



WE ARE CORK

STORIES FROM A DIVERSE CITY



EUROPEAN UNION
Asylum, Migration
and Integration Fund



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Oige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí
Cork City Council



CÚRAM SLÁINTE POBAIL
CORCAIGH CIARRAÍ
CORK KERRY
COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE



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Foreword from Ann Doherty, Chief Executive, Cork City Council

Cork City Council welcomes the publication of this important piece of work by our long-time partners in inclusion and migrant support, Nasc, with the support of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund. I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution made by the 24 migrant interviewees in sharing their lived experience of Cork City.

We are Cork: Voices from a Diverse City marks an important step towards the realisation of a broader Integration Policy for the city. This builds on a long-standing commitment by stakeholders across Cork to the aspirational city motto 'safe harbour for all ships'. The document follows the 2008 'Connecting Communities: The Cork City Integration Strategy' but also chimes with our own organisation's Corporate Plan which celebrates 'A City of engaged neighbourhoods and communities' where people feel welcomed, included and safe.

City Council recognizes the strength our city draws from diversity of culture and ethnicity. In this light, the City Council commends the decision to place the voices and experiences of migrants at the centre of this publication. As a local authority, we are committed to inclusive decision making, and were proud to lead on the 'Shape Your City' initiative in 2019, in a drive to encourage migrant communities to register to vote in local elections. This report relates an appetite from the migrant leaders interviewed to contribute to their neighbourhoods and communities, to embrace Cork life and to share the richness of their own cultures with all in Cork City.

The honest accounts provided in this work do not shy away from the real challenges that persist for newcomers to Cork. City Council reaffirms its commitment to a strengthened policy structure, continued focus on cultural celebration and support for the many communities of origin who have made Cork home. The upcoming Local Economic and Community Plan which will replace Pure Cork will reflect the needs of migrants and outline an inter-agency response to emerging needs. Like the interviewees here, the City Council must continue to provide a leadership role in inclusion across all the grounds for equality.

Ann Doherty

Chief Executive,

Cork City Council



We are Cork: Stories from a Diverse City has been several years in the making. We initially set out to develop a more traditional Integration Plan with Cork City Council. Nasc had previously worked with Cork City Council in the development of the first migrant integration strategy for Cork City, *Connecting Communities: The Cork City Integration Strategy 2008-2011* and *Connecting Communities: A Mid-Term Review 2010*.

In 2019, Nasc successfully applied for funding through the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020 to work with Cork City Council towards developing an Integration Strategy for Cork City. We also wish to acknowledge additional resource and support from Cork City Council and Health Service Executive Cork and Kerry Community Healthcare through the Local Community Development Committee.

However, challenges beyond our control, including two years of Covid-19 restrictions, forced us to re-evaluate our plan. The practicalities of traditional surveys, focus groups etc became impossible. Additionally, over the past two years, many of us rediscovered our local communities. We all became more aware of how reliant on each other we all are and learned how much borders impact on all of our lives. Too often, public narratives on migrant integration are focused on potential healthcare, education or housing costs and fail to address the benefits of diversity. The past two years have shown how frontline workers from migrant or refugee backgrounds are the backbone of our healthcare services as well as our local economies and creative spaces.

This inspired us to hand the narrative over to those who have migrated to Cork and are part of the life of our city, whether through culture, education, arts, employment, research, study, volunteering, or entrepreneurship. At the heart of this project is the concept of exploring integration from the first-person perspective of those who have made Cork City their home and who have experienced the challenges that come with establishing oneself in a new country and creating the links that meaningfully make a place a home. It sets out a new tone to migrant integration and participation in the social and community life of Cork City.

We are Cork: Stories from a diverse city is the exploration of what integration means from the perspective of twenty-four of Cork City's citizens. The twenty-four participants were given the opportunity to give an account, in their own words, of their experience

of life in Cork, and for the readers to gain an insight into the diversity of experiences of migration in Cork City. This process allowed us to ensure that the real concerns and needs of people on the ground were reflected.

We also aim to work towards a more inclusive, and truly intercultural society where migrants, refugees and international protection applicants work hand in hand with the Irish communities to promote integration in policy making political participation, economic growth, and social growth.

It is not possible to write about the migrant and refugee population of Cork City without referencing the recent arrival of Ukrainian refugees which will significantly change the landscape of the city. At time of writing in August 2022, over 44,000 refugees from Ukraine had made Ireland their home, with that number expected to increase further in the coming months. We hope that Cork can be a home and a 'safe harbour' to all those seeking safety here.

We are so grateful to the twenty-four individuals who have given up their time and allowed their stories to be told through this project. We wanted to capture a snapshot of the wealth of diversity and talent in our city as well as gain a more meaningful insight into the real everyday challenges for migrants, refugees, and international protection applicants.

Finally, I'd like to extend my gratitude to Cork City Council for their unstinting support throughout the last years.

Cecilia Amabo, Integration Officer



Integration is a two-way process that places duties and obligations on cultural and ethnic minorities and the state to create a more inclusive society.

Overview

2.1 Background

We are Cork: Stories from a diverse city is unique in nature and its development. It is an oral history capturing the perspective of those with lived experience of migrating to Ireland and finding a new home in Cork City. We adopted a bottom-up approach in this project moving away from the regular systematic approaches used to develop integration policy documents and towards centering the voices of people with lived experience of migration. We were particularly interested in interviewing those who through their own community or voluntary work were able to provide a deeper perspective and understanding of the needs of other members of their community. It was important to us to promote the expertise and knowledge already within the migrant communities in Cork and allow them to lead the narrative on integration in Cork City.

Nasc is aware that this is a snapshot of integration in Cork, and we acknowledge the limitations of a project such as this. We are clear that this is not a representative sample however we believe it can still provide useful insights into the issues faced by migrants in Cork City. The broad-ranging nature of the interviews provide an overview of some of the main issues of concern and the experiences relayed by those interviewed tally with national trends. Another limitation of this project is that, due to the nature of the funding received from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014–2020, it is predominantly focused on the integration experiences of people from third country national backgrounds.

The rationale behind this project is to give policy makers, local authorities, political leaders, civil society, and the public a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of a small number of migrants in Ireland who have made Cork their home. We would like to see this work become a stepping-stone for the development of further integration policies and initiatives in Cork City.

2.2 Interviewee Participation

Twenty-five participants agreed to be part of this project. One participant withdrew from the project prior to publication. Of the twenty-four final participants, seven had lived in Ireland for twenty years or longer, eleven had lived in Ireland for between eleven and twenty years and six had lived in Ireland for ten years or less. We wanted to interview people who had arrived in Ireland at very different times so that we captured the different experiences and needs of those who had lived in Ireland for over two decades versus newer arrivals to Ireland and to capture the changes that have already happened over the last three decades. The participants came from 18 different countries.

