of migrant residents who are not proficient in English have been elaborated in the annual ESRI Monitoring Report on Integration.<sup>3</sup> The report includes several language-related issues faced by migrant population in Ireland, regarding the school population and the working population. The report uses the National Assessment tests of reading and mathematics skills to highlight the main challenges faced by migrant students and in this context, the language barrier proves to be an important factor:

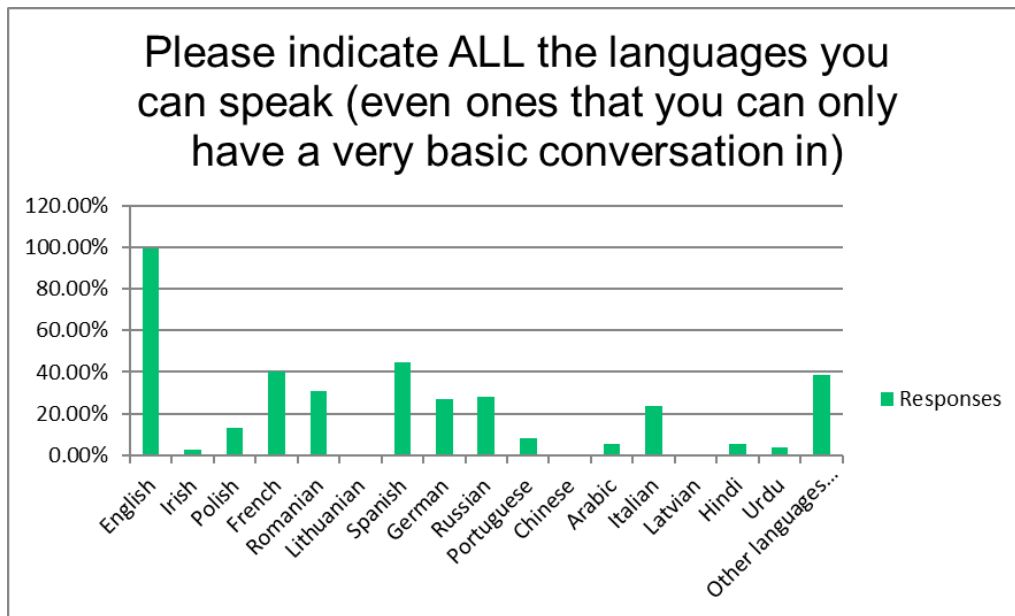
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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Census data is completed by an adult in the household and therefore it is likely that parents completed this assessment on behalf of their children, although possibly not in all circumstances.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-report-on-integration-2016/>

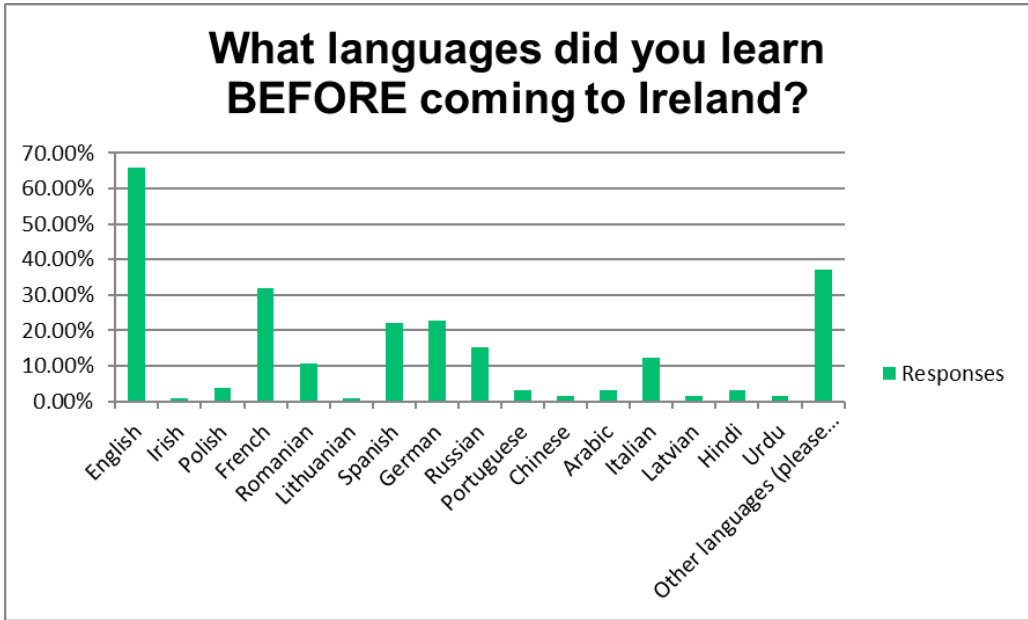
Reading scores are found to be significantly lower among children born outside Ireland than among those born in Ireland at both second and sixth class levels. The gap in performance is slightly lower among sixth class students (14 points compared with 19.3 for second class students) (Table 3.3). Children whose families mainly speak a language other than English/ Irish have significantly lower reading scores than those who speak mainly English, with a performance gap of 26-27 points at both second and sixth class levels (Table 3.4) (p. 38)<sup>4</sup> Age of arrival is one of the most important factors influencing English proficiency, as well as the number of years spent in the Irish school system (p. 39).

### 4.3 Survey data – languages spoken and occupations



The 99.25% who responded they could speak English is largely in line with recent Census data, with the slightly higher figure reflecting the language competency needed to complete an online English language survey.

<sup>4</sup> This refers to tests taken in May 2014, involving 8840 students in second and sixth class in 150 sampled primary schools.



The 65.91% of respondents who spoke English before coming to Ireland, and the large number of European languages spoken, reflects the number of European migrants who are the largest migrant groups in Ireland today, according to latest Census figures.

**Survey – Occupations:**

Of the 148 responses to the question of occupation on the survey, 90 different occupations were listed. These ranged from professional roles in medicine, education, IT and law to more manual roles of cleaner and agricultural worker. 8 respondents identified as homemakers, 11 as teachers and 2 as nurses. Only 3 respondents identified as unemployed and one on maternity leave, a proportion which challenges some myths which circulate in society about migrant labour.

## 5. Language Policy

**5.1 The Official Languages Act** recognises Irish and English as the two official languages of Ireland as specified by Article 8 of the Constitution.<sup>5</sup> Under this Act, the language rights of citizens to use any of the two official languages in the official spaces are clearly stated, for example: "A person appearing before either House of the Oireachtas or before such a committee, joint committee or sub-committee as aforesaid has the right to use either of the official languages." (Pt.2 S.6); "A person may use either of the official languages in, or in any pleading in or document issuing from, any court." (Pt. 2 S.8) The 2003 Official Languages Act does not provide for individuals whose first language is not one of the two official languages.

**5.2 The Equal Status Act (2000)**, (amended with the 2004 Equality Act, and amended again in 2012), tackles "discrimination, harassment and related behaviour in connection with the provision of services, property and other opportunities to which the public generally or a section of the public has access".<sup>6</sup> Among the grounds for discriminatory behaviour it lists the "ground of race" when two persons "are of different race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins" (Pt. 1 S.3). There is however no explicit reference to different linguistic backgrounds, or language disadvantages experienced in relation to the public, or linguistic barriers preventing access to services or opportunities.

**5.2.1** The 2014 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act acknowledged the 1950 Rome Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which includes reference to the linguistic rights of the person (in particular in relation to the right to security, a fair trial and the prohibition of discrimination).<sup>7</sup>

### 5.3 Strategies and policies: Migrant Integration Strategy 2017-2020

The Migrant Integration Strategy was launched in 2017, and it is targeted at migrants, refugees and other persons of migrant origin living in Ireland.<sup>8</sup> The strategy sets out actions for all government agencies, together with actions addressing more particular issues, in order to improve the lives of migrants in education, society and the workplace. The issue of language is regularly addressed, for example it states that the actions applicable to all Government Departments include the provision of:

- information to migrants in language-appropriate formats
- ongoing intercultural awareness training for all frontline staff
- signage in public offices indicating where interpretation is available
- clear information on how to make a complaint about racist behaviour by staff or another customer (p.4)

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2003/act/32/enacted/en/print>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/print.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2014/act/25/enacted/en/html>

<sup>8</sup> [http://integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/Migrant\\_Integration\\_Strategy-en](http://integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/Migrant_Integration_Strategy-en)



The strategy's aim is to communicate that successful integration is the responsibility of Irish society as a whole, which requires action by Government, public bodies, businesses, NGOs and local communities. It involves both mainstream services and targeted initiatives.

The strategy regularly references the language needs of immigrants and it acknowledges that EU/EEA nationals, while possessing the right to reside and work in Ireland, may need "well-developed English language skills in order to participate fully in the life of the State" (p. 18). The same need is listed among the different types of support that may be required by non-EU/EEA immigrants.

Actions to be undertaken are often language-related: for example the actions listed under "Access to Public Services and Social Inclusion" include "Information will be provided in language-appropriate formats and in a manner easily accessible by migrants." (p. 23) Furthermore, the provision and availability of professional interpreters, is to be "prominently displayed in a range of languages in relevant public offices" (p. 24).

Education-related actions include the closer monitoring of non-English speaking migrant children in Irish schools, and the review of the "adequacy of language supports in schools to cater for the language needs of children from ethnic minorities" (p. 26). This will continue after school, with "follow-on ESOL programmes [...] to enable migrants to acquire more intensive language skills to assist their integration into the workplace" (p. 26). The strategy involves the creation of a Migrant Integration Forum in every area, ideally through existing Public Participation Network (PPN) structures (p. 30). It encourages political participation through the distribution of multilingual voting material (p. 32).

