

How People Live their Lives in an Intercultural Society

EUROPEAN CULTURAL FOUNDATION
IRISH COMMITTEE



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Cover image: Marc O'Sullivan
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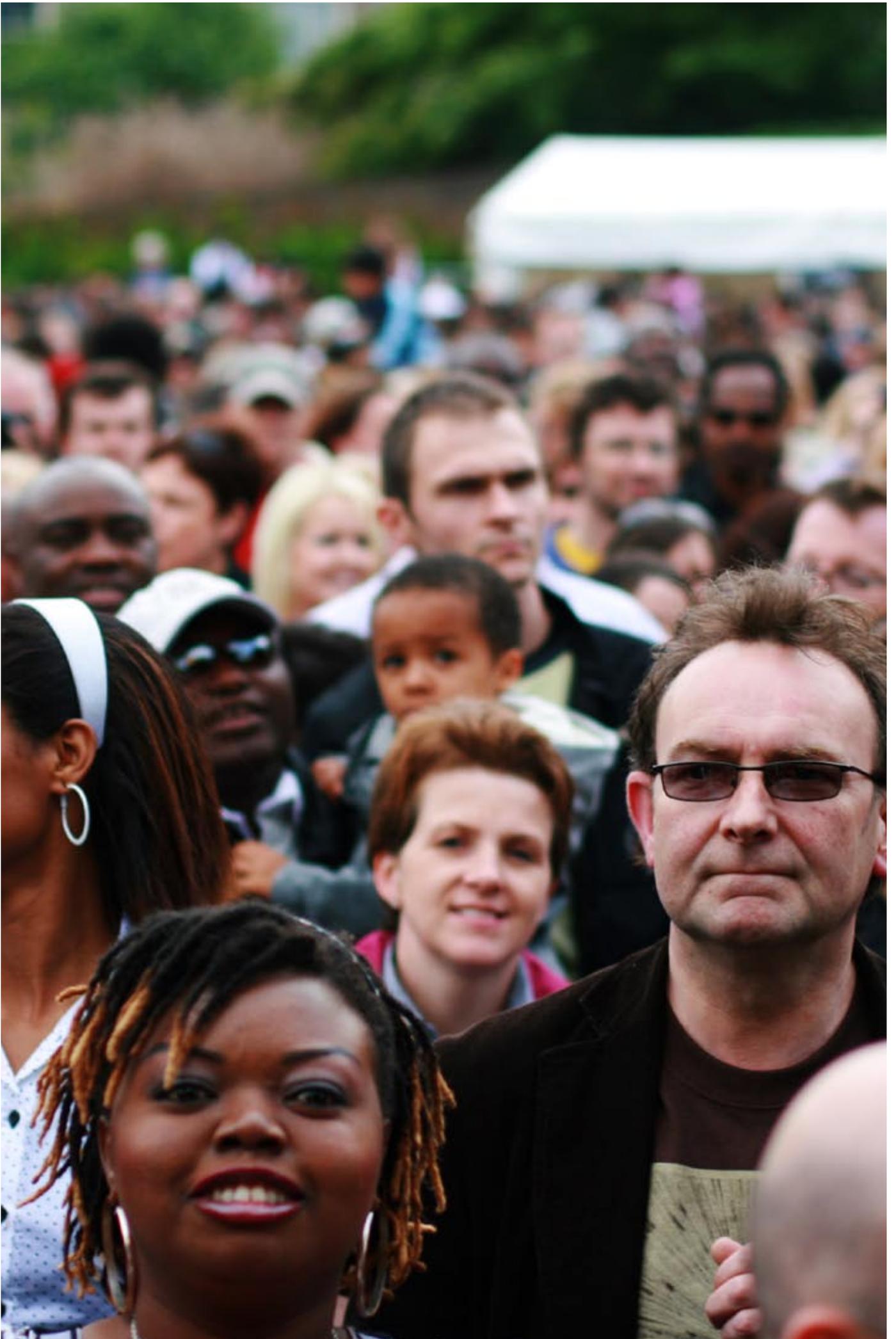


Photo: Nathalie Marquez Courtney

Foreword

Culture is the total pattern of human behaviour. It is the way in which we live. Since we share our world with others, the climate of our lives constantly changes as we influence them and they affect us.

For many years, the Irish Committee of the European Cultural Foundation has been involved in exploring the *cultural* impact of migration on the Irish in Britain and on the more recent arrivals from the rest of the world into Ireland. Others have reported on the social, medical and economic realities as reflected in the relevant statistics. The approaches do not clash.

The report which follows is the result of conversations between people living in Ireland who have different roots. It becomes apparent that many aspects of an individual's life – such as being a parent or playing a sport or being a member of a religion – have special effects on one's attitudes to the cultural environment.

Over the course of the conversations, language emerged as a factor both for good and ill in the experience of many. We tend to forget how much is conveyed by what – to us – are familiar words and gestures, and often ignore the interpretation required by those to whom they are not familiar. Not only can misinterpretation occur when everyone is speaking the same language, but an eye contact can change an amicable gesture into an implied rebuff. Yet most people are not only coping well but are constantly learning and making virtually instant adjustments as part of their social exchanges.

There have been very many reports, so what can this one offer? It is striking that the recommendations towards improving the way people live in an intercultural society would, of themselves, significantly improve the way in which society operates in Ireland. Greater communication and better coordination of basic official information about state schemes and requirements would reduce waste and improve the lives of everyone involved. The availability of space and an encouragement to cooperate with different groups would facilitate more effective local involvement and counteract some of the effects of over-centralisation.