The interviewees were selected to be from a wide range of backgrounds and professions from the creative sector to the medical profession. There is also a diversity of migration stories from those who joined family in Ireland to those who came to Ireland to seek international protection and had experienced direct provision.

Interviews were carried out by Cecilia Amabo in person or via Zoom video calling platform. There were some set questions, but interviewees were encouraged to speak on issues they felt strongly about. The interviews were transcribed and then edited for length. Participants had the opportunity to review their interview and make amendments or corrections.

2.3 Diversity in Ireland

In the last 22 years Ireland has become home to over 535,475 migrants or people of migrant background from over 200 different countries across the globe. In line with the National Framework on Promoting Migrant Integration and the Government's commitment to enhance diversity, inclusion and equality, the Department of Justice and Equality in 2017 developed, and implemented the first national strategy of its kind: *Migrant Integration Strategy: A blueprint for the future*¹.

1 http://www.integration.ie/en/ISEC/Pages/Migrant_Integration_Strategy

Census 2016² showed that Cork City recorded the largest increase in its non-Irish population across Ireland. The data shows that the number of non-Irish residents increased by 17.2% (2,505) between 2011 and 2016.³ In 2016, populations of non-EEA nationals were higher in electoral districts in the centre and north of the city with one electoral district, St Patrick's B, recorded a population of 18% non-EEA nationals. We note that with the boundary change in May 2019, Cork City grew to nearly five times its size and expanded its population from 85,000 to 210,000⁴ so we expect the forthcoming results of Census 2022 to show a very changed city.

2.4 Themes emerging from interviews

All 24 participants shared personal stories and insights into their experiences of integration in Cork. Overwhelmingly the participants were positive about life in Cork City. There were a wide range of experiences. In analysing the interviews, seven broad themes emerged as challenges in common which we discuss further below. While the interviewees themselves, particularly those who had lived longer in Ireland, may not have experienced certain challenges themselves, they were keenly aware of others in their social groups and communities who were impacted by these challenges.

2.4.1 Social Connections

Opportunities for making social connections were universally seen as important. Participants wanted to be able to connect to others from their ethnic communities but also to find networks and friends amongst Irish communities. The experience of participants varied very significantly. Two key factors emerged as relevant here: the date of arrival in Ireland and existing family relationships in Ireland.

Notably participants who had been in Cork for twenty years or longer had experienced feelings isolation and being othered in a much less diverse Cork at the time.

"Community Integration at the time we got here was very difficult. It was almost impossible at the time. There was so much tension in the atmosphere, fear of the unknown by the Irish people especially the elderly women."

~ Ps. Aribasoye

There was a sense that this had improved since the early 2000s. More recent arrivals to Cork were able to benefit from community networks established by those who had arrived in Ireland earlier.

"I realised that the Pakistani community in Ireland has a huge online presence where people could easily connect and link up with each other. We have different platforms through which we connect with each other. I felt very relieved because I had a lot of people around me. We connect through our Facebook pages. Irish Pakistani Professional Association on Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp groups which have over three thousand members. We have different professionals in different fields who share ideas and available opportunities."

~Fahmeda Naheed

Four of the participants were married to Irish nationals and they all referenced the relative privilege that this had afforded them in being able to access networks and information about life in Ireland. They recognised that their experience differed from that of others in their social circles.

"I have just been fortunate and probably well accepted to an extent because I am married to an Irish man from Cork. This has often given me protection compared to others and the stories I hear daily"

~ Joanna Dukkkipati

"Maybe because I worked supporting migrants, I am aware of the barriers that other migrants face and the privilege I have because my husband is Irish. I have support from amazing friends and family who often answer my many questions about how things work or guide me through processes, because if you didn't grow up here so many things just don't make a lot of sense. They introduce me to people and places; for example, unlike many other migrants, I didn't have a problem getting a GP - I was just taken as a patient where my in-laws go and that was it."

~ Majo Rivas

Several of the participants referred to individual instances of kindnesses by strangers in Cork which made them feel more welcome and at ease.

2 At time of writing, the figures from the 2022 Census had not yet been released.

3 <http://www.CSO.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp7md/p7md/p7anii/>

4 <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/council-services/public-info/boundary-extension/extension-timeline/>

"I remember a day when I first moved to Cork in 2016 and I was going for a mental health event in Wilton, I was supposed to walk there or take a bus. Along the way I got lost and stopped at a post office to ask for directions. I didn't just get directions, but a stranger, an elderly man, who didn't know me, has never met me, was willing not just to direct me, but to drive me right down to the event venue."

~ Tehmina Kazi

"I was taking a walk in the city with my little daughter in a buggy. I was around the Merchant Quays, while trying to climb the steps, I lost control and my buggy was almost turning over with the child inside, and a guy from nowhere rushed and caught the child and even injured himself. He was a real hero. This is someone who didn't know me from anywhere and when I asked him why he did it, he told me the life of the child was his priority and he didn't care if he was injured or not."

~ Stella Aigbogun

2.42 Accommodation and Housing

An extensive analysis of research and data on housing in the Irish context was published by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in 2021. *Monitoring adequate housing in Ireland* reported that a number of equality groups are overrepresented in the homeless population, including men, young adults, families with very young children, those who are single, separated or divorced, those from minority religions, people with a disability, non-Irish nationals, those of Black ethnicity and Travellers. Dr. Mohamed Mutasim describes the lack of accommodation as a "major crisis for migrants." He spoke of his difficulty in finding accommodation, despite having an employment contract as a doctor and assistance from his employer and wondered others, less fortunate, could manage. Nura Hagi noted that black and Muslim communities faced discrimination in accessing housing.

One under-reported impact of the housing crisis and lack of stable, long-term accommodation is the inability to forge strong relationships with neighbours and local communities. It can be seen in several interviews that these links were particularly important for the participants in this project and a key factor in their integration. Eleven of the participants specifically referenced the role that their neighbours had played in making them feel welcome in the community.

"When I first came to Cork in my estate, I was the only migrant in the [housing] estate. That was way back in 2004 and now we have over ten migrant families from different parts of the world. There was some isolation since I was alone, but I had incredible neighbours that is something that makes Cork different from other places."

~Dr Mutahira Lone

"I have lived in three different places in Cork in the last 19 years and in all these places, I have always been fortunate to have amazing neighbours"

~Jeannett Taku

"I have had incredible neighbours who welcomed me with open hands and that alone changed everything"

~Nura Hagi

Three of the participants referenced neighbours becoming like family members.

"I have a lot of respect for Ann, one of my friends and neighbours. We call her 'Granny Ann' because she is a mother to all of us."

~Khalid Azrag.

2.4.3 Cultural Life

All the participants welcomed the opportunity to participate in the cultural life of the city. Cultural activities were seen as very important. Participants referenced food festivals and the Cork Jazz Festival as highlights they looked forward to. Twenty of the participants had regularly participated in, or watched, the St Patrick's Day parade in Cork City or other parts of Ireland. St Patrick's Day was seen as an important way to showcase their culture to the wider community in Cork.