## **5.4 Strategies and Policies: Education**

**5.4.1** The goal of the Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015 is to create inclusive learning environments.<sup>9</sup> In this context, ensuring that all children have knowledge of the language of instruction is one of the key points in the strategy. For this reason resources were allocated for English as an Additional Language classes in the primary, post-primary level, as well as in adult education:

It is essential that providers and learners are able to communicate effectively with each other in the language of instruction. This requires proficiency in both social and academic (cognitive) language proficiency. In the Irish context, communicating means having sufficient proficiency in either English or Irish- whichever is the language of instruction. Gaining such proficiency will allow migrant students to access the curriculum/ programme on a par with their native Irish peers. (p. 46)

At the same time, the strategy acknowledges the importance of the students' linguistic background: "Educators at all levels should recognise students' prior learning, and value this experience. Mother tongue is an asset and not a hindrance. Accordingly, it should be utilised in

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<sup>9</sup> <http://education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Intercultural-Education-Strategy/Intercultural-Education-Strategy.html>

learning environments.” (p. 47). In order to achieve its linguistic goals, the Intercultural Education Strategy included these actions:

Actions	Stakeholder(s)
Educators at all levels gain awareness of the fact that they are also teachers of language and have a key role to play in developing and enhancing the language competence of learners.	Educators, education providers, ELSTA, CPD providers, initial teacher educators, and researchers
Continue to use a wide range of teaching methodologies to support the acquisition of the language of instruction, with a focus on cognitive language development.	
Teaching and learning strategies in higher education institutions include measures for students requiring additional support with the academic aspects of the language of instruction to ensure that they can fully access their learning programmes.	Educators, CPD providers, initial teacher educators, and DES
Distribute available EAL expenditure/ resources at primary and post- primary levels so as to enable and enhance whole- school capacity. Approaches adopted at other levels of education reflect specific education needs at these levels.	DES and education providers
Issue guidelines on best practice for the teaching and learning of the language of instruction as an additional language.	DES
Give due cognisance to the importance of mother tongue by encouraging migrant	Educators
students to maintain a connection with their mother tongue and culture to assist in the development of their sense of identity, belonging and self- esteem, as well as their proficiency in the language of instruction. Mother tongue proficiency assists additional language acquisition. Associated with this, the option of non- curricular languages at Leaving Certificate level should be actively promoted.	

**5.4.2** The 2016 ESRI Report on Integration notes in relation to the teaching of English as an Additional Language, that since 2012/13 the mode of funding allocation has changed, making it more difficult to monitor the effectiveness of the Intercultural Education Strategy:

Since the academic year 2012/13, assignment of teachers for special needs education and language support has been combined through the General Allocation Model (GAM) and is based on the total number of students in the school. Thus, it is no longer possible to monitor spending on English language tuition in schools. It is also a problem for monitoring the Intercultural Education Strategy, given that spending on EAL is a large part of the financial resources devoted to that strategy. (ESRI 2016, p. 42)<sup>10</sup>

**5.4.3** The SOLAS strategy for further education and training (2014-2019) was published in 2014.<sup>11</sup> It includes linguistic issues that are of interest to migrants in the “Active Inclusion: Literacy and Numeracy” section. It calls for a “clear policy for ESOL provision with priority to low-skilled and unemployed migrants.” (p.100) These courses are targeted at the different needs of migrants:

New community members in Ireland come from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, educational and social backgrounds. ESOL classes are provided across the country to meet the needs of learners who may be highly educated with professional and skilled backgrounds who are attending classes to learn English or improve their English. However, there are also a significant number of learners who are learning English who may have missed out on formal education in their country of origin and who lack the basic

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.esri.ie/publications/monitoring-report-on-integration-2016/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.solas.ie/Further Education and Training Authority SolasPdfLibrary/FETStrategy2014-2019.pdf>

literacy skills to participate fully and benefit from 'standard' English language classes. (p. 145)

## **5.5 Strategies and Policies: Healthcare**

The Health Service Executive launched the Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-2012 with a view to improving the health and well-being of the Irish population based on different needs.<sup>12</sup> It states that

Ethnic groups possess their own cultural identity, language, customs and practices, while each individual within the group will possess his or her own unique life experiences and health, social, emotional, vocational and psychological needs. (p. 6)

The strategy contains many references to language. In developing four main priorities (through research and consultation with HSE staff around the country), it includes, "Information, Language and Communication: Provision of accessible information to service users, together with availability of interpretation and translation services, were highlighted as key priorities requiring urgent attention." (p. 10) This is based on awareness that language barriers may be among the most relevant barriers preventing migrants from access to healthcare:

Barriers to accessing health services formed a large part of discussions during consultations with service users and staff as well as in all written submissions received. Major barriers cited included lack of accessible information in different languages together with unavailability of interpreters. (p. 77)

The HSE appears aware of the problems resulting from not correctly understanding the medical information provided:

Filling out forms and making sense of the information contained in them, especially when these are not in one's home tongue, can be extremely difficult, while not having information available on a range of potentially life-threatening issues can be very dangerous. (p. 98)

Some people from minority ethnic backgrounds may not be functionally literate even within their own language. Responses here will require a greater emphasis on visual and spoken messages. In some instances too, health information may need to be targeted for special groups, such as age and gender. (p. 99)

Among the measures, the strategy proposes close collaboration with communities to foster intercultural awareness, and intercultural training of HSE staff. It envisages the creation of posts for interpreters, to prevent not only misunderstandings, but also the widespread use of family and friends as informal interpreters, which "raises a number of serious issues around privacy,

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/SocialInclusion/National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007 - 2012.pdf](https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/Publications/SocialInclusion/National%20Intercultural%20Health%20Strategy%202007%20-%202012.pdf)

confidentiality and empowerment, and should – in line with international guidelines – be discouraged except in extreme or emergency circumstances.” (p. 100):

The introduction of an interpretation service should be accompanied by appropriate training of service providers in the use of such a service. Such training should be conducted in the context of broader cultural competence training, wherever possible. (p. 101)

## 5.6 The European Union

Many EU policies are directed at promoting multilingualism and the language rights of EU citizens. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) considers citizens’ rights to cultural identity and practices:

The Union contributes to the preservation and to the development of these common values while respecting the diversity of the cultures and traditions of the peoples of Europe as well as the national identities of the Member States and the organisation of their public authorities at national, regional and local levels; it seeks to promote balanced and sustainable development and ensures free movement of persons, services, goods and capital, and the freedom of establishment.”<sup>13</sup>

The Charter considers linguistic rights of all individuals in Article 21:

Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

And article 22:

The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

In addition, citizens may address the institutions of the Union in any one of the languages of the Treaty and have a right to receive an answer in the same language (Art. 41). This Charter was made legally binding by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.

### 5.6.1 The European Parliament summarizes the Union’s linguistic policy as follows:

As part of its efforts to promote mobility and intercultural understanding, the EU has designated language learning as an important priority, and funds numerous programmes and projects in this area. Multilingualism, in the EU’s view, is an important element in Europe’s competitiveness. One of the objectives of the EU’s language policy is therefore that every European citizen should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=EN>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU\\_5.13.6.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_5.13.6.html)

Linguistic difference is both a fact of the European Union, with 24 official languages, and an objective – in the sense that several initiatives and programmes are designed to protect and encourage linguistic diversity and language learning. It is important to note on the other hand that, while discrimination on linguistic grounds is prohibited in all cases, initiatives for the promotion of linguistic diversity are especially directed at the promotion of the official languages of the EU and of the indigenous minority languages. Initiatives for the promotion of multilingualism include:

- Protection of minority languages through the Framework Strategy for Multilingualism<sup>15</sup>
- Online observatory for multilingualism
- The European Indicator of Language Competence<sup>16</sup>
- ECML (<http://www.ecml.at>) and Mercator (<https://www.mercator-research.eu/en/>), two centres for research on modern language teaching and on multilingualism.
- Erasmus+ Programme
- Creative Europe Programme
- European Day of Languages
- Prizes: European Language Label, Juvenes Translatores

### 5.6.2 The 2005 Framework Strategy for Multilingualism

In 2005 the EU Commission published “A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism”.<sup>17</sup> Its goals were to reaffirm the Commission’s commitment to multilingualism; setting out its strategy for promoting multilingualism, and proposing a number of specific actions. The Commission policy aimed to promote “a climate that is conducive to the full expression of all languages, in which the teaching and learning of a variety of languages can flourish.” (p. 3)

The strategy expresses the desirability for language skills and it sets out the basic policy of “mother tongue + 2”, the idea that from a very early age the citizen should acquire his/her native language plus two other languages. This Strategy explicitly promotes multilingualism through different actions in the education, technology, mobility and translation areas. Its focus is on indigenous languages: the statement on “Multilingualism and European Values” addresses the (then) 20 official EU languages and the 60+ indigenous minority languages. The issue of migration and language is mentioned, always with an intention to integrate immigrants on a linguistic as well as social/economic level.

The task of educating the immigrant in the relevant European language is assigned to the EU nations, with their national strategies, and it is up to the single nations to decide whether and how to incorporate the teaching of migrant languages:

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<sup>15</sup>[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs\\_autres\\_institutions/commission\\_europeenne/com/2005/0596/COM\\_COM\(2005\)0596\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs_autres_institutions/commission_europeenne/com/2005/0596/COM_COM(2005)0596_EN.pdf)

<sup>16</sup>[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs\\_autres\\_institutions/commission\\_europeenne/com/2005/0356/COM\\_COM\(2005\)0356\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/docs_autres_institutions/commission_europeenne/com/2005/0356/COM_COM(2005)0356_EN.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52005DC0596&from=EN>

Experts have identified a need for national plans to give coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism amongst individuals and in society generally. These plans should establish clear objectives for language teaching at the various stages of education and be accompanied by a sustained effort to raise awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity. The teaching of regional and minority languages should also be taken into account as appropriate, as should opportunities for migrants to learn the language of the host country (and the teaching of migrant languages)." (p. 5)

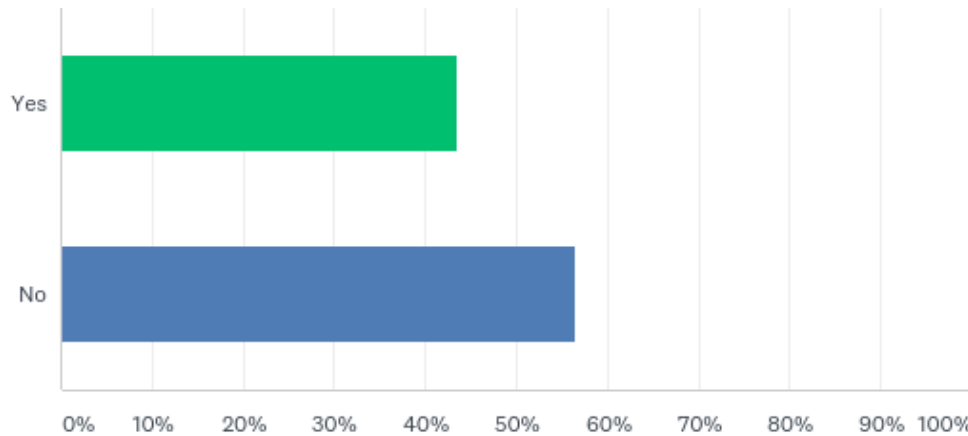
The strategy mentions the importance of language and migration when outlining the need for research on multilingualism, on social inclusion and diversity (including linguistic diversity) (p. 8). It also outlines, as one of its actions, the need to provide interpreting services for migrants (p. 11).