The scope and flow of immigration into Ireland has been different from that of other members of the European Union, as have been its roots. The absence of overseas dominions in the past has been favourable to attitudes towards Irish people and also helped the relations of the Irish to newcomers to their country. Immigration was a new experience and happily coincided with the virtual ending of enforced emigration.

While Ireland has largely been spared the anti-immigration rhetoric that has sullied politics in many countries, this cannot be taken for granted. The changing economic situation is a threat to smooth integration. Growing unemployment, emigration and pressure on public spending may combine to make immigrants scapegoats for the pain imposed as a result.

Ireland is now a culturally diverse country. This is not going to change, regardless of our economic situation. Our challenge is to facilitate and promote interculturalism. Cultural differences are a potential source of richness, respect and development. It is important that they are understood and nourished for our welfare and that of our children.

MIRIAM HEDERMAN O'BRIEN

Chairperson of the Project Steering Group

European Cultural Foundation, Irish Committee



Photo: Conor Ó Mearáin

1.0 Introduction

The European Cultural Foundation (ECF) is an independent, Europe-wide, non-profit-making, cultural foundation. Established in 1954 and based in The Netherlands, it is dedicated to promoting cultural understanding and activity in Europe, and the cultural dimension of European integration. The Irish Committee of the ECF was established in 1984 to ensure Irish participation in the Foundation's work. It aims to promote:

- Cultural, social, scientific and educational activities of a multinational nature and a European character.
- Research into cultural developments that have implications for Ireland and other European countries.
- Direct contact between Ireland and other members of the ECF network.
- Mutual understanding between Ireland and other European countries, and an appreciation of mutual problems and needs.

The Irish Committee of the ECF is a company limited by guarantee, with charitable status. Its Patron is President Mary McAleese.

In recent years, one of the concerns of the Irish Committee of the ECF has been the social and cultural consequences of increased migration and with the integration of newcomers from diverse cultural backgrounds into Irish society. The first study of migration sponsored by the ECF was by Nessa Winston, 'Between Two Places: A Case Study of Irish-Born People Living in England' (2000). Subsequent ECF projects in this area have focused on migration into Ireland and resulted in the publications, 'Customs Clearance' (2001), 'Mosaic or Melting Pot?—Living with Cultural Diversity' (2003) and 'The New Irish Communities: A project to promote effective professional education for pluralism and intercultural development' (2006).

As immigration grew rapidly, especially after 2004, an increasing number of agencies began to study and report on the implications of immigration for specific areas, such as education, the health services, housing and employment. Members of the Irish Committee came to feel that there was a complementary need to consider ways that intercultural issues impinge on people's day-to-day experiences and, in particular, to encourage frank but constructive discussion of obstacles to integration and how these might be overcome.

The designation of 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue gave added impetus to this idea, as did the appointment of a Minister for Integration. In 2008, the Irish Committee of the ECF was approached by the then Minister for Integration, Conor Lenihan TD, to undertake a series of strategic conversations exploring the cultural dimensions of migration and integration. The Office of the Minister for Integration provided funding for this project, which was also supported by a grant from Atlantic Philanthropies. Additional finance was provided by the European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam.

Unlike previous consultations and research work undertaken in the area of interculturalism, these strategic conversations focused uniquely on people's experiences: put simply, the purpose of the conversations was to explore how communities live their lives in the context of a more multicultural society. Because the ECF has neither a sectoral focus or policy agenda, it was uniquely placed to host these conversations, as it was perceived by the project participants as being neutral and non-judgemental.

The Irish Committee of the ECF established a Steering Group to oversee the execution of this project. Subsequently, a consultancy – DHR Communications – was contracted to organise and facilitate the conversations, with Peter Cassells, a member of the Steering Group, taking a lead role in bridging the work of the consultancy and the Steering Group.

Initially, it was envisaged that the information arising from the strategic conversations would feed into a new Taskforce on Integration, which was being planned by the Minister for Integration. The establishment of the Taskforce did not proceed at that time. However, the current Minister for Equality and Integration, Mary White TD, is now in the process of establishing a Ministerial Council on Integration, which will advise her directly on issues relating to migrants.

Information arising from this ECF project will be available to the new Ministerial Council and to all other relevant bodies and other organisations with an interest / remit in the area of integration.

1.1 REPORT STRUCTURE

This report describes, firstly, the context in which the strategic conversations were held. The project was designed and, indeed, largely carried out in the context of rapidly rising immigration levels in Ireland.

The impact of such high immigration levels on the ethnic composition of the population is described in this report, as well as the impact on employment. The effects of the abrupt fall / cessation in immigration levels with the advent of the current recession are also explored.

The middle section of the report describes the key elements in the design of the strategic conversations, including the selection of participants.

In its final sections, this report summarises the themes that emerged from the local and national conversations and looks at how we might – as a nation – respond to these themes.



Photo: William Murphy

2.0 Context of Conversations – How Ireland Has Changed

A number of recent reports from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) show that migration has had a significant effect on Irish society¹. Our transition from a country with a history of emigration to one of rapid immigration marks an important watershed in our long-term economic and social development.

2.1 IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON IRELAND

Inward migration exceeded outward migration in Ireland in every year from 1998 to 2008, contributing to a significant increase in the size of the population. The level of net migration increased from 17,400 in 1998 to a high of 71,800 in 2006, falling slightly in 2007. There were two main reasons for the substantial increases in net inward migration. Firstly, Ireland's economy was growing rapidly, with a resultant high demand for labour. Secondly, EU enlargement – along with less restrictive legislation since 2004 – enabled EU nationals, particularly from the newer member states, to migrate to Ireland.