"Participating in the St. Patrick's Day is always memorable to me because it has a unique element of bringing people together from diverse backgrounds."

Dr Mohamed Mutasim

Six of the participants also referenced taking part in Africa Day, celebrated in Cork on or around May 25th every year. One participant, Ps. Aribasoye, noted that he would like to see more Irish people taking part in Africa Day and actively learning about other communities in Cork.

"[S]ocial integration is very important, we need to see more of Irish people taking part in the Africa Day celebrations the same way other migrants participate in the St. Patrick's Day celebration. It is very important for the Irish to see and learn about our cultures the same way we learn the Irish culture."

This view was shared by Cecilia Gamez who said that she thought that "multicultural festivals should include more of the Irish community. It's usually just different migrants' communities enjoying ourselves; to really achieve full immersion we need more Irish to get involved."

The importance of Africa Day to the participants interviewed from African backgrounds highlighted the lack of equivalent celebrations in Cork City for those not from African backgrounds. From the interviews, it appears that there would be a strong appetite for more cultural celebrations in Cork.

2.4.4 Racism and discrimination

"When you are a person of colour living in the west, the issue of race and ethnicity is always there. You live it, you read it, you see it, you think it and you feel it. You can read something on the street, and it triggers it, you hear something on the radio it triggers it, you see certain adverts on TV they trigger it. This is the reality."

~Dr Naomi Masheti

The majority of the participants found Cork City, overall, to be welcoming and safe. Participants, particularly those who were parents, emphasised the importance of a safe environment for their children to grow up in. Nobantu Nomsa Nti spoke of her desire to find a safe place for her future children to live to be her motivation in moving to Ireland. Dr Mohamed Mutasim spoke of it being the first time that he felt safe letting his children out to play.

"It is the first time that my children can go out and play in the open field without supervision, which is something they couldn't do in the USA or in Saudi Arabia. They are also very safe here, more that they would be back in Sudan."

However, participants who were positive about life in Cork were also clear that they were aware of racism and discrimination and how this impacted on their sense of safety in the city. Stella Aigbogun felt that Cork was not safe and pointed to the increased risk for migrants who may face additional danger because of racism:

"People are not safe on the streets anymore. This is a general thing, but with migrants, they are often intimidated and racially discriminated upon."

Roos Demol also spoke of her hesitation in describing Cork as a welcoming city for migrants.

"I am careful about Cork being a welcoming city for migrants. Not everyone in the city is as welcoming. There is a lot of showcasing people welcoming migrants in Cork but that is not always the case, because we still see a lot of stereotyping, people being discriminated against because of their skin colour or how they speak and how they dress."

Ps. Aribasoye spoke of frequently being the target of racist abuse of the streets when he first arrived in Ireland, but he believes that with the increased diversity in Cork City, things are changing for the better.

*"I have lost count of how many times I got abusive words on the streets. I can't tell you how many times people would use words like f**k you coward, go back to your country, you are not welcome here, you do not belong here return to your country and so on. The streets were not very safe for us and but now I am happy that things are gradually changing compared to then."*

Not all interviewees had personal experience of racism but even those who had not experienced racism first hand, knows someone in their social circles who had experienced racism.

"There is still a lot of racist incidences in Cork against migrants and more so against Muslim migrants. This is something I would call the attention of the government to work hard to eradicate."

~Br. Kevin Mascarenhas

Fahmeda Naheed spoke of prejudice against people from Pakistan. She experienced a perception that people from Pakistan were not highly education. As someone with a master's degree from Punjab University and an M.A. in Teacher's Education from Allama Iqbal Open University, she felt she had to disprove that narrative. Her integration and diversity work in the city gave her an insight into the prevalence of institutional racism.

"Institutional racism and challenges remain a major problem for migrants' integration as well. These are major challenges that are not talked about in public but when you work with the community daily, you witness and experience them."

Jeannett Taku was inspired to set up a service for migrant families when she noticed the disproportionate number of children from ethnic minority backgrounds taken into care which she believes could partially be attributed to social work professionals not understanding cultural differences and migrant families not understanding their new environment and culture.

Dr Naomi Masheti has explored the experience of migrants, and particularly ethnic minority women, in accessing health care and maternal health care in her academic writings. Her academic work focuses on racism and discrimination in public institutions.

Tehmina Kazi, now working with Irish Travellers, found her work gave her a similar overview of structural discrimination in Ireland and pointed out Ireland's poor record on equality issues, particularly in relation to members of the Irish Travelling Community. She is able to use her extensive expertise advocating on behalf of minority groups and noted:

"When I first saw this job, I knew I needed to work with them [Irish Travellers] because Travellers are disproportionately discriminated against, and I have a very strong passion against racism and discrimination."

2.4.5 Employment and under-employment

Twenty of the participants raised the issue of underemployment and lack of decent work opportunities for people from a migrant background in Cork. Nationally and internationally⁵, migrants are overrepresented in sectors characterised by low pay, shift work and temporary contracts, all elements which hinder progression. An analysis by the Economic Social and Research Institute (ESRI) published in 2020 found that ethnicity played a significant part in barriers to employment with statistics showing that Black Africans were likely experiencing the worst outcomes in accessing employment⁶.

A 2020 report published by Doras, *Getting Right To Work: Access To Employment And Decent Work For International Protection Applicants In Ireland* found that lack of recognition of educational qualification

and experience of people with migrants' backgrounds were key barriers to migrants obtaining and keeping decent jobs.⁷

Participants of this project revealed that when they do get work, they are more likely to get work in unskilled roles and expressed frustration in accessing jobs proportionate to their skills and qualifications. Worryingly, findings released from the Workplace Relations Commission show that the two sectors with the highest proportion of complaints in relation to breaches of employment law are Accommodation & Food Services, and Domestic and Care work. Both are sectors with the highest percentages of migrants.

"I came to Ireland with a BA and ten years of working experience as a lab technician and yet I am unable to find a job in my field."

~Rosario Balmaceda Zuniga

Cilly Tshamano Ndou spoke about how the lack of opportunities in Ireland for migrants and people of migrant backgrounds, forced people to emigrate:

"The lack of employment for migrants in Cork is a huge challenge. It's so frustrating and has destroyed so many homes because people leave to look for jobs in the UK. Also, migrants suffer from underpaid jobs despite their qualifications. It is either they get jobs that are below their qualifications and skills, or they don't get at all and that pushes them to look elsewhere."

Another participant, Tehmina Kazi noted that she had to move away from her husband to London for three years, as she was unable to find suitable work in Cork.

Majo Rivas spoke about her ability to take an unpaid internship gave her a way to break into the Irish labour market but points out that this isn't economically feasible for most people.