Ireland does not currently have a national plan for languages to give coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism. As can be seen from the above discussions, language features in many aspects of Irish policy documents ranging from education to justice and healthcare. However, there is no overarching strategy for languages in Ireland and no group which monitors the implementation of language policies.

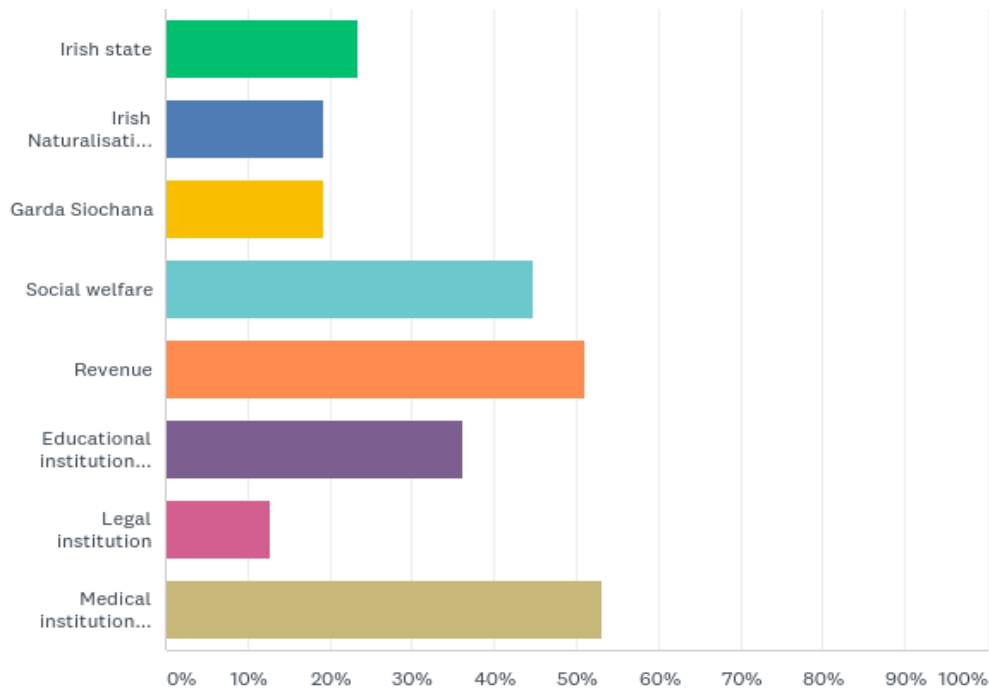
## 6. Language and Irish Institutions

### 6.1 Survey Findings

In the "My Language" survey, migrants were questioned about their linguistic interactions with Irish institutions. When asked if they ever had difficulties in communicating with institutions in Ireland 43.4% of respondents said yes while 56.6% said no.



Although a majority have never had problems with Irish institutions, a sizable number reported issues. They were asked to specify the types of institution(s) where difficulties were encountered, and respondents listed the following:



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Irish state	23.40%	11
Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Services	19.15%	9
Garda Siochana	19.15%	9
Social welfare	44.68%	21
Revenue	51.06%	24
Educational institution (school, university...)	36.17%	17
Legal institution	12.77%	6
Medical institution (hospital, clinic...)	53.19%	25
Total Respondents: 47		

The types of linguistic issues reported regarded the use of specific/obscure terminology by staff, and failure to understand/be understood because of accent differences.

When asked what difficulties people encountered replies included the following:

- I couldn't understand what are they saying vice versa.
- I had cancer last year and I did chemo, was very hard understand every information about my health.
- Technical words I didn't understand
- I could not understand the woman, because I was new, and was not used with local accent.
- At the preschool, I didn't understand when the stuff will call me to announce me when we can begin the preschool. When I call the emergency (ambulance), talking at the phone for me it's very difficult to understand all the questions. It's easier- face to face.
- It is always about the specific terminologies are used and the differerents accents in the country.
- I gave birth 10 weeks after my arrival in Ireland and I had lots of difficulties understanding the hospital staff, especially when they were using medical terms...I also became self-employed and all the paperwork to create a company and run a business was very challenging at first. I thought the Revenue Office was not very helpful.
- In the children hospital once I took my son that was hurt in the school. Revenue..., still very hard to follow.
- People sometimes speak very fast and it may lead to misunderstanding. Also difficult to get message across
- It was difficult for me to understand their technical words and for me to share my feelings and concerns

For one respondent the interaction with the GNIB [Garda National Immigration Bureau] was particularly negative:



Being less confident and having a (slight) accent causes the GNIB staff to ignore, overlook, and often be aggressive or rude towards me (it's worse for those with darker skin).

Another respondent felt that there was different treatment for native and non-native speakers:

At the social welfare office, when I need a help, I already got the impression they already see me as a foreigner rather than a person living in Ireland for a long time and I saw how their attitude changes, when I bring my Irish husband there and the case of without my husband. Without my husband, they are not so patient to listen to me what my job situation was etc, which made me very frustrated. The same thing happened dealing with [other Irish] institutions.

People speaking quickly, in unfamiliar accents causes particular difficulty and having to speak on the phone is identified as an issue of concern. The intolerance and impatience of some staff was also commented on, as was the lack of understanding of some institutions for their situation. During one of the focus groups, when this issue was discussed there was recognition that efforts had been made to simplify communication but difficulties still remained:

Well, recently they were trying to introduce simplified leaflets and, so it was easier, but I don't think Irish people understand, one hundred percent, so... (P. Focus Group B)

## 6.2 Irish Institutions and Cultural Issues

In one focus group, a participant discussed at length the issue of cultural difference and the need for greater cultural understanding and awareness. Even though the person was communicating in English with a representative of the Department of Justice, their language systems were not aligned. Through this disconnection, the participant felt a lack of sensitivity and understanding on behalf of the Irish official:

[...] when you arrive here and you go through the asylum process, I... my first contacts were made with an official is... from the department of justice, and *I realized that what I was saying wouldn't probably make sense in their head because obviously, I was kind of from a different environment*, whatever I was saying they interpreted it into the environment that they were used to, so some of the things that I was saying, were not making sense to them and they wouldn't believe, what I was saying [...] I was speaking in English, but because the different environment, so like, for example, if you're born in [Ireland] and you've lived all your life in [Ireland], and you arrive in Harare in Zimbabwe, today, that's total culture shock! And obviously you have to learn a new environment before you can live and communicate with the people, so when you're making a first contact with an official, and you're telling them about where you're coming from, they are thinking in their head, in the space of Dublin. *They cannot interpret that what you're saying is actually in reality*, in another environment, so they would dismiss whatever you're saying [emphasis added]

[...] And if they think that you're not saying what they would imagine can happen, they'll just say that's... uh, uh, your credibility... lack of credibility, like: how could this happen?

It's not possible. But it can happen in a different... environment, that's, it can happen in that, so... and that was the experience that I... had. (T. Focus Group B)

In summing up the experience, the participant felt that their experience was not singular:

No, so... having gone through the process and now working with people in the process, I eventually realized that we all went through the same experience, and so... [...] there is just general culture disbelief, that has been found out through this stage, and also that, cultural differences, and... accents, pronunciation, variation of..., all that contributes to how, some of the outcomes, or some decisions were made, about people's cases. (T. Focus Group B)

In the focus groups, participants were asked if they had one minute with Minister of State for Integration, Diversity and Inclusion, what would they tell him? One focus group responded that they would like to see more diversity in the public sector:

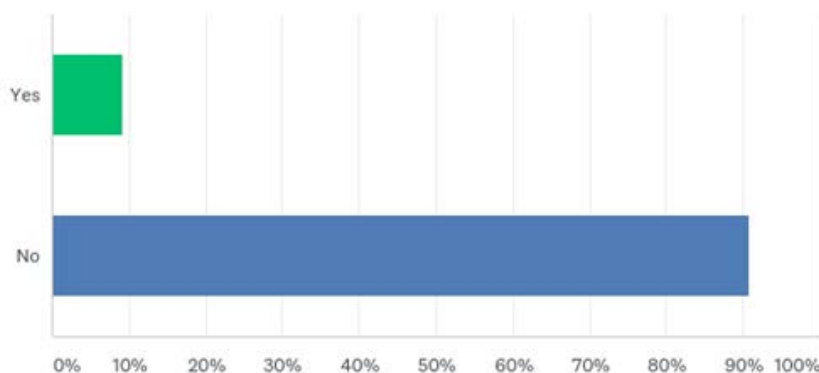
I'll tell him to create more opportunities for migrants, and also to increase the quota public servants. Yeah, so yeah, like they should have an increased quota of how many migrants are actually in the public service, and then also create space for migrants to be able to, to get into positions where they can actually support the communities and also inform the government. (T. Focus Group B)

They express a desire for greater cultural openness and understanding and respect for diversity, not just through cultural awareness but also through greater interactions and inclusivity. The presence of diversity on the public sector would be welcomed by migrants as a step in this direction.

### 6.3 Interpreting in Ireland

As was noted in section 5, it is stated in Irish policy documents that interpreting provision should be available when a linguistic need arises.

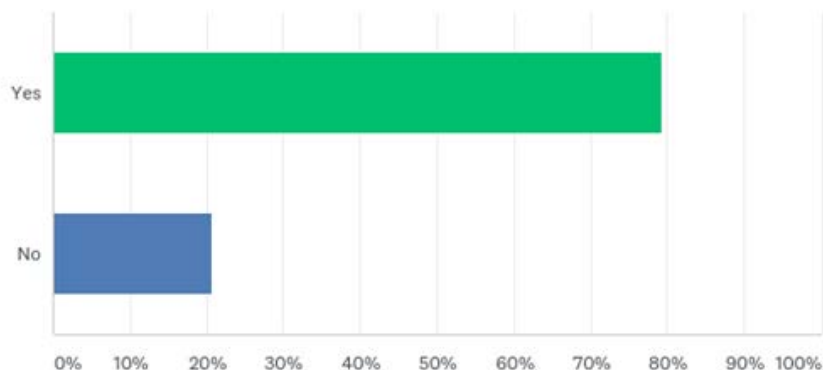
From the survey, it is noteworthy that an overwhelming majority of respondents have never used a professional interpreter in Ireland (91%).