These migration patterns led to greater population and cultural diversity in Ireland. In the 2002 Census, less than seven per cent of the population had been born outside Ireland or were non-Irish nationals. In the 2006 Census, 11 per cent of the population were non-Irish nationals, coming from 118 different countries. Many of these came to Ireland for work, unaccompanied by dependants.

¹ This section draws on the work on migration in a number of NESC reports:

- 'Next Steps in Addressing Ireland's Five-Part Crisis', Report No. 120, October 2009.
- 'Well-Being Matters: A Social Report for Ireland', Report No. 119, October 2009.

- 'The Irish Economy in the Early 21st Century', Report No. 117, June 2009.
- 'Managing Migration in Ireland', Report No. 116, September 2006.

The proportion of immigrants in the labour force was, therefore, higher than in other sections of society: by summer 2007, 16 per cent of all jobs were held by nationals of other countries, half of whom were from the new EU member states.

The largest group of non-Irish workers were UK nationals (112,000). Typically, these had been resident in Ireland for longer than other groups, although the majority came to live here in the 1990s. They were scattered all over the country, with just over half living in rural areas. Their characteristics – in terms of age and marital status – were similar to those of the Irish population.

The next biggest group, according to the 2006 Census, was Central and Eastern Europeans. Polish nationals comprised the majority of this group (63,000), followed by Lithuanians (25,000) and Latvians (13,000). Most of these arrived in Ireland after 2004, following their native countries' accession to membership of the EU. Like the UK nationals, they were scattered throughout the country, with a slight concentration of Lithuanians in the north-east of the country and Latvians in north Dublin. They tended to be relatively young (in their 20s and 30s) and single. Of those that were married, many of them lived separately from their spouses, who were still in Eastern Europe. At the time of the Census, over 80 per cent of Eastern Europeans in Ireland were working: the men typically in construction and manufacturing, and the women in shops, hotels and restaurants. Ninety per cent were living in rented accommodation.

There were 16,000 Nigerians in Ireland in 2006, mainly in cities and in the towns of the north-east. Over half were married, and many had children – their age profile was adults in their 30s and 40s, together with children under 15. Eighty per cent were living in rented accommodation. Almost one-third of Nigerians in Ireland were unemployed in 2006, with 16 per cent in education and one-tenth looking after the home and family. Some were not working because they were waiting for their asylum applications to be processed. Of the 38 per cent at work, the main areas covered were health and social work, business services and wholesale / retail.

Other nationalities resident in Ireland in 2006 included Americans, USA (12,500) and Chinese (11,000). The American population was dispersed throughout the country, with only 50 per cent in employment. Many were married with children, and nearly two-thirds lived in owner-occupied houses. Ten per cent were retired. Two-thirds of the Chinese population were living in Dublin, predominantly in rented accommodation. The majority were single people in their 20s, who were studying or working, mainly in restaurants and hotels.

The number of Germans in Ireland in 2006 was 10,000, living for the most part in Dublin or on the western seaboard. They had an average age of 36, and seven out of 10 were in work, mainly as managers and professionals in business services and manufacturing. Another significant grouping was Filipinos (9,500). More than 60 per cent of these were employed in health and social services in 2006, and 59 per cent were female. The number of children (aged 0-16) was also significant, at 16 per cent. Sixty per cent of Filipinos were living in the Dublin area.

Although new migrants were disproportionately employed in relatively low-wage occupations in service sectors – such as hotels, restaurants, retail and unskilled construction – National Employment Survey figures showed that, within sectors, there was relatively little difference between the earnings of Irish and foreign workers. Average hourly earnings of foreign nationals were similar to those of their Irish counterparts in the health sectors and in wholesale / retail, and were 91 per cent in hotels and restaurants. Migrants' hourly earnings were most behind their Irish counterparts in manufacturing, which may have reflected differences in skills, rather than any discrimination. In assessing the impact of immigration, the NESI noted that – although there probably had been some moderation of wage growth in certain areas – there had been no 'race to the bottom'. This may have contributed to the general political acceptability of rapid immigration.

2.2 ECONOMIC RECESSION

In the past two years, the economic recession has had a disproportionate impact on Ireland's non-national population. People from the EU accession states have been particularly affected: in the 12 months to June 2009, their employment fell by 25 per cent, compared to a six per cent fall for Irish nationals, and their unemployment levels rose by 140 per cent, compared to a rise of 113 per cent for Irish nationals.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that outward migration from Ireland once again exceeds in-migration. The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has estimated that net outward migration was 50,000 in 2009, and will be 40,000 in 2010, partly as a result of a sharp increase in unemployment among non-Irish nationals.

However, even if current trends persist, many recent immigrants will remain in Ireland and others will continue to arrive. Thus, there will continue to be a need to integrate people – with diverse cultures, skills and needs – into Irish society. There is, indeed, a danger that competition for jobs will worsen relations between immigrants and the native Irish population, making it ever more pertinent to find ways of fostering smooth social integration.



Photo: Conor Ó Mearáin

3.0 The Approach Taken to the Strategic Conversations

The strategic conversations organised under this project focused solely on people's experiences. Put simply, they explored how people and communities live their lives in the society in which they find themselves. They addressed questions of cultural identity; values; attitudes, and methods of expression that could affect individual lives. Those who participated were invited to identify factors that facilitated and constrained relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds and – where they identified problems – to suggest ways in which these might be alleviated, not only in their own communities but on a broader scale.