"When I first arrived in Ireland, I applied for so many jobs in the first few months, but got no interviews. Then an unpaid internship in my area came up and I was privileged enough to have my family support me in

⁵ The European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted a comparative study in 2016 which found that the highest rates of discrimination in the workplace experienced by sub-Saharan African respondents across Europe were documented in Luxembourg, Sweden and Ireland. Study available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/sec-ond-european-union-minorities-and-discrimination-survey-main-results>

⁶ https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/BKMNEXT392_2.pdf

⁷ <http://doras.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Doras-Getting-Right-to-Work-e-copy.pdf>

going for it. Most people, including migrants, don't have the support that would allow them to go for an unpaid internship, they have families to take care of, bills to pay, mouths to feed. I know so many amazing migrants with a wealth of experience and talents, but they just can't seem to get a break in the Irish labour market."

Lack of childcare support was also raised as an effective barrier to employment and to integration especially amongst migrant women by participants. Although lack of adequate and affordable childcare is a problem faced across Irish society, migrants and women of migrant backgrounds face triple the effect across Ireland.⁸

"We also have major issues around childcare which hinder many migrant women to work effectively or go to school and participate in different community activities. The childcare system needs to be improved."

~Fahmeda Naheed

One interviewee, however, spoke at length about how she received support to further her career in Ireland. Artist Amna Walayat described her fear on leaving her successful career as an artist in Pakistan behind to move to Ireland with her husband, but after a few years in Ireland finding support from the Visual Artists of Ireland and the Arts Council of Ireland and receiving grants that allowed her to build her career in Ireland.

"The VAI has a mandate to advocacy for artists and to help artists to come together and showcase their talents. I truly regret not joining them immediately after I arrived in Ireland. It took me more than six years before finally contacting them for fear of rejection. Now, I am not only exhibiting my work regularly, but I've also secured multiple funding awards recently from Arts Council to sustain my practice"

2.4.6 Underrepresentation in political life

Concerns were raised by all twenty-four participants of the under-representation of migrants in political offices and decision-making tables. This is mirrored throughout Ireland. According to the 2016 census, 810,406 residents in Ireland were born outside the country with a significant increase over the preceding years. Despite this increasing number, only two out of the 949 local councillors elected in the 2014 local

elections were people from a migrant background. This number increased in 2019 with nine candidates of migrant background elected as local councillors.⁹ The Census 2016 data shows that just over 12% of the Irish population are non-Irish nationals so a representative local government would have 113 local councillors of a migrant background. The lack of migrant voices in the government was perceived as a barrier to migrant-friendly policies in the country. One of the participants who ran for local election spoke of the reaction amongst migrant communities:

"When I registered myself for the 2019 local elections, the migrant community accepted me and some of them said things like, 'we have never been asked what we think or what we felt, people just come and drop their flyers telling us what they want to do and not care to listen to what we think or want.'"

~Dr. Lekha Menon Margassery

The 2016 census showed that non-Irish nationals currently account for approximately one in eight (over 12 per cent) of the Irish population but just nine out of a total of 949 local councillors in Ireland elected in the 2019 local elections were from a migrant background following the 2019. It is clear there is significant work to be done to increase diversity within local government in the country.

2.4.7 Direct Provision and the International Protection Process

Eight of the participants spoke of their own experience of the international protection process or living in a Direct Provision centre. Hawrey Mahmoud had made an application for international protection (asylum) after a dangerous journey to Ireland as a minor and his experiences before coming to Ireland continue to impact him. He describes his recollections of that "horrendous period" of having the power to steal his sense of security and quiet.

"I was separated from my family by war when I was only 16 years old. I left home, still a minor, in search of safety and protection. My life was destroyed; my education was disrupted because I was only in the secondary school when things got worse. I was separated from my parents, siblings, and friends because of the war. I travelled through very rough routes with many others

8 <https://www.esri.ie/news/high-childcare-costs-linked-to-lower-employment-among-mothers>

9 <https://immigrantcouncil.ie/sites/default/files/2020-05/Strength%20in%20Diversity%20FULL%20REPORT%20FINAL%20060520.pdf>

before reaching the shores of Ireland. The journey was horrendous. I got here in Ireland in 2008. What I wanted the most was safety and security. I felt I was safe, and I was happy about that but each time I think of the ordeal and what my parents might be going through, it often steals away that sense of security and quiet I had in me.

Two other participants spoke of their relief on first arriving safely in Ireland. Miriam Shauti Counter spoke of her initial gratitude to “have a roof over our heads and enough food to eat for us and our little baby”. This sense of relief in a newfound safety was echoed by Nobantu Nomsa Nti, who also then noted that this initial relief was followed by a long wait to get a decision on her international protection application.

“At first, we were very happy that we had left South Africa and that we were in a safer country. I was very excited but gradually, the excitement started fading away. We only got our leave to remain in 2015. We spent seven years of our lives in direct provision centres and three of my children were born while we were in the centres.

Two of the participants, Hawrey Mahmoud and Cilly Tshamano Ndou, directly referenced the stigma they felt when they lived in direct provision with Cilly noting how this had impacted her children.

“My experience out of direct provision is something completely different. I feel that my children are now free and the stigma they got when they were at the centre is no longer there. My children used to feel very uncomfortable interacting with other kids in their schools or playing around with them because of the things that they have been told for living in a direct provision centre. Leaving the centre has truly given my children freedom and I cannot be any happier.”

Hawrey felt that the stigma attached to direct provision made it more difficult to transition out of direct provision and integrate into the community however Miriam Shauti Counter noted that the links she made while living in direct provision assisted her integration.

“When you get yourself active in the community while you are still in a Direct Provision centre as a migrant, community integration becomes very easy because the same people you worked with while in the centre are the same you meet in the community.”