The lack of use of professional interpreters in the migrant community highlights the scarcity of interpreter provision in Ireland. Of those who had used professional interpreters, most were happy but some concerns were expressed:

Hit and miss, some are very good and others not so great. A few got involved with the cases or clients we were working on.

The next question in the survey was whether the person had ever acted informally as an interpreter for family or friends, and 79% of respondents said yes.



It would appear that the gaps in professional interpreting in Ireland are being filled by migrants in an informal capacity. While many respondents report interpreting for communication with friends and family, much of the reported interpretation happens when dealing with Irish institutions. When asked in which context they had worked as informal interpreters, respondents replied that they had interpreted in schools, at social welfare offices, with Revenue, in hospitals, banks, Intreo Centres, at work, with utility companies. While in some contexts such as in restaurants and shops, this informal interpretation might be helpful and beneficial for all involved, in other contexts such as in interactions with medical, financial, educational and judicial institutions, this informal interpreting is not ideal and goes against many of the declared aims of the policies discussed in section 5. When respondents report interpreting informally for Gardaí, hospitals and Social Welfare, then questions must be asked about the provision of formal interpreting in these contexts. Respondents regularly said that they were happy to do this work in order to help family and friends in situations where they might otherwise struggle. A significant number, however raised issues of concern about what they were doing.

### 6.3.1 Interpreting in Ireland - Issues:

Respondents to the survey admit to trying to help people with informal interpreting but at the same time, they express awareness that they often do not have the necessary skills for what they are being asked to do:

- As an community interpreter I have performed in the court. It was very stressful as my law related vocabulary is not good enough. Helped my family member and few friends with forms filling , GP visit and during meeting with solicitor.
- For my mother in her appointment, and every where in Ireland, and I m still doing it, experience wasn't good and still not good as i m not good in English.

- I acted as an interpreter in numerous occasions, both with family/friends and in University (helping fellow students). I find interpreting and translating in general quite difficult and, at times, frustrating. I am not trained in translation studies, therefore I am not used to use to different language systems at the same time.
- [It is] Difficult not to let people a part of a conversation or not to interfere as well as being simultaneous
- For family and friends in the institutions such as social welfare offices, court, hospitals, doctors. It is sometimes frustrating because of lack of exact vocab in my native language to explain issues that are specific to Ireland.
- I went to the Rape Crisis Centre in Galway with a woman from the Republic of Congo who needed some help. Because of this particular context, the experience was difficult and my level of English at that time was not good enough.
- Hospital. Felt that the hospital should have taken care of that. It's in the HSE policies but they're not culturally competent.

Although they are trying to help, the respondents identify issues of lack of training, lack of linguistic ability, lack of specialized skills and lack of cultural specificities which cause issues when they are trying to interpret for others.

### **6.3.2 Non professionalism of interpreting in Ireland**

The use of non-professional interpreters can result in many issues relating to quality and cultural sensitivity. One interviewee said:

I used to work as a translator, interpreter in courts, hospitals and you know, [...] I was actually doing it as a part-time job to get some income when I was working in a shop, nobody checked my qualifications, nobody checked what I, my ethics of work, nobody checked anything, I just sign-up at this website and then I was receiving these assignments and I was going there. (T. Interview)

A respondent to the survey who acts informally as an interpreter in Ireland in hospitals and in court said that:

Interpreting is a joke in Ireland. No national exams or certifications. No preparation and no pay. Nobody takes responsibility for their wrong interpretation. In the continent there are very strict requirements and translators take legal responsibility for their work.

This perception of the failing of the interpreting provision in Ireland by migrants, mirrors concerns that have been expressed by service providers and academics.<sup>18</sup> The main issues

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<sup>18</sup> See Report on Interpreting and Human Rights in Ireland (2015) Royal Irish Academy [https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/2015-01-08\\_report\\_human\\_rights\\_and\\_interpreting.pdf](https://www.ria.ie/sites/default/files/2015-01-08_report_human_rights_and_interpreting.pdf)

identified by all groups are training and quality control. Failings in these areas can have serious repercussions for non-native English speakers who are placed in a vulnerable position. The Immigrant Council of Ireland have identified linguistic sensitivity in interpreting as a key issue which can play a pivotal role in crucial decisions. Interpreting is seen as central in the asylum process where applications are scrutinized in minute details and small misunderstandings/miscommunications can have a big impact. Teresa Buczkowska of the Immigrant Council of Ireland gives the example of someone applying for asylum based on LGBT discrimination and threats, who might be assigned an interpreter whose views are more in harmony with those of the authority from which the person is fleeing rather than the person for whom they are interpreting. Another example she supplies is when in an asylum process an interpreter translates the word “torture” but not exactly as that asylum seeker is explaining, and so the severity of the experience might be diminished and the outcome of the application compromised. The choice of words in these contexts can be crucial in conveying empathy or otherwise and the interpreter is in a powerful position. Cultural understanding is required on both sides and interpreting is not merely linguistically expressing words but also mediating cultural difference.

### **6.3.3 The Migrant Integration Strategy and Interpreting**

In the Migrant Integration Strategy, Action 24 states that “The Department of Social Protection will continue to provide translation/interpretive/sign language services as required”. However, as can be seen from the survey results, in many cases this is not happening. People are unaware of services, services are not available and migrants themselves are acting as interpreters in the absence of adequate state provision of services. Action 49 states that “An appropriate model will be developed for the provision of interpreting services to users within the health area who are not proficient in English.” This is crucial as in the focus groups, health was identified as one of the most linguistically challenging areas and also represents one of the main areas where informal, unprofessional interpreting is currently taking place. Finally, the Strategy notes on p. 39 that “The availability of interpreting to enable migrants to access public services also emerged as a key issue. Participants in the public consultation process noted the need for the provision of suitably qualified high-level interpreting facilities across all public services.” Despite these aims, through migrant testimonies, the shortcomings of the current system emerge especially the lack of quality control, scanty provision and the lack of rigor in terms of the professionalism of the service.

## 7. Language and Accessibility

### 7.1 Language Learning

The survey "My Language" provides an insight into the attitudes of a sample of migrants with respect to English language learning, helping us to place English within their life trajectory. It is important to point out that most respondents to the survey had already learned some English before their arrival in Ireland. A majority of respondents include English in second or third place in a vast repertoire of languages.

However, if we look at how respondents describe their English learning process, and their fluency in the language, we can see that learning English is always open-ended and ongoing, and considered necessary for integration, regardless of the immigrant's skill level. While most respondents report having learned English at school (in Ireland or, more commonly, in their country of birth), there are several indications that the "real" English was learned through continuous contact with members of Irish society, and that they consider this process to be ongoing. As was seen in the analysis of the Census information from 2016, of the 612,018 people who spoke another language at home 508,016 (83%) indicated they could speak English 'well' or 'very well', while 86,608 people (14.2%) indicated 'not well' or 'not at all'. In the survey conducted as part of this research, the issue of confidence in English was explored and people were asked how much they agreed with the statement:

"Sometimes I am afraid I don't speak English well enough"

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
👍	13.33% 16	10.83% 13	16.67% 20	42.50% 51	16.67% 20	120	3.38

59% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement revealing that there is still a gap between being able to speak English in most everyday contexts and feeling assured of one's ability to use English to fully participate in society. Although many people feel that they can use the language, in reality they are not confident in all settings.

### 7.2 How did you learn English?

Many respondents to the survey learned English before coming to Ireland and again afterwards. Some have taken English classes in Ireland and Fáilte Isteach is mentioned by various respondents as a positive way to learn the language. The opportunities for language learning in Ireland are seen as an important part of gaining proficiency. As one respondent said, they learned English:

At school in Poland but with not so good results. After I came to Ireland I have attended Adult Education Centre classes, spoke in English at home in Ireland and by watching Irish TV

Other respondents mention learning through immersion in the language:

I had no choice but to learn, I was surrounded by Irish [people] in school etc so I tried to read and listen as much as possible to English (newspapers, radio, TV) and then I was able to make conversions and write.

Informal learning of the language through watching movies, television, listening to music, reading books / newspapers, taking internet classes via Skype speaking with Irish friends are also mentioned by respondents along with working in a place where everyone was using English. Although watching audiovisual material can be useful, various participants in focus groups pointed out that the accents in most movies and television are English or American and so do not help that much when it comes to oral communication in Ireland.

### **7.3 English language in Ireland**

In the focus groups, when reflecting on the language learning process, many commented on the distinction between what is learned in a classroom and the realities of living in Ireland. Even participants who came to Ireland from countries that were former British colonies, and/or where English is currently one of the languages of instruction, faced struggles in adjusting to the English language in Ireland. Participants explained that English courses in their home countries were often taught by non-native speakers, or focused almost exclusively on writing:

It was like, when I was in eighth grade, which was like twelve, I could write perfectly an entire essay but saying it out loud would be a problem for me, so even when I came here, I heard a word that I didn't recognize but then somebody would write it down and I was, oh, I know that! You know? (M. Focus Group B)

So, for example, 'really', we say 're-a-lly'. I know that, from my country. Yeah, like, teachers, teaching English, they say 're-a-lly'. I, uh, I discovered here, it's 'really.' (H. Focus Group B)

The pervasiveness of English as a global language of instruction is rarely cast into doubt, but the survey and focus groups underline how this does not automatically translate into a level of English that is sufficient for integrating fully into Irish society. Most migrants have some knowledge of English when they arrive; but few of them feel fully equipped to work and thrive in the Irish environment.

### **7.4 The context**

The ESRI Report on Integration, discussed in section 5, addresses the linguistic barriers that may prevent migrants from achieving their goals in terms of career or quality of life:

The foreign-born who lack host-country language proficiency can become a group with cumulative disadvantages as language skills not only determine their position on the labour market but also the level of their social integration. Individuals not proficient in the majority language face a 14 percentage-point lower employment rate than other immigrants and an over-qualification rate that is on average 17 percentage points higher across OECD countries (Thoreau, 2014). (p. 90)

Foreign-born non-English speakers have rather lower scores in literacy tests than Irish-born or foreign-born native English speakers (p. 93). The skills gap between native and non-native laborers is mainly driven by English language competency and this results in significantly higher overqualification rates (p. 108). In Ireland, the Education and Training Boards provide English language courses for migrant workers, unemployed migrants and asylum seekers.