3.1 STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS AT LOCAL LEVEL

This project was initiated in the second quarter of 2008 and, over the course of four months, six conversations were held throughout the country: in Limerick City, Cork City, Sligo, Dundalk, Tallaght and Dublin City Centre.

Participation in the conversations was by invitation only, and every effort was made to represent a balanced cross-section of Irish people and people from new communities (reflective of Polish, other Eastern European, Chinese, African, South American and other nationalities). A special effort was made to identify and include participants who were innovating in different ways and thinking creatively about immigration and integration. Participants were drawn from society (local organisations), business, public agencies and new communities.

In total, 79 people took part in the conversations organised at local level. The profile of participants can be summarised as follows²:

- Community organisation / NGO representatives: 40
- Representatives of new / non-Irish communities: 38
- Local parents: 30

² Please note that participants were categorised under all applicable categories. Hence, the total in the summary profile is greater than the total number of participants in the strategic conversations at local level.

- Representatives of local authorities (elected representatives or employees): 12
- Education sector³: 11
- Religious⁴: 8
- Businesspeople: 7
- Representatives of sports organisations: 5
- Health services providers / practitioners: 4
- Members of An Garda Síochána: 3
- Media representatives: 3
- Trade union representatives: 2

Twenty-five nationalities were represented at the local conversations. The highest number of attendees came from Ireland, making up over half of total participants (41). The second largest nationality represented was Nigerian, with nine participants overall in the various conversations. There were also three Polish participants; two Cameroonians; two Ivoirians; two Romanians and two Welsh. One participant from each of the following countries took part:

- | | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------|------------|
| ● Afghanistan | ● India | ● Russia | ● Tanzania |
| ● Algeria | ● Latvia | ● Slovakia | ● USA |
| ● China | ● Malaysia | ● South Africa | ● Zimbabwe |
| ● The Gambia | ● Mauritius | ● Spain | |
| ● Ghana | ● The Philippines | ● Sudan | |

While some participants were leaders in their own area, or representatives of a particular sector, they were invited as individuals to speak about their own experiences. To this end, at the outset of each conversation, everyone was 'equal' in terms of their roles. The conversation format was designed to encourage all participants to share their personal opinions and experiences – regardless of their work or role in the community – without anxiety that this might lead to recrimination or have other negative consequences.

Since the elements that shape any change involve (1) the personal, (2) the interpersonal, and (3) the institutional, the conversations covered all three of these levels.

3.2 STRATEGIC CONVERSATIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL AND PROJECT EVALUATION

To draw more fully on the issues that emerged from the local conversations, a national conversation was hosted by the Irish Committee of the ECF in July 2009.

The attendance at this national conversation was composed of almost 20 leaders and specialists from civic society organisations, such as business organisations, sports, health and religious groups, including:

- | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| ● British Council (Ireland) | ● Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) | ● National Parents' Council |
| ● Canal Communities Partnership | ● Health Service Executive | ● Polish Chaplaincy |
| ● Dublin City Council | ● Irish Business Employers' Confederation | ● Society of St. Vincent de Paul |
| ● Equality Authority | ● Immigrant Council | ● Teaching Council |
| ● Football Association of Ireland (FAI) | ● LIR Training | |
| ● Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC) | | |

Participants were presented with an overview of the issues that had emerged from the six local conversations and the conversation focused on unpicking these issues, and looking at which institutions and organisations could provide responses to the gaps identified.

Also in 2009, an evaluation of the work of the project was undertaken by Dr. Alice Feldman from University College Dublin (UCD)⁵. This evaluation sought to review the process and identify how best the project – given its limited resources – could communicate to a broader audience the issues arising from the conversations and encourage prompt actions to address any gaps.

Finally, a further – and more focused – national conversation was held in February 2010 to review the changing context brought about by the economic downturn and to reflect on changes that had taken place since the project commenced in 2008. This was attended by a small number of key stakeholders.

3 Including all levels of education provision and representatives of Vocational Education Committees (VECs).

4 Including people holding a particular position within their religion (e.g. priest / pastor) and people who expressed strong religious views during the conversations.

5 A copy of the evaluation report is available, on request, from DHR Communications, 101 James's Street, The Digital Hub, Dublin 8. Tel: 01-4885808, Email: info@dhr.ie.



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4.0 Themes Emerging from the Strategic Conversations

This section outlines the themes that emerged at the six strategic conversations held at local level and that were further explored during the national conversations.

A significant number of issues arose from each of the conversations; the emphasis placed on each issue differed depending on the local environment. In Cork and Sligo, for example, the existence of direct provision centres nearby had a strong impact on the focus of the conversations. In Dundalk, the issues discussed were influenced by the high numbers of migrant agricultural workers from Eastern European countries living in the North-East region.

For the purposes of this report, the main focus is on aspects of the conversations that addressed cultural identity and difference. Throughout each of the six local conversations, issues relating to cultural identity and difference emerged, sometimes leading to intense debate. The structure of the conversations enabled frankness in discussions about norms and values and, indeed, as the conversations developed, some participants questioned their own failings in promoting integration within their own communities.

The following issues were the most commonly discussed across the strategic conversations:

4.1 CULTURAL IDENTITY

Issues of cultural identity arose in each conversation. The context in which they arose varied according to the profile of the participants and the issues that emerged in the deliberations. However, in the main, a recurring issue related to the 'threat' to cultural identity posed by migration and integration.

Some non-Irish participants in the strategic conversations expressed concern that the education system and the norms of social behaviour in Ireland did not provide any space for their communities to express their cultural identity and, in some cases, did not facilitate the full practice of their religion. For instance, some participants cited an instance in a direct provision centre, in which they were residing, of the conversion of their mosque into a kitchen, leaving the Muslim residents with nowhere to pray.