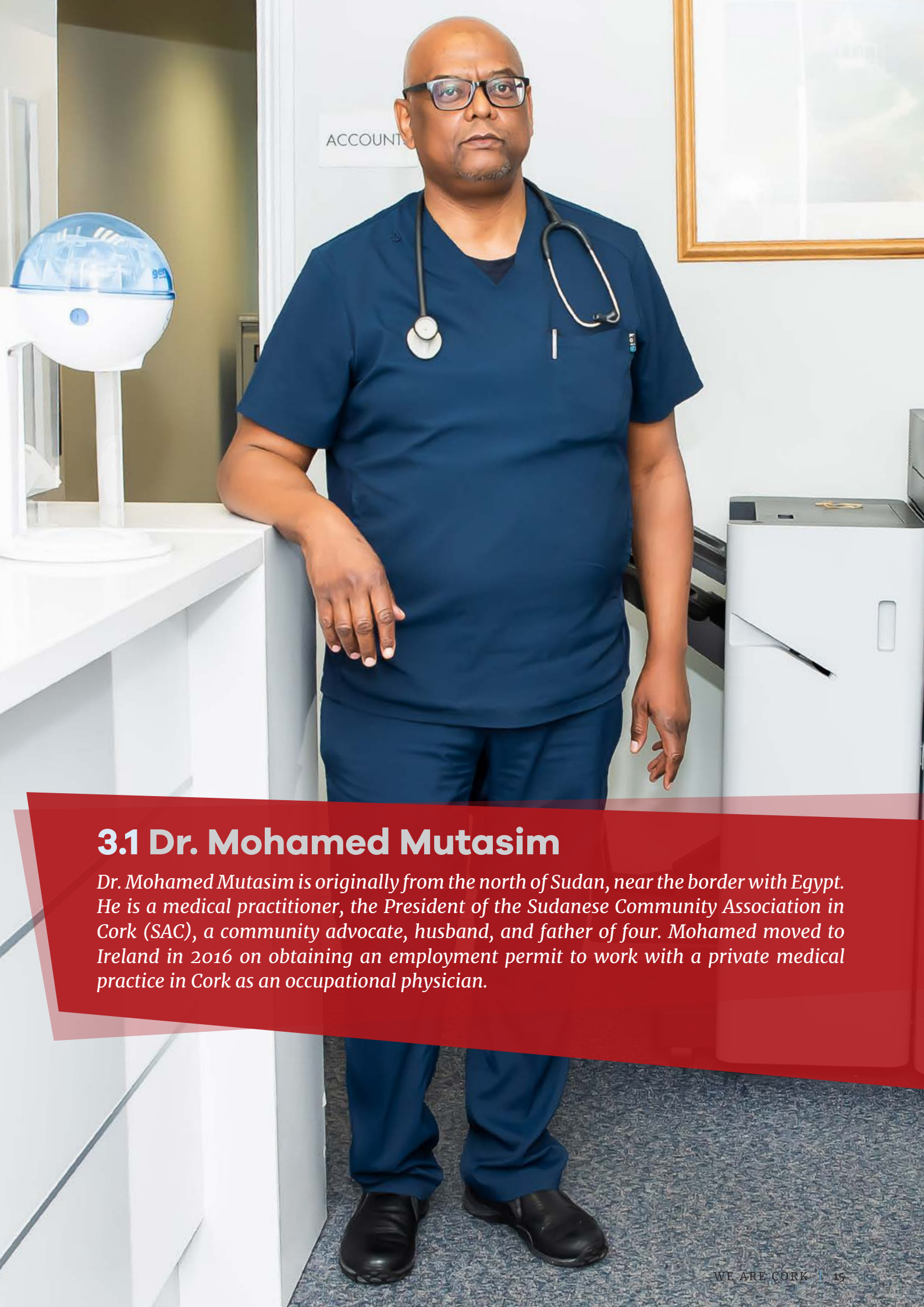
Rosario Balmaceda Zuniga, a participant currently resident in a direct provision centre, expressed the urgent need for change – specifically the end to direct provision itself and an end to the delays in the system.

“I would like to see changes in the system - for people to be settled faster than what is happening. I have been in the accommodation centre since 2019 and I don't even know what my situation is. I would like to see an end to the direct provision system.”

2.4.8 Conclusion

All the participants in the research raised valuable and personal insights. Unfortunately, it is not possible here to delve into all the very worthy issues raised but we hope this report can be a useful addition to the ongoing conversation on how Cork as a city can respond to the many challenges hindering migrant integration. There are enormous benefits to the city's economy as well as to those living here if the under-employment of migrants can be addressed. We also hope that this report shows the very significant contribution of those who have made this ‘safe harbour’ home to the cultural, economic, and social life of the city.





3.1 Dr. Mohamed Mutasim

Dr. Mohamed Mutasim is originally from the north of Sudan, near the border with Egypt. He is a medical practitioner, the President of the Sudanese Community Association in Cork (SAC), a community advocate, husband, and father of four. Mohamed moved to Ireland in 2016 on obtaining an employment permit to work with a private medical practice in Cork as an occupational physician.

From an early age, Mohamed had a love of, and passion for, medicine. After High School in Sudan, Mohamed travelled to Syria to study Medicine and Surgery. His studies subsequently took him to the USA and Jordan, during which time he obtained multiple qualifications including a Diploma, Master's degree and a Board Certificate equivalent in a PhD in Community Medicine and Fellowship.

Mohamed's arrival in Ireland to live and work could be considered as an unplanned journey. "I was not imagining coming to Ireland at any point in my medical journey. While I was in Saudi Arabia, a lady from Ireland, a medical doctor, came to a medical conference we organised in Saudi Arabia. Unknown to me it had always been her wish to work in Saudi Arabia. At the conference, she spoke to some few people and indicated her interest to serve as a medical doctor in Saudi Arabia and one of the persons she spoke to directed her to me. She was told that I would be the one to help her with her request. After speaking to her, I saw the passion she had. Her field of expertise was well needed, and I asked her to send me her CV. She did and after going through it, I noticed that we had done a lot of similar studies and I told her that I would like to come and work in Ireland. While I was sending her CV to the right places in Saudi Arabia and recommending her, she also contacted some of her colleagues in Ireland and spoke to them about me. It was just fortunate for me that they were looking for someone with my qualifications at the time. I was asked to send a CV and after a while, I was offered the job. I moved to work in Ireland while she also moved to Saudi Arabia. The process went so fast; I moved to Ireland without knowing much about Ireland itself. When I came to Ireland, I had to go through the Irish Medical Council specialty examinations, and I did that very successfully. It wasn't easy but I made it through. I also since had further training which is very useful for my career here in Ireland. The journey has been very successful so far."

Shortly after his arrival in Ireland, Mohamed began looking for ways to find the Sudanese Community in Cork and he became an active member of the Sudanese Community Association in Cork (SCA), later being elected as President of the SCA. His voluntary work has led him to support Sudanese international protection applicants and to try to build relationships between the Sudanese Community in Cork and Irish communities in Cork.

"As the President of the Sudanese Community Association here in Cork, I work very closely with Sudanese who are members of the asylum-seeking

community. We try as much as possible to provide career orientation and help them in different areas where we have professionals. As an association, we are very community oriented, so we do a lot of cross-cultural activities that bring our people with the Irish community. Cork people are community-oriented people and are very welcoming... The association is focussed to fostering integration with the Irish community and to link them with other community... If you interact with [people in Cork], you will realise that they always want to know about different cultures and when we invite people to events, they come and are always keen to learn about different cultures."