The courses are funded by the Department of Education and Skills, although exact spending figures are not available. ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes are provided by ETBs nationally to meet the needs of learners who may be highly educated with professional and skilled backgrounds who are attending classes to learn English or improve their English. Solas' Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 calls for the provision of clear policy for ESOL provision with priority to low-skilled and unemployed migrants. (p. 41). The report lists other associations providing English language courses for immigrants, such as the Fáilte Isteach project, SPIRASI and Doras Luimní.

## **7.5 Language and Accents**

Accent and pronunciation are clearly identified by non-English speakers as the most difficult aspect of trying to communicate in Ireland.

Ireland is just a different place entirely, the first thing that hits you is the language, not the language, the language is English; but the accent is different, and they can't understand you, you can't understand them (D. Focus Group B)

Also problems with grasping how to talk, no? Because I know, writing, reading? Very good. Speaking, yeah it's difficult. Also the accent, here, in Ireland, very different. (H. Focus Group B)

The variety of accents in Ireland can also present difficulties, whether this is variances from county to county or also differences in social register between professional contexts and what is spoken in the street. There is a strong sense that language classes are not enough for interaction with society because in a classroom there is limited exposure to "authentic" accents. Respondents in focus groups and in surveys all mention the importance of talking to 'real' Irish people in 'real' situations. There is a strong desire to communicate with locals but it is difficult to find Irish people who have the time and the interest in talking with non-native speakers.

I think there should be more gatherings, it's not just classes because like they said, they need to talk to people! So there should be more... events where Irish people can mingle with migrants, you know, they need to talk to Irish people, If you're... in a room talking to migrants, all around, people are speaking wrong English all over, and... you don't improve, but if you go outside, I think... (M. Focus Group B)

Fáilte Isteach, where older Irish people meet with migrants and teach them English is welcomed by those who have used the services as an opportunity to have real interactions. There is however a strong desire to have more possibilities for interaction between Irish people and non-native speakers.



## 7.6 Immersion Learning

Although immersion in a language can be beneficial for learning purposes, the difficulties of this for learners who are immersed in Irish society without the requisite language skills should not be underestimated. A participant in a focus group recounts her experience of going to an Irish school:

[...] when I came here, and I came on maybe the... fourteenth of August, and I started school on the thirty-first of August, and like I said, my English was written so I didn't have like, any, speaking experience, and, for the first six, seven months, [...] it was so bad. Like I couldn't understand the teacher, I couldn't understand the students, I, came from a completely different culture [...] I used to get nosebleeds how bad it was... for the tension and the stress. I had to learn how to speak, I had to learn how to understand the subjects: maths, physics, chemistry, like... it was very difficult for me. (M. Focus Group B)

This individual did not have the benefit of specialized English language classes in school and found teachers difficult:

[...] the students were more understanding than teachers, so if I'd talk to someone they would either slow down or try to help me with, but the teachers, I couldn't speak the language but they still... demand me to do the same work as everyone else, even though I do not understand. [...] there weren't any, like, how do you say, extra language classes or stuff like that. (M. Focus Group B)

Since the academic year 2012/13, assignment of teachers for special needs education and language support has been combined through the General Allocation Model (GAM) and is based on the total number of students in the school. Thus, it is no longer possible to monitor spending on English language tuition in schools. It is also a problem for monitoring the Intercultural Education Strategy, given that spending on EAL is a large part of the financial resources devoted to that strategy. (ESRI 2016, p. 42) The Migrant Integration Strategy stresses the necessity to review the "adequacy of language supports in schools to cater for the language needs of children from ethnic minorities" (p. 26).

In its submission to the Department of Education and Skills in 2014 for the new Foreign Languages Strategy, the ASTI highlighted some of the issues concerning supports for children who are immersed in Irish schools and who possess limited English language skills. They reported that:

The language learning needs of migrants are complex. They need targeted supports to enable them to acquire the majority language and simultaneously need supports to retain their own mother tongue language/s. From the perspective of the ASTI, neither set of needs are currently being adequately met. Supports for teaching English-as-another-language – EAL - have been reduced by successive austerity budgets. Indeed, during the economic boom, the quality of supports for EAL was not optimum. Training was not provided in any systematic fashion to either EAL or mainstream teachers. In most instances, many of the former were not experienced teachers but rather were new

entrants to the profession and to whom atypical teaching duties were – and continue to be – routinely allocated. The complexity of migrant students’ language learning needs is explicitly addressed in the 2010 National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy. The latter notes that “(migrant students’) acquisition of communicative language may mask a deficit in academic language skills that are needed to succeed at school”. (9) The recommendations in the Strategy should be revisited as a matter of urgency as two consecutive PISA studies provide clear evidence that migrant children are performing significantly below their peers in reading literacy whereas the difference is not so significant for the other domains, including the new domain of digital reading in 2012.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear from the above and from migrant testimony that support structures and cultural understanding are crucial in order to minimize the emotional difficulties and maximize the positive learning outcomes.

### **7.7 Children and Language Learning**

A strong desire to pass on the mother tongue of the parent to the child was expressed by many of the participants in the surveys and focus groups. It was deemed important so that the children could communicate with other members of the family who might not have English. The importance of the children being able to speak the parent’s native language were not only limited to communicative functions but also included links between the language and identity: Children were encouraged to speak their “heritage” language because: “It’s to see your roots” and because “Tradition, it’s not just, just language”. Although children might have Irish passports, parents can feel that they still belong to another country:

But when you learn [the foreign language], when you teach them language, you teach them traditional thing, and culture, and your... beliefs... Yeah, and your beliefs, not just religion, some beliefs is out of religion, so just beliefs in how you... how you just live, how you lived and [...], your family their belief. And... even if my childrens, they born here and they have Irish passports, it’s still, they, they need to know they are Sudanese first before they are Irish, just... important for me. And when they become like, twenty, you’re... they become like adults, they... it’s their choice what they think, but until then I will still, teach like you are Sudanese first. (Y. Focus Group B)

Language in this context is clearly not merely a communicative tool, it links a person to a community, to a tradition and to another country. Without that language, the link is seen to be broken. Another respondent said:

Well I think it’s very important for [my son] to learn Chinese, because that’s our hometown, that’s where I’m from, and it is important, and, and good for him to... for kids, to know his background, his ancestry, his root, you know? And so he, he can find where he really belongs. He will know he will have a life good, very good here, but he still needs to look for his... ancestors. (Y. Focus Group A)

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.asti.ie/uploads/media/ForeignLanguagesSubmission.pdf>

This person refers to a place in China as “*our* hometown” and says that there the child can find where he *really belongs*. This perception of belonging to both Ireland and another place is typical of the hybridity of the migrant population and especially to their children who might never have set foot in “our hometown” but for whom it still represents a fundamental part of their identity. Without the language skills, accessing this other facet of belonging becomes difficult.

For many of the participants it is crucial that their children have the opportunity to learn the language of their parents and they pointed out the lack of support for language teaching for community languages. In most cases, parents organise and teach classes for their children without any state support and many would like greater support (even if it just the provision of space) for weekend language schools for children of parents whose first language is not English.

In April 2017, the Minister for Education and Skills Richard Bruton TD announced at the TUI Conference that measures were going to be put in place regarding the teaching of ‘heritage’ languages as part of the new national strategy for foreign languages. As of October 2017, this strategy has not yet been published. However, some of the elements announced in April 2017 include:

- New (curricular) Leaving Certificate specifications will be prepared accompanied by Leaving Certificate examinations, to replace non-curricular Leaving Certificate examinations, for students whose heritage language is Polish, Portuguese or Lithuanian.
- The number of students seeking to learn minority languages can be small and they may be located / dispersed throughout the country. A new model involving a shared class, where a critical mass of students from a number of schools in a locality can be grouped together, may be an option. Such a class would operate after school or at a time agreeable to the schools involved.
- In addition to, or complementing the shared class model, could be the use of blended learning whereby a combination of online and face-to-face teaching by specially appointed peripatetic teachers working across a number of schools, in key identified geographical areas, could be trialled. Embassies will be consulted on the opportunities that such shared classes might provide.
- The Department of Education and Skills and the Teaching Council will address the complex issue of the registration of teachers for the new languages being proposed for incorporation into the Leaving Certificate programme. These will include Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese. It will involve developing appropriate criteria.
- Measures to develop and build on the heritage language skills of immigrant communities: these include curricular specifications at Leaving Certificate, starting with Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese, as heritage languages, with accompanying Leaving Certificate examinations. These specifications would replace the existing Leaving Certificate non-curricular examinations in these languages.
- Consideration of the development of additional Junior Cycle Short Courses for heritage languages, mindful of the fact that a short course in Polish already exists.

- The Department will work with embassies of relevant countries in delivering on these commitments.<sup>20</sup>

These measures are long overdue and are eagerly awaited and needed by migrant communities and their children.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-04-19.html>

## 8. Language and Identity

*Migrants*

by Nita Mishra

I know 'good migrants'  
Assimilated families  
Good peaceful people  
Who have 'learnt'  
To keep their voices under wraps  
Pick up the local accent  
Have parties to assimilate  
And  
Over the years  
A slow realisation dawns  
Upon them, that  
They are still  
Different, migrants  
Foreigners  
And the colour of the skin  
Hasn't paled  
Even a wee bit  
In vain  
Was it all worth?

Language is not just a means of communication, it is also a site of identity construction, a process by which individuals give meaning to the world. The connection between language and identity can function at both an individual and a societal level – people can feel a bond with others through a shared language, they make sense of who they are through the words that they use. In the case of migration, the movement between different languages can result in fractured identities, in hybrid identities, in new constructions of identity.<sup>21</sup> In the survey, migrants were asked how much they agreed with the statement: My nationality is linked to my language.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
👍	5.79%	8.26%	13.22%	43.80%	28.93%		
	7	10	16	53	35	121	3.82

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<sup>21</sup> For some theoretical discussion on this theme, see the works for example of Burr (2003), Bauman (1992), Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Ricoeur (1992).