Many participants cited the advent of Irish Aid's annual programme of activities to mark Africa Day⁶ as a good model to promote and celebrate non-Irish culture, but also pointed out that such opportunities are limited and that there are no funding lines or supports to help our new communities to maintain and celebrate their cultural identities.

In several conversations, participants spoke of the need to strike a balance between maintaining traditions and celebrating identity, while adapting to the traditions and cultural norms that prevail in Irish society.

It was also stressed that support – mainly financial – for representative groups of new communities (for example, societies and cultural groups) could enable them to contribute more fully to the creation of a better society and economy.

4.2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND INTEGRATION

The issue of cultural differences arose – in several shapes and forms – in each of the strategic conversations.

In the introductory sessions of the conversations – where pairs of participants discussed their personal experiences of interculturalism – it emerged that many of the Irish people present had some personal experience of emigration themselves. Indeed, many of their first experiences of interculturalism occurred outside Ireland. Thus, the experience of arriving into a new community and adapting to new norms and ways of life was an experience that was understood by Irish and non-Irish participants alike.

Both new communities and the Irish community identified their own roles and responsibilities concerning integration. Better understanding of each other's backgrounds, norms and traditions was regularly cited as a requirement, particularly on the part of new communities.

The Sligo, Cork and Dublin City Centre conversations, in particular, focused on issues relating to racism and xenophobia. In all of these conversations, participants from new communities recounted instances of abuse and racism. In one case, the conversation heard that racism had manifested itself in an unprovoked physical attack on a participant from an African country. At the Tallaght conversation, there was recognition that migrants from Central Europe were received better than their counterparts from African communities, for instance.

Misunderstanding and suspicion of new communities arose in most conversations, with some participants citing urban myths and prejudices among certain sectors of society (for example, among older people).

The lack of understanding of Irish norms and behaviour on the part of new communities when they arrive in Ireland was also mentioned by participants from both new communities and from Ireland. Not understanding that it was essential to queue or wait in turn for services, for example, was cited during a number of conversations as a problem for immigrants, particularly with newcomers from Nigeria. Meanwhile, in two of the conversations, members of new communities expressed their concern that Irish children were poorly disciplined and their amazement at the levels of ill-behaviour among teenagers.

In one particular conversation, community leaders from Ireland observed that – although their daily work included the promotion of integration – they made little effort to do this in their communities of residence or in their private lives.

All of the conversations discussed ways to promote greater understanding of cultural differences and responsibilities in this regard. According to participants in the conversations, key ways in which understanding and better relations could be achieved include:

- The creation of spaces within a community setting where people can come together to learn about each other. The structure and parameters of these 'spaces' remains unclear, as each strategic conversation had a different concept of what could be delivered. Some project participants spoke about structured events in the community, where there was a deliberate coming-together of different communities; others spoke about a place where people could come and go informally, but which was synonymous with interculturalism; others suggested more structured relationship-building between asylum-seekers and volunteers from the host community. Regardless of its format, the notion of creating a space for intercultural dialogue was one of the most consistent issues arising in all of the conversations.
- The continuation of the strategic conversations was cited by most groups as a good model for teasing out emerging issues around interculturalism in the community. While many of the people who participated in the strategic conversations knew or had interacted with each other through their work / volunteering, the conversations offered a first opportunity to look at how interculturalism is affecting communities and what models could be used to address any associated problems.
- Awareness about new communities is needed among service-providers and within other community support infrastructures, including the Gardaí.
- Opportunities and events such as Africa Day and the Chinese New Year celebrations should be grown to promote understanding and awareness of different cultures.
- Sport can be used as a means of developing intercultural dialogue and good relations in communities.

4.3 EDUCATION SERVICES

The importance of education in raising awareness of new cultures and promoting integration was one of the main recurring themes. This covered education in the formal sense, and informal education in the community.

Where there was a large number of parents participating in a strategic conversation, the conversations tended to be dominated by issues relating to how the school system was effective / ineffective in promoting integration. The views of teachers and those involved in education support and delivery also shaped the conversations on this topic. Failure to consider aspects of different cultures within the education system was also raised as a concern.

Project participants generally felt that, when a teacher / school principal made integration a priority, there was considerable success in promoting cultural understanding in the school setting. However, there was also a general consensus that top-down national and local efforts to promote integration in schools are insufficient or even ineffectual.

Participants saw schools – and, indeed, pre-schools – as important places not only to promote integration amongst children, but also as places with the potential to bring parents together. However, in the majority of conversations, participants felt that members of new communities had a limited choice about which school they could send their children to because of where they lived, lack of priority on school waiting-lists and because of the predominance of faith-based schools in Ireland. To this end, there was a concern about segregation in the school system, and a fear that some schools could become immigrant-only. This was seen as a serious threat to integration.

Language support for children and adults was also identified as a critical area that needs to be addressed if successful integration is to be achieved.

The issue of third-level education also arose in the context of recognition of qualifications from abroad. Many people from new communities felt that, while they had significant qualifications, these were not recognised in Ireland and, consequently, they were unable to find employment that matched their skills / educational levels.

Discussions of a failure by migrants to obtain recognition of their educational qualifications led several participants to express concern that low-skills employment was all that was open to new migrants and that – in a tightening labour market – these jobs were particularly vulnerable. This – it was felt – promoted marginalisation of new communities.