For Mohamed, sharing cultural knowledge is important and he works with the Sudanese Community Association to foster this. "The Sudanese Community Association school also opens its doors to others who are interested to learning Arabic. The school was closed during the pandemic, and we are reorganising ourselves to reopen the school. We also do regular Sudanese gatherings that tally with other important and special events that happen back in Sudan. We organise the Sudanese Exhibition which is one of the days that we have all wear our unique clothes, share Sudanese food and cultural dances, and our culture is displayed. We had the last ones in [Cork] City Hall and in University College Cork. We are currently planning the next one in September. Our Association also takes part in major activities in the city like the St. Patrick's Day, Africa Day celebrations, Culture Night events and other activities that promote integration and culture. I also have very good moments sharing our culture with different ethnic groups and learning from them. Participating in the St. Patrick's Day is always memorable to me because it has a unique element of bringing people together from diverse backgrounds."

For Mohamed there were certain challenges that made settling in Ireland difficult and he particularly notes how challenging finding accommodation in Cork City was for himself and his family. "I came in as a professional and I still encountered challenges. At times I wonder what people who didn't come in the same way I came would be facing. First there was a huge difficulty in getting accommodation. If it was not for the assistance given to me by my employer, I don't know what would have happened. Housing is a major crisis for migrants. I came with an employment agreement and still was not exempted from the crisis. I stayed in a hotel for up to two weeks. The hotel at one point asked me to leave because they had other activities. Just at the time when they asked me to leave, I saw a place and

I just had to take it because I had no choice. I also found opening a bank account a major challenge. Approving a work permit from the Department of Justice is another issue too.”

As someone who has had the opportunity to work and study in countries across the world, Mohamed is well placed to observe any differences to community life in Cork versus elsewhere. Mohamed notes, “From what I have observed in Cork, Cork is very lovely place, and the people are very nice too. I am here with my family and they all like it here. It is the first time that my children can go out and play in the open field without supervision, which is something they couldn’t do in the USA or in Saudi Arabia. They are also very safe here, more that they would be back in Sudan.”

Working as a doctor in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic had a profound effect on both Mohamed’s work environment and his personal life. He was keenly aware of trying to keep his children safe and he also missed being able to travel to see his extended family, something that had been very important to him pre-pandemic. “During the pandemic, the government was trying to make

guidelines on how people can be kept safe. I was fully involved in my capacity to approve patients’ fitness to return to work or not by giving my professional advice. For people who thought they were not fit to return to work, I made multiple interventions to advise them on [how to improve] their fitness. As a dad, it was difficult especially during the winter, but I try my best to be available for my children and my patients at the same time. Also, before the pandemic, I was traveling every three months back to my home country to see my family and friends but not anymore”

Mohamed terms his relocation into Ireland as ‘a give and take situation’. “My movement to Ireland is of mutual benefit to both parties. It’s a give and take situation. I have benefited from a lot of things. Likewise, the government and the people of Ireland have benefited from me coming to Ireland. I benefit from working with high-level professionals and I have gained a certificate that I have always wanted. People always treat me with respect, and I do the same to them. That is the essence of shared knowledge. My colleagues working with me have learned a lot from me just the same way I learn from them.”



3.2 Amna Walayat

Amna Walayat is an award-winning artist, wife, and mother. She is a member of Art Nomads, Sample Studios Cork, Backwater Artist Network, Angelica Network, Smashing Times Dublin, Visual Artists Ireland and is currently the Creative Producer in Residence with Cork County Council.





Amna was born and raised in the densely populated city of Punjab Pakistan where she developed a love of art from an early age. Amna holds an MA in Fine Arts from the Institute of Art and Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. She also holds a certificate in studio-base painting at École Régionale des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, France and, most recently, graduated with an MA in Modern and Contemporary Art History, Theory and Criticism from University College Cork (UCC) Ireland in 2016.

Amna's move to Ireland was not one that she had planned for herself. In 2013, her husband received an offer of employment at University College Cork. Amna originally had very mixed feelings about moving to Ireland. It was great news and a fantastic opportunity for her husband, but for Amna it meant giving up her career in Pakistan. "The thoughts of moving and leaving behind everything I had worked so hard to build struck in. At the time, I was already well-established working as the Program Organizer, Pakistan National Council of the Arts, a Curator at the Alhamra Arts Council, Lahore, Pakistan, and in my 4th year as a PhD student with my PHD as a studio-based researcher with PURAF, at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. When I had to give up everything to migrate... I was saying to myself this is not what I want, I am an artist, I am good, and I am exceptional in what I do. The thought of it scared me. Then I said to myself, I will have to make use of this opportunity... and, since University College Cork also had a good master's degree program, I could apply for another course to keep up-skilling myself. Since I already had a good hand on English, I loved it because I didn't have any language barriers like [I would with] other countries. It wasn't hard for me to be accepted."

Living in a small city did require an adjust for Amna. "Honestly when we arrived Cork, Cork wasn't the ideal place for me. Having been raised in Punjab and other places, I found Cork to be very small and I didn't see myself living here. I told my husband we must move to Dublin which is a bigger city with more opportunities and a place where I could establish my artwork. It was always my idea to live in bigger cities like Paris, London. But as time went by, I gradually started loving the city and its people. It's been 8 years and we are still here, and I don't even think I would like to move to Dublin anymore."

Amna has also found Cork a welcoming place for migrants, "When my friends ask me if I think Cork is a city for migrants, I often say a big 'Yes'. I always have the fear of moving alone especially when I was living in London and in France. I was always afraid to

move alone to anywhere. But here in Cork, I feel more relaxed and comfortable, and I go to a lot of places alone without any fear. I go to art exhibitions alone here which is something I would never do while living in London or France. Cork people are nice, and they give you the chance to express yourself and belong to the community of your profession. People are always willing to listen to your story, your migrant stories and what we want as migrants. They also give us opportunities to participate in the political life.”

Amna had vast experience working as an artist including with the Pakistani National Council of Arts and was eager to re-establish her financial independence. She started applying for jobs and art opportunities and, after many attempts, she started gaining opportunities in art sector i.e., exhibition, talks, residencies, bursary awards and most recently employment as the Creative Producer in Residence at Cork County Council. “As an artist, I love Ireland because of its landscape. The landscape is very inspiring and gives me motivation to paint. I have always loved to paint with landscape because it makes me see things differently. Before I was feeling small with myself and after having these contacts with different artists here in Ireland and seeing their work, it gave me even more inspiration and strength.”

There were challenges however for Amna in establishing herself as an artist in Cork. She recalls, “When I was working in Pakistan, I could apply and get any job no matter the level of entry because I was fully qualified and skilled with management skills and more. But I wouldn’t say the same for Ireland even for very little things. Language maybe played a big role in the challenges I encountered and probably not fully understanding the system like I knew the system in Pakistan.”

Over time Amna surmounted those barriers saying, “Now I go to different arts exhibits and I feel the sense of belonging, I recognise people, people recognise me and that is amazing. Over the years I have received tremendous support from Visual Artist Ireland (VAI) and Arts Council Ireland. These are amazing organisations that helped me to enter the art industry here in Ireland and [assisted] in terms of finances. The VAI has a mandate to advocacy for artists and to help artists to come together and showcase their talents. I truly regret not joining them immediately after I arrived in Ireland. It took me more than six years before finally contacting them for fear of rejection. Now, I am not only exhibiting my work regularly, but I’ve also secured multiple funding awards recently from Arts Council to sustain my practice i.e., Agility Award, Bursary Award and Next Generation Award”.