The results are striking as 73.73% of all respondents feel that there is a link between nationality and language. In a related question in the survey, people were asked how much they agreed with the statement

**My language is my culture.**

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
👍	4.20%	5.88%	24.37%	37.82%	27.73%		
	5	7	29	45	33	119	3.79

Once again, a majority of the respondents demonstrate a marked link between cultural identification and language. Interviews and focus groups also discussed the relationship between nationality and language, highlighting the contextual and contingent nature of national language and national identity. While some migrants have the opportunity to speak their native language regularly, others do not have the same opportunity:

When I speak with somebody and they speak Spanish. It makes me feel more connected (C. Focus Group A)

There is also an emphasis on the importance of teaching children the native languages of their parents, both from a pragmatic perspective to re-integrate if they return to their parent’s country of origin and from a familial network perspective to be able to connect on a cultural level with extended family, especially grandparents:

Because it’s to see your roots. And, you still have family in, in your origin... country. And... they need to... know, they, they should be able to communicate with the other members of your family and... friends, etcetera. And also for their own... ethnicity. They need to know... from... the, the background. Because without background the people are uh, I don’t think that they would be, uh, fully happy, you know, in the future, when they grow up. (K. Focus Group B)

...she might have to go back to her country, she needs the language, at the very centre and she needs to know the culture and the religion, and everything. (M. Focus Group B)

And she need to talk to a... to... her grandma... (H. Focus Group B)

Nationality can be invoked in a processual manner through interaction with culture, language, religion and ancestry which does not necessarily have to be based in the home country (Anderson, 1991). The link with family in country of origin also highlights how migrants are both connected to the host country and their country of origin, with language the key to communication of culture.

The nationality and national identity of children are important to parents, and described as more than words on a passport. As was described in section 7.7 parents feel that learning their native

language gives their children access to their culture and heritage and they often express a desire for their children to identify with their parent's nationality, through language and cultural practice, even though they live in and have been born in Ireland. What will happen when these children become adults is not proscribed, however their upbringing is clearly representative of transnational socialisation. For adults who choose to live in Ireland, the idea of hybrid nationality is more plausible:

... probably a year later I felt I was Irish Indian (M. Interview)

Identity is also expressed through language in the memory of interactions with parents and grandparents which shows how cultural language practices, even those which may no longer be practiced, are remembered as a familial history of language, of a shared identity between child and parent.

I lived very closely to the Ukrainian border, and I remember even how my grandmother spoke, what language, like set of word she was using, we don't use them anymore because the language, evolved, even further, but people in Ukraine, they still use those words (A. Focus Group A)

I'm from the North of Italy, but my parents are from the South, and my grandmother is from the South and she only speaks... her dialect, so I can, understand what she says, most of the time, but I can't speak it (F. Focus Group A)

The focus here on the language practices of grandparents is linked to where and how they lived and the importance of knowing that language, even at a rudimentary level to enable effective communication. Linked more closely to a sense of national identity, the stories children are told reflects personally important socio-historical information:

I'm also part of this community [...] and there's a lot of sort, it's very, very close-knit so the story of our grandparents' migration, like it's something very important, it's always told to us, you know told to the children and how they migrated (O. Interview)

In this case it is a memory and story of migration of grandparents from their home country which reinforces the roots of identity, exactly what parents living in Ireland are trying to achieve, as noted earlier.

## 9. Language, Belonging and Integration

*This Space Here by Nita Mishra*

This space here

This space here

Now

Is mine

This space here

Is mine

When I am here

This space where you are

Is mine too

This space you claim as yours

Is mine too

This space where

You stand

I stand

with distance in between

This space

This distance

We must transcend

You walk a bit

I take a step,

We move

in this space

We cover it, merge

We become one, you with me

I with you

We

with this space

This distance

We

become us

I and You

This space was ordained

to be transcended

to be known,

Be revealed

to Us

This space where you are

Is mine too

This space here

This space here

When I stand here

Is my Bodhi tree

This is where I am

One with you

At the foot

Of this Bodhi tree

When I am here

Rests my whole life

Raises my whole Be-ing

Leaves, and comes back

Eternally

### 9.1 The Impact of Hostility and Exclusion

Language can be an important factor in creating an environment of hostility and exclusion. According to Teresa Buczkowska of the Immigrant Council of Ireland, language can be exclusionary in a number of settings:

- When it is used as a tool for racial abuse and, or harassment on the streets or at work, with phrases such as 'you go back to your home country'.
- When the language used in the media to describe migration and migrants dehumanizes and creates an atmosphere of fear.



- In an employment context where language is used as a way of blocking access to rights, for example an employer using very complicated language, hindering comprehension.
- When employees are not allowed to use their native language at work
- Through the lack of oversight of interpretation and translation provision by the state which leaves migrants vulnerable

## 9.2 Integration not Assimilation

Although migrants wish to speak English and interact with Irish society, they do not want this integration to come at the expense of the effacement of their own culture. In the integration process, they wish for their own culture to be acknowledged and respected; as one participant in a focus group said:

I feel most of the time that, when the Irish people looking at me, and I'm not behaving the way that I'm meant to behave, because there's an attempt to assimilate me, they... I know they identify that I'm from a different culture, and I have my own way of doing things, but because I live here, there's an assumption that I should do things the way they're done here. So I feel that like, almost every day. But when I do things the way I understand to be allowed to, as long as I'm not breaking the law or harming anyone, I should be allowed to do, things the way that I... do them in my own culture. (T. Focus Group B)

Ozgecan Kesici's poem to the Irish people expresses the desire for inclusivity and diversity in powerful terms:

### *An Open Letter to the Host Country of an Immigrant*

Did they not tell you?  
I ran away from homeland,  
or else the land that raised me,  
to join the ranks of the romantics;  
the sets of song-makers and wordsmiths.

I left strict appointments and six-week notices,  
where the weight of having to do's undid me  
and bureaucracies took out the human from society  
to come to a place where "you're grand's"  
and "no bother's" get dropped on the daily.

Ireland, take me.  
for I have no place apart from what's in me  
and a distorted memory of where I really should be:  
stretched out masses of land,  
where horses supposedly run free  
and falcons are caught at the arm.

Take your walks through me, and through me  
let's have our talks about famines and what colonisers left behind.

You and me. They left behind you and me.  
 For this, I have come to stay, this *is* our place to be.

Ireland, have me.  
 Soak me in your seven seas  
 and spit me out at the edge of your cliffs  
 or else roll me out by Dun Laoghaire,

Raise me onto your Wicklow Mountains and topple me back  
 into your mind valleys,  
 into your print valleys,  
 into your page-in-ink valleys.

Ireland, love me  
 as a lover does the first three years,  
 but don't break me, don't assimilate me  
 and don't discriminate me.

For I have cracked again and again  
 in a place called Turkestan,  
 in the sweet *naans* of India,  
 trickling waters of Bavaria  
 and the suns of Anatolia.

This is all I bring with me.  
 Receive me, accept me and make me  
 a token of what Ireland could be.

(Ozgecan Kesici – Ayoubi)

### 9.2.1 Use of native language

Being allowed to speak one's native language at work or at leisure or in public contexts is important to retain this sense of identity and self. In the "My Language" survey, people were asked how much they agreed with the statement: I don't like using my first language in front of strangers. In this answer 25% of people agreed and 13% strongly agreed. 47% of respondents however felt comfortable using their first language in front of strangers. They need to be proud of a first language and comfortable in using it in a new country is an important part of integration where becoming part of a new society does not mean renouncing connections with another society and language. In a follow up question, people were asked whether they agreed with the statement I wish I had more chances of speaking my first language.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
👍	10.66% 13	23.77% 29	34.43% 42	17.21% 21	13.93% 17	122	3.00

The answers to this question present a mixed picture with 34% disagreeing, 35% neutral and 31% in agreement. The amount of people who would like more opportunities to speak their first language is balanced by a similar number who are happy as they are. People were then asked if they had ever been forbidden/prevented from speaking their first language in the workplace or at school and 22% of respondents said that this had happened to them. One respondent reported receiving a letter from an employer stating that “using Polish language at work is forbidden”; others reported not being allowed to use their first language in a variety of different work places. Further comments included those who felt that using their first language in the presence of others would be impolite and not acceptable in the workplace.

### 9.3 The Irish Language

Ireland’s bilingualism, its relevance to the country’s history and its current socio-cultural position cannot be ignored in a discussion on language in Ireland. Our research questionnaires included questions on how the debate on the Irish language interacts with migration and other languages. Migrants were asked how much they agreed with this statement: I think that speaking Irish is an important part of being Irish.

<b>STRONGLY DISAGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
15.70%	14.88%	16.53%	28.93%	23.97%	
19	18	20	35	29	121

As can be seen from the responses a majority of respondents felt that the Irish language was very important to being Irish. At the same time, the Irish language is spoken to some extent only by 2.96% of survey respondents. Some 30% of respondents felt that speaking Irish was not relevant to being Irish.

## 9.4 Belonging



[Image from the exhibition Be-Longing by Marta Golubowska, 2017]

As has already been discussed in Section 8, language is crucial to creating a sense of identity, a sense of belonging to a place, or even a variety of places. English language proficiency allows for greater integration in Irish society but to what extent do non-native speakers of the language feel as if they belong in Ireland? There are mixed reports of how migrants are received in Irish society, from recognition that Ireland does not have the level of extreme xenophobic behaviour which features elsewhere globally, to times when small misunderstandings can leave migrants feeling excluded:

Yes I think if you are studying together, if you are working together, and you have the same level of English as everyone else then everything is fine, because you have defined the context to talk about, and, and then you're just talking your own depth, so, even if you don't understand them hundred per cent, because you know that is about a particular thing, you get the overall idea, you may miss one or two word... so interacting is not a problem but interacting socially is harder, because a lot of time, if there are a lot of Irish... people then they have their own context, and like they have their own jokes, related to particular counties, particular background, Cork, Limerick, Mayo, but... Mayo, and whatever, different sports and then just... you may actually establish a bit of rapport with them, you think you may be establishing a rapport, and then there will be other people

around and they would crack a joke, and then everybody would understand that and then you would be out of context. (D. Focus group A)

This lack of cultural knowledge of the context is positioned as more relevant to new migrants, something which has to be overcome. After a period of time cultural knowledge gaps can be ameliorated, until someone new encounters them again, as noted above. It was also noted that people in Ireland can be very helpful in filling in the gaps:

...if you know the people well, then they are actually quite nice, you can actually ask them, or sometimes I have found that they actually just look at you, understand that you're clueless then they actually try to fill you in on some background. (D. Focus Group A)

Interpersonal communication cannot be taken for granted in intercultural communication, addressing not only the language differences but the practices which can be assumed as cultural which may in fact just be idiosyncrasy, as noted here small differences can be addressed if communication is open, on both sides.