A whole range of recommendations and ideas emerged in relation to education. Key among these were the following:

- Ensuring language support for children in the formal education system, as well as homework clubs to support children from new communities in getting to grips with language and a new curriculum.
- Access to free language classes for adults was suggested as a way of overcoming common misunderstandings and helping people from new communities to access services and employment.
- Modifying the school curriculum to include greater education about other countries and cultures; including people from new communities in school materials (for example, an African child could be included as a character in a school reading book), and providing national guidance and support to schools to help promote integration, rather than just leaving it to the possible goodwill / interest of particular teachers.
- Some recognition of qualifications obtained in other countries would assist new communities in securing employment.

4.4 DELIVERY OF PUBLIC SERVICES

The way in which public services are delivered was considered by most participants in the strategic conversations to be critical in determining how successful integration might be.

Lack of consultation within certain areas about housing new communities and, in particular, about the delivery of direct provision centres was seen as a major cause of segregation, misunderstanding and / or discontent on the part of both new communities and long-term residents (for example, in Sligo, where the majority of the town's new communities are housed in one location).

Furthermore, in more disadvantaged communities – such as certain parts of Tallaght and Cork – it was felt that immigrants were excessively concentrated geographically, thereby creating the conditions for ghettoisation and often suspicion and even hostility from among the existing Irish community.

Many participants had found that bureaucracy and a lack of information had acted as barriers to accessing their rights and entitlements.

There was some discussion of health and cultural practice (for example, circumcision of small boys) and of data collection and the question of ethnic identity. It was noted that the HSE has piloted data collection on ethnic backgrounds with encouraging results. The success is due to the training of staff and an understanding from the service-users on why the data needs to be collected. It was felt that the challenge now is how we can apply the learnings from HSE pilot projects across health and other public services and how we can implement systems to allow for data collection.

During the strategic conversations, concern was also expressed as to how, given the different systems and criteria for permits to work and reside in Ireland, some non-national families can settle down in Ireland as a family unit. In some instances, the children of immigrants have grown up being educated in Irish schools and are now seeking work. However, they are not entitled to long-term residency and, when their dependant work permit expires, they are no longer entitled to stay, although their parents have the legal right to stay and work.

Some of the suggested improvements that could be built into our public services to help achieve greater integration in communities were:

- Better planning in the delivery of community infrastructures (schools, health facilities, etc.); housing, and services so that ghettoisation does not become a feature of Irish society.
- Greater education / awareness and language supports in frontline services, particularly those that are most likely to interact with new communities.
- 'One-stop-shop' information resources for new communities that want to access information on entitlements, rights, employment and services.
- Leadership by national government in promoting the rights of all citizens and ensuring that policies and approaches to issues – such as education and the labour market – do not lead to segregation of new communities.

There was general agreement that the key to integration is to create services that are inclusive of non-Irish nationals rather than having separate service-providers and different access routes for migrants. Public services need to be reformed and made more tailored for all individuals, it was felt.

4.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The issue of sport arose in most conversations, as many of the participants had personal positive experiences of sport and its impact on integration, and had children who benefited positively. Some had taken up Gaelic football with local clubs as a means of integrating better with the local community. Participants reported that getting foreign players from local soccer clubs to visit schools to speak of their own experiences, including negative experiences of racism, had most impact on their children.

Theatre and the arts, as well as women's groups, were also seen as good opportunities for integration. Events and festivals were also acknowledged as important ways of introducing people to different cultures too.

Participants in all of the strategic conversations expressed a wish for structured opportunities ('safe spaces') in their local communities, where people – both Irish and members of new communities – could learn from and about each other and further develop relations.



Photo: Nathalie Marquez Courtney

5.0 Overarching Recommendations

The local strategic conversations produced a raft of considerations that could be acted upon to remove barriers to integration and create the best conditions for an intercultural society. Most of the issues that arose – such as the role of formal education and the importance of national leadership in promoting interculturalism – were repeated in each conversation, irrespective of where and when the conversations took place.

The overarching issue that arose from the project was the level of consensus amongst participants in the project on the value of conversations in promoting interculturalism within communities was remarkably high. However, it also emerged that most communities lack a structure or place in which people could come together to discuss emerging issues that arise as we become more culturally diverse. The focus on this particular issue was borne out in the project evaluation, undertaken by Dr. Alice Feldman of University College Dublin in 2009.

To further unpick the issues that emerged from the local conversations and the project evaluation, two national strategic conversations took place in 2009 and 2010. These looked at how best the issues raised through the project could be addressed in both a national and local context. Participants in the national conversations comprised leaders and specialists from civic society organisations, ranging from business to sport, health and religious groups. Ultimately, their purpose was to develop key recommendations that could help transport the issues emerging from the local strategic conversations into actions for politicians, policymakers, community leaders and individuals.

One of the national conversations had the specific brief of examining how the recession is impacting on interculturalism, and how policies need to be modified to ensure that smooth integration continues to take place in Ireland.

This section of the report looks at key priorities and actions that were identified through the national conversations, which could be considered by actors right across society, including at a national and community level. Broadly speaking, three sets of actions have emerged:

1. Actions that require leadership to promote interculturalism.
2. Policy and system changes to reduce barriers to integration
3. Actions that help continue the promotion of interculturalism during this time of economic recession.

5.1 LEADERSHIP ON INTERCULTURALISM

At a general level, the national conversations noted Ireland's relative success in promoting integration during its early years as a country of migration. However, it was also noted that there was no guarantee that migrants would – in the long-term – sufficiently integrate into Irish society or the economy. Experience elsewhere shows that while many countries, like Ireland, have used migrant workers to meet labour market shortages, few have achieved the long-term integration of migrants into the economic, social, cultural and political life of their nation. There was a sense that Ireland had reached a tipping-point, and leadership and political will were now required to prevent Ireland from having a negative intercultural experience.