While migration often comes with many sacrifices, the Pakistani community in Ireland has provided a connection to home for Amna. “I don’t miss home at that extent that I used to in the beginning. We have almost everything here i.e., halal food, our native food even fresh fruits and vegetables i.e., Mangos and bitter melons. However, I miss my mother, siblings, and extended family members whom we often visit during our holidays. The Pakistani community in Ireland is a huge community. We are very well connected with one another as neighbours or with personal visits and social media – all Pakistani from different walks of life across Ireland. This gives you the spirit of culture and belonging. We are far from home, but we feel at home if we are connected to each other. We have a network of Pakistani experts and professionals where we share ideas and opportunities... I also founded the Pakistani Arts Network; it has formed an exhibition community where we exhibit Pakistani Arts and help each other with connections and learn from each other. As a community, we also come together and celebrate the Pakistani National Day which is on the 14th of August and a very big event back home. Hina Night and Eid are also important events back at home. We also celebrate these with enthusiasm to make us feel more at home even here in Cork.

I would honestly say Ireland is one of the best places for me because of the things I have benefited from... I got financial support from the government to purchase very expensive art materials and everything that has to do with my arts work including materials that I have to use for experiments. The Art Council Ireland (ACI) and the entire art community have been very helpful to my life and career. I now have the Irish context in my arts more than the art I did back home in Pakistan. I am not the only one who has benefited from the government’s gestures. My native artists friends are also benefiting here. My children too have benefited. They have good free education in public schools and a good quality of life. They have their friends here and access to many sports and outdoor activities i.e., swimming, cricket, cinema, parks, beaches as well as halal food restaurants and takeaways. They only know Ireland as their home.”



3.3 Nobantu Nomsa Nti

Nobantu Nomsa Nti is originally from Johannesburg, South Africa. Nobantu is an entrepreneur who runs her own online speciality cake business via her Facebook account. She is also a community volunteer, a wife and mother to four children.

Nobantu has lived in Ireland since 2008, when she had to leave South Africa because of the escalating levels of violence. Fearing for future children's safety, she and her husband made the difficult decision that they had to move.

"I was born and raised in Kimberley in South Africa... My husband is from Ghana, but we met in South Africa, and we got married. When we found out that we were about to have a baby, my husband was worried about us raising our kids in South Africa due to security reasons. We started making plans to move abroad where we could properly raise a family and ... we decided to come to Ireland. Friends who were in Ireland before us encouraged us, telling us that Ireland was an amazing country to raise kids and start a family. It was also an English-speaking country like South Africa, and we thought to ourselves that integration wouldn't be a challenge, especially in terms of language. The circumstances our friends [were living in] were exactly what wanted for our kids. South Africa was too toxic at the time, and we had no plans of raising our children in such an atmosphere."

When Nobantu and her husband got to Ireland, they made an application for international protection. What followed was a long process within the direct provision system. Nobantu talks of her initial feeling of safety and then her frustration at the long waiting times and the uncertainty of the international protection system.

"At first, we were very happy that we had left South Africa and that we were in a safer country. I was very excited but gradually, the excitement started fading away. We only got our leave to remain in 2015. We spent seven years of our lives in direct provision centres and three of my children were born while we were in the centres. Before we arrived in Ireland, I was already pregnant with my first child who is now 13 years old and in those seven years, I had two more children in the centre. After we got our documents, we immediately started looking for accommodation. We finally got a place, and since 2015 we have lived in Douglas." Nobantu loves the community around her and has been fortunate to create great relationships with neighbours. "I have had amazing neighbours... We share Christmas gifts and visit each other's homes. My new Romanian neighbours that just got here are so amazing. They brought us a specially made Romanian cake to introduce themselves to the neighbourhood and it was amazing."

Nobantu finds her volunteer work with the homeless very important and meaningful to her. "I did some

work that goes out every evening to help homeless people called; Seo-Le-Cuidiu Cork. I saw an advert they made online requesting more support for the homeless. I sent an email and asked if it was okay to cook food, package it and bring it for distribution. They agreed. While I was there, I felt a sense of peace and joy within me...

I have never once allowed my experience of Direct Provision define me or my children's lives. I knew it was just a phase even though it took much longer than I expected. I love Cork very much; the people are very nice people, welcoming and friendly. I have had both good and bad memories from people who feel I am not supposed to be here. I have however never allowed any of the negative experiences hinder me or make me feel differently about Cork. When you set out to take a walk in the parks or just walking on the streets in Cork, you smile and talk to as many people as you wish. The people are generally very friendly, and it brightens your day..." She and her family also enjoy the sporting and cultural life of the city. Her children play football with their local teams and Nobantu likes to attend their matches as much as possible. She also notes that her children particularly look forward to coming into town for St Patrick's Day to watch the parade and be part of the celebrations.

Nobantu and her children have unfortunately experienced racism in Ireland. She describes two encounters that particularly stick out for her.

"I took my four kids to the beach and on our way back, my kids asked if they could get KFC, I told them it was fine, and I drove into the KFC yard. A lady come up to me and said, 'Didn't you see me on the zebra crossing? You should have waited for me to cross.' I said to her 'You were not there. The rule of zebra crossing is that if you see someone close to the zebra crossing, you stop but you were not there.' She just started shouting, 'you are not supposed to be in this country, look at how you are spending our taxpayer money, you should go back to your country'. I answered and said to her 'No ma'am, you are wrong, and you cannot speak to me like that, I am a citizen of this country, my husband works very hard and full time, and we pay our taxes in this country and I can drive whatever car I want if I can afford it. You can't talk to me like that I do not appreciate it.' She didn't stop instead she continued with words like, 'You people are destroying Ireland for us you honestly have to go back to your country'. At that point I told her to go and educate herself, for she didn't know what she was talking about."

Another incident I had was with an old man always

moving round my car repeatedly each time I parked to pick up my kids from school... I walked out and asked him if there was a problem. He answered me and said 'Yes, you are the problem' and before I could say a word, he asked me if I had a driving licence. ... Immediately he pulls out his phone and said he was calling the guards on me. What amazes me was the fact that when he placed the call, he used these words; 'Can you send me a van here, there is a Nigerian lady here who is driving a big car without a licence'. Now I told him 'Firstly I am not from Nigerian, and not that there is anything wrong with me being Nigerian, but I didn't understand what he meant by that...' First, he asked if I had a driving licence and then assumed that I am from Nigeria. It is complete stereotyping."