When you're from completely different countries and completely different cultures, every single thing is like: okay, in my culture, you really save the soap, but there is a lot of water in Argentina, so you turn on the tap, and go, like, for ages, and the soap is like gold. In Ireland, you really use a tiny bit of water, but the soap you use, a lot of soap, and to me, is like: why are you using all the... you know? But you don't get angry because it's like, of course, I'm from somewhere else, or maybe was just my family, it doesn't matter, you take less for granted and you really communicate all the simplest things. (R. Focus Group A)

Reflecting the intercultural communication between friendship groups, there is recognition that genuine acceptance does occur. This is contrasted below with different institutional events which, even with the best intentions of including various cultures, can either make difference more visible and exclude or can offer a genuine form of intercultural recognition<sup>22</sup>:

...I have white Irish friends who are fantastic people who really, genuinely want to, want to mix around and have fun and you know, but on the other hand in primary school, for instance when they have an intercultural day, they have a desk for the day, oh you are Roman, you are Irish, sorry, you are Indian, you are Pakistani, you are this that, oh let's celebrate, you know, your food, your clothes except Irish, it's like going to the zoo for the day, and that's what they understand in many places, what it means to be culturally, you know, mixing, or, but I, it's not true for everything, that's my experience in a few years in primary school, when I've seen how they celebrate intercultural, but in other places I think it's genuinely beautiful...for instance the ceremony for citizenship was very, very respectful ...(M. Interview)

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<sup>22</sup> See Fanning (2002) for discussion of weak and strong multiculturalism.

These discussions highlight the role of language in integration, in finding links with a society and in being able to create friendships and contacts. Lack of language skills compromises this access and then language can act as a barrier to communication and integration in society, with misunderstandings and linguistic shifts leading to exclusion, hindering a sense of belonging.

## 10. Languages and the Arts

As part of the research, a number of migrant artists who are attempting to make their mark in Irish society and culture were interviewed. They are mostly emergent artists, whose work is only now being acknowledged through prizes and the inclusion in festivals and anthologies. They are part of transnational networks, maintaining artistic ties with their home countries, but at the same time have decided to use English as their main medium. Their work addresses Irish society and at times (but not always) discusses issues related to migration. They use the internet to stay up to date with trends in their areas and disseminate their work transnationally; at the same time, they make use of resources available in Irish communities (universities, community centres, local arts centres) to develop their practice and ground it in Irish society. What emerges from the interviews is a will to change the conversation about Irish culture in inclusive terms, and to raise awareness of underlying issues such as displacement and incomprehension (but also episodes of racism and discrimination). Their works and opinions offer insights on different methods of integration and discussion of migrant issues.

The artists and authors that we interviewed are (in alphabetical order):

- Marta Golubowska, visual artist (<https://golubowska.weebly.com>)
- Ozgecan Kesici-Ayoubi, poet
- Kasia Lech, theatre performer (<https://polishtheatre.wordpress.com/>)
- Christodoulos Makris, poet (<http://yesbutisitpoetry.blogspot.it>)
- Nita Mishra, poet
- Jijo Sebastian, film director (<https://jijospalatty.blogspot.ie/>)

This sample of artists who accepted to take part into our project did so without any claim to represent a whole community, nationality or artistic milieu. As individual artists/authors/etc., they showed us some of the challenges and possibilities of those who have decided to make Ireland their artistic home.

### 10.1 Learning and re-learning the global language in Ireland

Some of the people we talked to became artists here in Ireland, even though most had already studied their practices in their countries of origin. They were already familiar with English when they came, however, all of them faced different levels of cultural and linguistic challenges when they started practising in Ireland. Some of these challenges impacted them on a very practical level. This is, for example, Marta Golubowska on her experience with the language of art in English:

When I ran art workshops, it was: 'what's mould, what's cast? What means ... what words do you use to describe the short of perspective?' I know in Polish but I have to learn all those words in English. I had to get involved in networking with people to be able to find these. (MG)

Even though Golubowska had a degree in fine arts from her native Poland, and had studied English for years in school, she found herself in the position of acquiring linguistic tools and put them to use, to interact with the arts community in Ireland and make a name for herself. In the end, she managed to turn her sense of displacement in the new environment into art: her recent project *Be-Longing* looks precisely at this, combining a model representation of the housing estate where she lives with interviews with her neighbours.

Cultural and linguistic displacement are often themes in these artists' work, and they have to find a medium to express them. This often means going back and forth between English and their native languages, as in this testimony by Indian poet Nita Mishra:

I think in English, I have written in Hindi, I cannot write in Oriya, which is my mother tongue... and I do feel English is, when I'm trying to translate it, or trying to use to say something deeper, I find English is difficult to deal with. English doesn't have those words, and so I feel frustrated at times: but I'm one of those who is not involved with any one language, but always negotiating between different ways of expressing myself. (NM)

With the notable exception of Jijo Sebastian (whose films are set in Ireland, but acted in Malayalam) English is their preferred medium, which they use to address the Irish public as well as the global stage. This double dimension is very important for the practitioners that we have interviewed.

A good part of international art and literature nowadays is experienced and disseminated in English. The Irish-based artists see English as a global language in the first place. From this point of view, it can feel like a useful tool and a foreign body at the same time, as Jijo Sebastian remarked in his interview:

Most of my intellectual reading was/is done in English. A lot of my thinking brain works in English. Yet It is always foreign. I must confess deep inside I harbour a feeling that English is intrusive in my system and even subjugates me somewhere. (JS)

On the other hand, English can open up new expressive possibilities, since it is a 'new' language for them, not attached to previous experiences and background – as noted by Cyprus-born poet Christodoulos Makris:

[My relationship with English is] one of investigation. I hold it at a distance while simultaneously being enveloped by it. And one of trust. I'm quite comfortable with it in the sense that it doesn't much entertain nostalgia and conservatism; it's such a malleable entity that it invites modifications, abuse and mangling, it practically begs for innovations, and bounces right back. (CM)

This idea of English as a "malleable entity" is very interesting. Using a new and unfamiliar language can be a daunting perspective, with very specific risks, challenges and pitfalls: our survey of the migrant experience underlined some of them. When we talked to migrant artists



and poets we found a dimension where the risks and challenges did not disappear, but coexisted with new expressive opportunities. In this dimension, English can still be "intrusive" and still feel "distant," or "difficult": but it is also a clean start, a medium that is malleable and inclusive enough to accommodate the story of these new users.

The global dimension of English also means that these practitioners can often act as a connection between Ireland and other parts of the world. In 2014, Makris was involved in a project called *Centrifugal*, where seven poets from Dublin and seven poets from Guadalajara (Mexico) translated each other ("our intention was to encourage a connection and a sort of collaboration between poets from across cities and languages to turn the original texts into versions of them [...]. Poetry in this case [...] is what was gained in translation."). In this case, a Cyprus-born poet translated between English and Spanish, contributing to Dublin's international dimension.

Ozgecan Kesici-Ayoubi, a scholar and poet whose background includes Kazakh, Turkish and German cultures, engaged with her Kazakh roots on a different level in Dublin, and this led her recently to embark on a translation of poet Magzhan Zhumabayev. Working on this project in Dublin enabled Kesici to see the poets of the Kazakh national liberation movement of the early twentieth century in a different light, creating parallels between Kazakh and Irish history: "if I could publish it in Ireland I would because of Ireland's own 1916 history, the poets of those times, among them Yeats, and I think that there is that sort of parallel between the two movements." Mobility and translation are two things that put Ireland in conversation with other parts of the world, often producing unexpected results.

Certainly, the nature of the medium plays an important part in determining how easily a piece of cultural practice can travel. The poets that we have interviewed must engage in a series of operation of translation in order to be understood – in Ireland, in their home country or in a third country. Expressive forms with a visual component seem to travel more easily, Golubowska notes:

Interviewer: So, when you're speaking to someone with your art, do you have in mind an English speaking audience?

MG: you see, I'm trying to be relevant to myself primarily, so that's the first criterion; and then I'm looking at the idea to include as many people as I can. I don't think it would have to be English-speaking people as long as they can understand where the idea comes from. if I attached a piece about the project in Polish, then it could be as well only meant for Polish people, maybe I'll do that when I send it over to Poland to exhibit.

Visual art, where words are only an incidental feature of the work, and they often appear only as an appendix or explanation, can be experienced more easily by an audience that does not speak the same language. That is, to a certain extent, the case of cinema: Jijo Sebastian makes films about the Indian (Malayalam) community in Ireland, and almost all dialogue is in the Malayalam language. That should not scare the Irish viewer: not only are they available with English subtitles, but – as Jijo notes – language is only one dimension of a film ("Frankly I can watch and enjoy a Bela Taar, Roy Andersson or Wong Kar-wai movie without any subtitles").

## 10.2 Making art with the languages of Ireland

And yet, these practitioners are immersed every day not only in English, but in the English that they hear in Dublin and other Irish cities and towns. In Jijo's latest work "Box", one of the most significant scenes is when a Muslim woman sits in a pub with a parcel, causing a white Irish patron to panic: the scene is built over a pattern of dialogue and misunderstanding over English and Malayalam, and over easy assumptions about different cultures coexisting in the same space. Makris has a poem called "Daddy, Why Did You Call Me Bastard?", composed entirely of conversations overheard on a particular day in Dublin. Mishra's poem "Tom's Exotic Princess" describes her encounter not only with English, but with a recognizably Irish brand of English:

Strangely enough,

"Pretty face' writes in English!

Academic papers?

Must be an aberration, whhhaat?!

Pays taxes as well!"

"Jaysus!"

Authors and artists incorporate their experience of Irish culture, language and atmosphere in their work: sometimes it is simply a part of their everyday experience that feeds into their work. Other times, they explicitly respond to the experience, in work that is a request for expressive space and for inclusiveness. In an interview with Nita Mishra about a work-in-progress "This country that is yours" – she discussed how the poem came to her in Hindi, but she is now trying to translate into English because of its message:

I am saying, you know, the strength that you have, and the connection you have with this land, though you may not see me having that... but I also feel excluded from that feeling that you have for this place, I also strongly, equally strongly feel for the mountains, sitting in my car in the Dublin mountains so, [...] you should know that I feel as strongly. (NM)

Migrant artists are finding their voice, balancing Irish and non-Irish elements in their productions, to claim a space in Ireland and the right to a connection to this landscape. The negotiation may sometimes be hard to pin down, but it describes a reality. Theatre performer and scholar Kasia Lech, whose English was heavily influenced by living in Ireland but who also spent a considerable amount of time in the UK, spoke about what she calls her "Polish/Irish/British accent" and how it became a platform for her to play with, to avoid being cast into a particular space and reflect a reality ("I think it's interesting because I'm not the only one, there's a lot of Polish people that move between Ireland and the UK"). Migrant art is

ultimately about the right to represent Ireland from a different perspective - but it must be acknowledged that such a perspective exists and that it already occupies a space in Ireland.