Participants in the national conversations felt that interculturalism had received a lot of lip-service in the past decade, but – with Ireland's sharp downturn and the return of immigrants to their country of origin – the issue rarely secures any attention at a political level or in the media now. Yet, in the face of this, there is a generation of people who have come to make Ireland their home.

The following recommendations to enhance leadership on interculturalism emerged during the national conversations:

CHAMPIONING INTERCULTURALISM

A voice – not necessarily drawn from the political sphere, but who would be listened to politically – needs to emerge so that the issue of interculturalism does not fall off the policy / political agenda. Such a champion would need to commit to progressing interculturalism in the long-term. While it was felt that there are a number of outstanding people who contribute to elements of discourse on interculturalism, participants felt no strong voice has emerged that adequately promotes the entire concept of interculturalism.

Even with a champion, political leadership on interculturalism is imperative, particularly as recession can create conditions where resentment and tensions flourish. Political interest and leadership on interculturalism – according to the conversations – has waned and there are few positive actions being taken at a national policy level to promote interculturalism, particularly since the onset of the economic downturn. Political leadership on interculturalism needs to come from all political leaders, but the Government has a particular responsibility in this area.

DISCOURSE ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

Given the unparalleled changes that have taken place in Ireland over the past decade, a national discussion on Irish identity would be timely. Its objectives would be to help people understand that Ireland is now a multicultural society and will remain that way, despite the shift in the economy. A significant leader with a high standing within the state could initiate and steer this discussion over a period of time. Ultimately, if communities are to begin discussing interculturalism, some national framing of that discourse would be essential to ensure it did not become divisive.

Initiatives to revisit how we develop our economy in light of the changed environment have already taken place, such as the Irish Economic Forum in 2009. Similar discourse on how to gain the maximum benefit from interculturalism in a changed Ireland would now be timely.

The conversations also concluded that the media should play a greater role in promoting more positive and constructive discussions on interculturalism on an ongoing basis.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN PROMOTING INTERCULTURALISM

Despite the decline of the role and status of the Catholic Church in Ireland, religion remains strong amongst many of our new communities.

During the conversations, questions emerged about whether or not religion was a barrier to integration. The point was made that it acts as a centre-point around which new communities organise and socialise, and – may become a barrier to engagement with the wider society in which they now live.

Regardless of whether religion can act as a barrier to interculturalism, it was recognised that religion can play a very important role in offering new arrivals to Ireland a sense of belonging. To this end, those in leadership roles within religious / faith-based groups should seek to promote interculturalism through their pastoral, community and outreach work.

5.2 POLICY / SYSTEM CHANGES

The second series of recommendations that emerged during the national conversations related to policy and system changes.

It was noted that research and dialogue on integration have become quite meaningless because very little has changed in response in terms of policy / system changes. This inability to get beyond the level of ‘talking shop’ has been emulated across the board: from community level to Government. The economic downturn has contributed to this general inactivity, and has even resulted in a reduction in programmes and supports that can help to facilitate smooth integration. Indeed, many organisations – including those with responsibility for providing public services – have been forced to reduce their specialist approaches / programmes to respond to the needs of different cultural groups and are now looking at how they can reconfigure mainstream programmes so that, as far as possible, they meet everyone’s needs.

The following recommendations were devised at the national conversations to assist in framing national policy, and to help to create the conditions for an intercultural society at both national and local levels:

DOCUMENTING ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Through the conversations, it emerged that many organisations were hesitant about documenting the ethnic backgrounds of people who used their services because they feared a possible backlash as the data collection could be seen to be unfair or create grounds for inequality. However, most participants agreed that having a client profile was of significant importance in ensuring that services were culturally appropriate.

It also emerged through the conversations that – where data was collected and the client or service-user was aware that it was being used to inform the delivery of the service they were seeking to obtain – there was good understanding and compliance.

National leadership and direction on documenting ethnic background is critical so that services can be effectively planned to take account of all users’ needs. Offering staff and volunteers training and guidance in collecting this data – and making sure that clients and service-users understand the rationale for securing such data – would help in overcoming fears around inequality.

Although slightly unrelated to documenting ethnic background, it was recognised that there are now a significant number of undocumented people living in Ireland (for example, people whose permits have expired). Without any records of them, the health and education systems and other essential services cannot cater for them. To this end, a system of recording their existence and circumstances is essential so that they do not fall through basic safety nets.

SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION EFFICIENCY

At a very general level, the conversations concluded that Ireland’s public services are disjointed and that the recent high levels of immigration to Ireland have further highlighted this. More information-sharing and cohesive planning across service provision – particularly in our public services – is now paramount, especially since resources are limited and efficiencies are necessary.

In addition, funding of projects that promote interculturalism should be better managed in our new economic environment: the conversations reflected on projects funded in the past in this area and conceded that there was significant repetition of funding and small blocks of funding were being allocated to keep groups ‘happy’ rather than to achieve a tangible result. Funding allocation must be made on the basis of achieving the greatest efficiencies and the most sustainable results, participants felt.

Efficiency and speed in processing applications for permits, residency and education programmes need to be enforced, and a more holistic approach to dealing with families in these processes also needs to be considered. A system of recognising educational qualifications received in other countries should be developed, and guidance to frontline service-providers on language also requires development.

