FACTS ABOUT MIGRANT WORKERS IN IRELAND
Migration of people is part of today’s globalised economy. It has become a fact of life for millions of people across the globe.

In the same way that Irish people have emigrated, migrant workers from different countries have come to Ireland to live, work and raise their families. Migration will continue to be a feature of Irish life, now and into the future.

Throughout history, migration has been accompanied by fears and negative myths and misinformation about newcomers. Many people do not have access to clear, accurate information about migrant workers. When left unchallenged, misinformation leads to prejudice, racism, discrimination and inequality.

This leaflet is designed to provide information and answers to some common questions about migrant workers in Ireland.

**SOME FACTS ABOUT MIGRATION**

Anyone who lives or works in a country that is not their country of citizenship is considered a migrant. There are more than 200 million international migrants in the world today.

Ireland is in the top ten of countries whose nationals emigrate to work and has the second highest proportion of its population living in other countries of the EU.

International studies have shown that Ireland, along with the rest of Europe, will continue to need migrant workers in the coming years to support an increasingly dependent population.
According to the Central Statistics Office, 10% of the population in Ireland is made up of non-Irish nationals. The majority are UK nationals (2.7%), followed by other EU countries.

Over the last twenty years, migrant workers have been actively recruited to come to Ireland. They have been a key factor in Ireland’s economic growth.

The majority of migrant workers are of working age and contribute more to the economy in taxes and PRSI than they receive in public services or social welfare.

It has been estimated that migrants contribute €3.7 billion to the economy annually through taxes and PRSI, work permit fees, immigration registration fees, higher education fees and personal consumption.

Migrant workers and their families contribute to society and their local communities in many ways, including sports clubs, churches, schools, arts organisations and community associations.
Migrants are not responsible for the current economic downturn in Ireland or anywhere else. On the contrary, migrant workers, as other workers, have helped to build Ireland’s economy and they will continue to be important to economic growth and stability into the future.

Sectors hardest hit in the recession including construction, hospitality, retail, manufacturing, services and other industries employ the highest percentages of migrant workers. As a result, migrant workers are suffering higher rates of unemployment.

There has been a substantial decrease in the number of migrant workers coming to Ireland. The number of Personal Public Service (PPS) Numbers issued to non-Irish nationals went down by nearly 50% between 2008 and 2009, and over the past two years the number of employment permits issued has dropped by 66%.

While some migrant workers and their families may return to their home countries, most are remaining in Ireland. Past experience shows that measures encouraging migrants to return to their home countries have limited impact and are discriminatory.

Finding alternative employment can also be a challenge for migrant workers. A 2009 study by the ESRI and Equality Authority found that migrant workers with similar skills and experience were less likely to be called for interview by employers, based on the name given on the CV; i.e. foreign-sounding names were significantly less likely to secure interviews than Irish-sounding names.
Migrant workers and permission to work

Just as Irish nationals are free to work in any EU country, EU nationals can work in Ireland without the need for an employment permit. Citizens of Romania and Bulgaria require an employment permit for their first year working in Ireland.

Migrant workers from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) require an employment permit to work in Ireland. According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, employment permit holders constitute 1.2% of the total labour force.

There are two main types of employment permits: the ‘Green Card’, for higher-paid jobs and where skills shortages are identified, and the ‘Work Permit’ for a limited number of occupations, usually lower-paid but essential work.

Work permit applications are subject to a Labour Market Needs Test. An applicant has to prove no other qualified Irish or EEA-national is available for the position. It requires that a job is publicly advertised for at least eight weeks.

Employment permit holders are entitled to apply for long term residency after five years. Once granted, this entitles an individual to live and work without the need for another employment permit.

International students are entitled to work up to 20 hours per week to support themselves while in Ireland. Students contribute an estimated €900 million annually to the economy.
Migrant workers have no automatic entitlements to social welfare on arrival in Ireland.

Social welfare payments are controlled by strict guidelines and procedures. Migrant workers are asked to satisfy additional checks and conditions to qualify for certain payments, such as Child Benefit. They are required to confirm their entitlement every three months. Many wait more than two years before Child Benefit payments are processed.

Migrant workers face difficulties in accessing Social Assistance and Child Benefit payments due to the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC). The HRC is a test to judge if a person has an established connection to Ireland. It is based on factors such as length of residency, employment record and family connections.

When an EEA national working in Ireland becomes unemployed they are entitled to a level of social protection, just as Irish people working in other parts of the EU can access protections in those countries.

Non-EEA workers can only avail of benefits for as long as they are legally resident in Ireland even if they have made PRSI contributions. Claiming social welfare negatively affects applications for citizenship. For this reason, many do not claim welfare even when they need it.

Fraud is a problem for any social welfare system. There is no evidence that fraud is any greater among migrant workers compared to Irish nationals.
UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT WORKERS

Just as there are undocumented Irish in the United States, there are people who have become undocumented in Ireland. It is estimated that there are 30,000 undocumented migrants in Ireland.

People become undocumented when they do not have permission to reside in the country. This can happen for a number of different reasons, including unexpected redundancy, exploitation, non-renewal of an employment permit, overstaying a visa or failures in State administrative procedures.

Undocumented migrants and their families live in situations of economic and social vulnerability. They cannot travel home and are cut off from extended families. They are more at risk of exploitation. Many work, pay taxes and PRSI but are prevented from accessing social services and benefits.

Undocumented migrants have a number of rights which are set out in international legal instruments that have been ratified by Ireland, including: the European Convention on Human Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In practice, accessing these rights is extremely difficult.

It is has been recognised internationally that regularisation programmes are a necessary part of migration policy. In Ireland, two regularisation schemes have been implemented for undocumented migrants: a scheme to regularise the parents of Irish-born children (2005), and a scheme to regularise employment permit holders who became undocumented (October 2009).
The Migrant Rights Centre Ireland is a national organisation working to promote justice, empowerment and equality for migrant workers and their families.

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