In doing so, migrant artists have to access English without losing touch with their original perspective. Coming from outside, they cannot take English for granted, and often mix in elements from their native languages to enrich the text. Mishra, Kesici and Makris all insert elements of different languages into their poems. Polish Theatre Ireland (where Lech was one of the founders) created shows like Chesslaugh Mewash, where the work of Polish author Czesław Miłosz became the basis for a multilingual performance about intercultural contact and the human need for communication. Based on the languages spoken by the actors that the company recruited in Dublin, they were able to bring English, Irish, French, Lithuanian, Polish and Slovakian on stage:

KL: So it was poetry of Czesław Miłosz but in all those different languages, it was super confusing...

Interviewer: I can imagine

KL: ...and lots of fun.

Interviewer: And those people were all from Dublin, let's say, they were all based in Dublin?

KL: Yes, all of them were based in Dublin

Interviewer: So, in a way it was bringing a snapshot of the different nationalities that you have in Dublin?

KL: A taste of Dublin.

The "taste of Dublin" that companies like Polish Theatre Ireland bring to the stage is made up of many languages, highlighting this aspect of Irish society through the world of cultural production. This reality is often more complex than one might assume, and its creative outcomes are often unexpected.

Kesici thinks that the multilingual history of Ireland itself played a part in her choice of language-mixing. In an interview, she revealed that the idea came to her from what she heard from 'spoken word' poets in Dublin:

I started off in the spoken words circuit, and that was also very inspiring. I loved when poets sometimes did their poems in English but then they had, you know, verses of complete Irish in it, and that was just very exciting to me. Because I was like: I can totally understand and see why you are doing that! Because some of these things can only be said in a certain language... (OK)

Kesici found a congenial environment in the spoken word poetry events of Dublin cafés, where she says she found an atmosphere of “curiosity and openness.” There, as she started to work on her poetry, she found herself inserting words that come from afar, from the Turkey of her childhood or from Kazakhstan, the ancestral home of her family. There are words, she claims, that can only be left in a certain language. The title of her poem “Agajai,” for example, is a Kazakh word for which a close translation “would probably be kin, my kinsmen, my kins-people, but when you say that in English it just sounds so...mechanical to me whereas when you say it in Kazakh it’s like really very, very close, it’s just got a very sort of emotional connotation to it.” That is why she decided to use the Kazakh word in that poem, and sing some verses from a Kazakh song before reciting it in public performances.

The multilingual atmosphere that inspired her to reach across the continent for those words, however, is in Ireland: it is the presence of Irish as well as the particularity of Hiberno-English. Being in the presence of a society for whom English is only one of the languages, and where English is influenced by ancestral contacts with another language, can make a newcomer feel more welcome on a linguistic level:

This is something I heard used, [...] because of the Gaelic history but a lot of things would be said that were almost sort of translated from the Irish into the English or ways of saying things and I really like that, I really like that, because I would maybe do that myself where I would translate, sort of. I always try to do that, to translate Turkish idioms or expressions into English so I like that aspect of it, certain ways of saying things or sort of translated from the Gaelic or the Irish into the English. (OK)

In exploring the new environments, the migrant artists and practitioners are always finding new connections and sharing them with the new audience. These connections are often surprising and unexpected, and they contribute to opening up the spaces of Irish culture.

### **10.3 Against labels: never 'just' migrant artists**

It is important to state that the artists and authors do not wish to be conflated with their cultural or national background, nor with the idea of “migrant artist” itself. They do not hide their backgrounds, or refrain from using them as foundations for their work, but they strongly feel that the concerns and capacity of true art exceed national labels.

This idea was very aptly expressed by Makris, who often talked about the risk of poets being labelled by their national flags, “like Eurovision song entries”:

there's an issue that's perhaps part of the growth trajectory of a society: poets and writers who are perceived as 'other' in terms of national identity tend to be primarily understood or labelled as such. Quite apart from the fact that identities are to be determined by the individuals concerned, and not imposed by others, a mature society would not seek to segregate people based on particular elements of their identity. (CM)

Jijo, who is an advocate of the universality of film as a medium, made a very interesting distinction:

My ideal audience is film lovers like me around the world who can enjoy a film for its style (form). This is every art house/ experimental film directors wish. Only when a viewer appreciate the form will the director gets appreciated.

My choice of content (Indian ethnic minority lives in Ireland) is my passionate niche. Identity, belonging, cultural conflict, integration etc are all very interesting subjects to me. (JS)

On one hand, we have the author's background, or his/her "passionate niche": where the author comes from, and what he/she cares about. We also have an Irish society that they aim to redefine, to a certain extent. On the other hand, migrant artists will be a part of Irish society when they will be perceived as "artists" based in Ireland, and no longer as a foreign body. To this end, cultural production is one side of a larger call for agency and representation, where migrants claim a space not only *as* migrants, but as voices in their own right, beyond the experience of migration:

It's about representing. It's about agency, first of all, of how migrants are represented: so both migrant having agency over their representation, in terms of voting of course, but also in the way how the migrant body is represented in mainstream. But it's also about allowing spaces for migrants to be represented beyond their migrant identity, so not only stories about how they came to Ireland etc., but outside the issue of migration: just part of here or part of somewhere else, but without that migrant frame. It's about working towards that. It's about recognising that, you know, the soundscape of Ireland has been enriched once again. (KL)

## 11. Multilingualism as an asset?

It is clear from the recent Census, that a wide variety of languages is spoken in Ireland with up to 13% of the population using a foreign language on a daily basis. In our survey alone, over 40 languages are mentioned and up to 25% of respondents indicate that they speak as many as 5 languages. The issue of migration and language is often seen as a problem: how to bring migrants' language skills up to scratch; how to cope with incomprehension and misunderstanding. It is useful, however, not to always view multilingualism and migration as a problem, but rather to see it as an asset in society. A report on managing linguistic diversity in a changing Europe was published in 2007 with the title "A Rewarding Challenge".<sup>23</sup> The report argued that for all its difficulties, the challenge of multilingualism is one that can enrich the Union and prevent the resurgence of nationalisms:

A common sense of belonging based on linguistic and cultural diversity is a powerful antidote against the various types of fanaticism towards which all too often the assertion of identity has slipped in Europe and elsewhere, in previous years as today. (p. 5)

The authors of the report said that those entering Europe including immigrants, citizens of the new Member States, and young Europeans from all countries must be constantly encouraged to gain acquaintance with the common heritage and to make their own contribution. (pp. 6-7) They acknowledge that migration is simultaneously a possibility for enrichment and a source of tensions, and remark on the necessity to maximize the advantages while reducing the drawbacks. (p. 19). They view the repercussions of not valuing the mother tongue of migrants in stark terms:

[...] it is vital for the countries of Europe to understand how important it is for every immigrant or person originating from immigration, to maintain knowledge of their own language of origin. A young person who loses the language of his ancestors also loses the ability to communicate effortlessly with his parents and that is a factor of social dysfunctioning which can lead to violence. (p. 20)<sup>24</sup>

This report partially informed a 2008 EU Commission Communication, entitled "Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment" which reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to multilingualism and related policies.<sup>25</sup> It acknowledges the challenges of increased mobility (p. 4) and repeats the notion that the multilingual individual is an important resource in intercultural communication. The communication also acknowledges the need for outsiders and

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<sup>23</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/rewarding-challenge-report\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/rewarding-challenge-report_en.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> It is also claimed in the report that "Excessive assertion of identity often stems from a feeling of guilt in relation to one's culture of origin, a guilt which is sometimes expressed by exacerbated religion-based reactions. To describe it differently, the immigrant or a person whose origins lie in immigration and is able to speak his mother tongue and would be able to teach it to his children, knowing that his language and culture of origin are respected in the host society, would have less of a need to assuage his thirst for identity in another way." P. 20

<sup>25</sup> <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/ict/language-technologies/docs/multilingual-comm.pdf>

newcomers to receive specific training and also be provided with translated material and interpretation services. (p. 6)

As a member state of the EU, the question must be asked, does Irish society value multilingualism? Are migrants supported in their language needs? How does Irish society deal with hybrid identities and linguistic diversity? The words of migrants recorded in the previous pages testify that while living in Ireland has been a generally positive experience for most, there is still much work to be done to become a society which is accepting and supportive of multilingualism.

## 12. Recommendations

- View multilingualism as an asset to Irish society, and not a problem to be fixed.
  - The use of more than one language should always be encouraged and seen as an asset and not a hindrance.
- Create cultural spaces for the expression of multilingual experiences.
  - Due to the lack of cultural spaces for new voices in Irish society, we recommend that Irish cultural institutions and Irish cultural funders recognise the need for diversity. Furthermore, we believe that it would be valuable to support cultural ambassadors, artistic practitioners who work between languages and cultures, who represent Ireland from a different perspective and provide new expressive opportunities.
- Create greater opportunities for linguistic interchange in Irish society between native and non-native speakers.
  - Due to issues with accent and local linguistic variations, language learning in authentic settings with native and non-native speakers is an important step towards integration. Community language initiatives such as Fáilte Isteach should be encouraged and expanded.
- Provide English language classes for all levels and in all educational contexts.
  - Attention should be paid to how language provisions in Ireland are perceived by migrants and how services need to evolve. The amount of spending in this field should be reviewed annually.
- Examine the diversity of staff in the public service and incentivize job opportunities for immigrants in this area.
  - The sensitivity of public sector staff to cultural and linguistic difference should also be examined.
- Support language teaching both in schools and in the community, particularly in the area of the so-called 'heritage' languages.
  - It is important that the intergenerational links should not be lost and that children can access their heritage and culture. Learning English should not be at the expense of other languages.
- Publish a national Foreign Languages Strategy and establish a Languages Advisory Board.
  - Ireland does not currently have a national plan to give coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism. There is no overarching strategy for languages in Ireland.



- All future integration initiatives should take account of language as a central aspect of communicative systems and identity constructions.
- Interpreting services in Ireland need to be professionalized with training, testing and quality controls put in place.

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