5.3 ACTIONS THAT HELP TO CONTINUE TO PROMOTE INTERCULTURALISM DURING RECESSION

There was broad consensus on the importance of enabling conversations on interculturalism and integration to happen in local communities. However, structured opportunities ('safe spaces') where both Irish and non-Irish could learn from and about each other and further develop relations will not occur automatically. Currently, these conversations are happening informally at the local school-gate, in workplaces and in sports clubs. But there is no way of capturing the contents of these conversations and experiences and using them to shape national policy.

To take this issue forward, there was general agreement from the national conversations and the evaluation that:

- The Office of the Minister of State for Integration should take the political and policy lead in promoting the importance of and the need for local conversations on interculturalism.
- The Office should interact with local authorities and other agencies in order to support local organisations seeking to identify and develop opportunities for local conversations on interculturalism and integration. Exactly who should take the lead locally ultimately depends on what is in place in a given community. However, it was considered that use should be made of existing processes and local organisations and forums that are well-trusted and have the capacity to attract people from different backgrounds and different sectors. Also, use should be made of locations that are familiar to people, and where a level of engagement may already be happening, for example, schools, sports clubs and other similar locations.
- Time and resources should be set aside to up-skill people to personally explore our attitudes and to enable people to understand that difference is not a problem. Building these capabilities is crucial for in-depth conversations that challenge hidden assumptions and build relationships that will be sustained.

The central conclusion of the conversations is that Irish people – personally, in their communities, in business, society and public service – are ready to learn more about other cultures and to facilitate greater integrations of migrants into Irish society. However, the capabilities and practices that might support this are inhibited by some features of our policies and a lack of opportunities for intercultural dialogue.

The conversations did show that our overall approach to integration might be refreshed and reframed by taking more account of what is really happening in local communities, society and business. Also, our understanding of the process of integration might benefit from analysing developments at different levels – the personal, interpersonal and institutional.

Case Studies

CASE STUDY 1: HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE

The Health Service Executive (HSE) developed a National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007 - 2012 as the frame work to address the health and care needs of people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The HSE's National Social Inclusion Unit had the remit for development of this strategy as well as coordinating implementation of recommendations. Since the publication of the strategy, the HSE produces regular updates which it circulates to stakeholders to indicate progress and possible barriers that have been emerging over the course of its implementation.

One of the critical elements identified to make the strategy possible was the collection of relevant ethnicity data so that the information could be used for ongoing service planning and development. The HSE understood that the collection of such data needed to be handled carefully. To this end, it piloted a data collection project, whereby staff were trained in approaching service-users about cooperating with data collection procedures. Critically, the HSE found that people were happy to offer data provided they understood the purpose of its collection, that being to help plan and deliver appropriate services.

Of course, planning of services in a way that promotes interculturalism is not the only challenge facing the HSE: sharing information across agencies; coherency around translating and interpreting, and generally sharing of best practice across agencies (both statutory and non-statutory) would – in the experience of the HSE – assist with promoting interculturalism, as well as making more efficient use of resources.

In its work on interculturalism, the HSE recently developed an Emergency Multilingual Aid to help health service providers communicate with a patient while awaiting an interpreter. The Aid comprises a language identifier card which can point the health service provider to a range of language resources on CD and in print that enable them to pose key questions in relation to their health condition. The Emergency Multilingual Aid is not designed to replace interpretation services, but helps health service providers to gain a picture of their patient's health while awaiting an interpreter. The aid acts as a concrete example of developments aimed at reducing access barriers for service users, as well as building capacity of staff to deliver culturally competent services.

With the onset of the recession, the HSE has had to learn new ways of working to ensure that the objectives of its intercultural strategy are met. It is prioritising work that responds to high-risk factors and statistical drivers. It is keen to ensure greater collaboration across agencies and organisations to ensure that the best outcomes are delivered in the interests of interculturalism.

CASE STUDY 2: FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND

The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) runs an intercultural football programme and has a full-time Intercultural Football Programme Coordinator on its staff team. The experience of the Association has been that football by itself cannot facilitate integration; however, it can play an important role as part of a larger strategy.

Connectivity is key to the approach adopted by the FAI to promoting interculturalism. One of its main channels for connecting with target groups is through schools. However, because of poor planning and a lack of preparedness within the education system for requirements for school places by new communities, many children of migrants find themselves attending schools outside of the area in which they live. Often these schools have low-levels of attendance by children from an indigenous Irish background, and therefore presents a challenge for programmes seeking to support a philosophy of interculturalism. Many of the FAI's School initiatives focus on moving participation beyond the school gate, including after-school programmes that engage children as well as parents as volunteers and club open days to connect children and adults to local clubs. In addition to its work with schools the FAI continues to explore other ways to link their programmes to minority communities so that it is able to engage youth and young adults as well as children in sport; to achieve this the FAI has developed relationships with effective and broadly representative migrant/new communities network organisations and groups.

Like the HSE, the FAI has also come to recognise that securing ethnicity data is useful in planning and delivering its programmes. The FAI undertakes to collect appropriate data, but is careful to ensure that people who are asked to offer information on their ethnic background are offered a clear explanation as to why the data is being collected and what it is being used for.

The FAI's experience is that children are an important conduit in the promotion of interculturalism, and they can act as a link in bringing parents together: by volunteering around sport – and other cultural activities – parents from diverse backgrounds can come to know and understand each other better.

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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased from 10.5 million to 12.5 million, and the number of people in the public sector who are employed in health care has increased from 2.5 million to 3.5 million (Department of Health 2000).

There are a number of reasons for this increase. One of the main reasons is the increasing demand for health care services. The population of the UK is ageing, and there is a growing number of people with chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and asthma. This has led to an increase in the number of people who need to be treated in hospitals and other health care settings.

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