Despite this, Nobantu still feels a strong sense of safety and security in Cork, and she is happy to be raising her family here, "I have been living amongst the best people. Living here makes me feel so much at home. I come from Kimberley in South Africa and the life there is almost the same as here in Cork. The only difference is that Cork is more secure than Kimberley... My children see Cork as their home because they were all born here, and I see them living here for a very long time. This is their home... I am one of those few migrants who have never had challenges in accessing any help here in Cork or Ireland. Sometimes people don't understand things. The manner of approach sometimes is also a reason why most people get backlashes. When you go to access a service and go there with the entitlement mentality, you are bound to face certain challenges. I am not saying people to go and beg but you should respectfully approach any service you want to access. I always have one thing at the back of my mind each time I approach a service. I remind myself that this is not my country and sometimes, I will have my way and at other times I wouldn't. The government will obviously take care of their own before looking out for foreigners. That is always in my head and that is why I don't feel too disappointed sometimes when I don't get certain things I want. I come from South Africa and the system there is completely different."





3.4 Pastor Dickson Aribasoye

Dickson Aribasoye is a pastor and a member of the Nigerian Community Cork in Ireland, a leading member of the Yoruba Community Group Ireland and a member of the Evangelical Society of Ireland. Ps Dickson Aribasoye, is originally from Nigeria and holds a degree in Theology and Diploma Certificate from Respond College in Community and Social Development studies as well as a Diploma in Security Management and a Diploma in Health Service Supervisory Management

Born and raised into a Christian family in Ekiti State Nigeria, Ps. Aribasoye attended a seminary school. He started his evangelical work at a very early age in a northern state of Nigeria. Ps. Aribasoye served as an Evangelist with the Christ Apostolic Church for many years. The unrest in Northern Nigeria including the rise of the torture, killings, and persecution of Christians by a terrorist organisation led to Ps. Aribasoye fleeing to Ireland with his family in 2000.

“When we got to Ireland, the first thing that happened was that we applied for International Protection. After Dublin, we were transferred to Cork and then the real journey of integration started. Many people in Dublin at the time had seen many black people coming into the country... but it was a completely different scenario with the people of Cork. Integration at the time we got here was very difficult. I started working with different volunteering organisations, providing help to vulnerable people and those in need. I am the first black pastor to have led a church in Cork from the time we arrived in Ireland in the year 2000. I was the first black evangelist to lead the Christ Apostolic Church in Cork Ireland.”

Ps. Aribasoye looks back at that first few years after arriving in Cork as being particular difficult and feeling very excluded from society. “Back in those days, it was not an easy task to even associate with Irish people because they were so scared of black people and migrants in general. They had very little understanding of who we were. When you were walking the streets and meet an old lady, she would scream and immediately cross to the other side of the road.

Very few of us [Black migrants in Cork] had the opportunity to work or be accepted. I was only accepted because I worked with the church. I do evangelism and I do voluntary work in the community. That was the only way I got involved with the community. They started feeling a little comfortable around us. It took a long while before people starting walking alongside us on the streets here in Cork. You could still see fear in people’s eyes and the shock on their faces each time you entered the shop to buy something or just sitting at the park or walking. It was always very traumatising and then we also had to accommodate them because they were not used to seeing [Black] people.”

After receiving an immigration status and leaving direct provision, Ps. Aribasoye had two personal milestones. Firstly, his wife was able to find employment. “We went... looking for a job after

our [residency] papers arrived. My wife was asked if she could do care and although she had no care experience whatsoever, they said if she had taken care of an elderly person and wanted to do the job, she would be given further training. She accepted and became the first black woman to do elderly care work in Cork at the St. Luke’s care home.” He and his family later found a secure and stable home when they were allocated social housing. He describes it as “a day of joy for me and the family. Even though the house was ... isolated, we were very excited to have our own place.”

Ps. Aribasoye personally experienced negative reactions from inability to access paid work to being racially abused on the streets in the early part of the 2000s.

“Some of the challenges we had, or I faced, when we first got here was the fear of the community. They feared us so much that people wouldn’t employ us. At the time we also didn’t have the work permit that the government now gives people [in the international protection system] to work. So, we had a ton of issues but as time went by, things gradually began to change. We could only work after getting our status and most of the jobs we did at the time were mostly voluntary work, but it also helped us to connect with the community and kill the fear that most people had about us.

I have lost count of how many times I got abusive words on the streets. I can’t tell you how many times people would use words like f**k you coward, go back to your country, you are not welcome here, you do not belong here return to your country and so on. The streets were not very safe for us but now I am happy that things are gradually changing compared to then.”

Ps. Aribasoye has been part of creating that positive change in Irish society. An active member of the Nigerian Community and the Yoruba Association in Cork, he is keen to promote inclusivity and engagement amongst young people through cultural and sporting events.

“We started with the Nigerian community group involving every Nigerian but when the population increased over time, people started identifying with their own ethnic groups and that is how we formed the Yoruba community group. I was the first treasurer of the group, and the group’s mandate was to help new migrants from the Yoruba background and Nigerians living in Cork. We supported each other to maintain our culture and to teach our children our way of life as well as introducing the

culture to other African groups and the general Irish community.

We also organised friendly matches between the Irish youths and Nigerian youths which helped a lot of our youths to integrate into the community. It also enabled most of them to make Irish friends with whom they remain friends till this day.

We have been very active in different activities in the city such as the: Open Day for Migrants, Africa Day, St. Patrick's Day, Cultural week, the Nigerian Ibo Yam festival, and other activities, playing rugby, Christmas festivities. The Cork City Council has been very helpful towards migrants' integration because they always make available resources for community initiatives to support ethnic minority groups to work together."

Ps. Aribasoye also acknowledges the advantages he has received living in Cork. "First, Ireland is a very good country and I and my family have benefitted a lot from the government and the general community over time - medical care, education for myself and my children, the Council house. I can travel across the world as an Irish citizen which I am sure I couldn't if I were back home."

However, he would like to see greater participation by migrants in the political process in Ireland and more efforts from the Irish community to become involved in integration initiatives. Although the government has provided some support, he would like to see greater efforts to eradicate racism.

"The Yoruba community played a very active role to mobilize other ethnic minority groups on migrant political participation in Ireland. We were given some funds by the government to carry out this activity. We moved from one county to another mobilising migrants on the importance of migrant political involvement in Ireland.

We still need a lot of community education to eradicate racism within our communities and streets, social integration is very important, we need to see more of Irish people taking part in the Africa Day the same way other migrants participate in the St. Patrick's Day celebration. It is very important for the Irish to see and learn about our cultures the same way we learn the Irish culture."





3.5 Tehmina Kazi

Tehmina Kazi was born and raised in London and her parents originate from Karachi, Pakistan. Tehmina is a human rights professional with 15 years' experience, working with multiple human rights organisations both in the UK and Ireland.

In 2014, Tehmina was based in London but visited Ireland frequently as her first husband was from Dublin. She had wanted to move completely to Ireland, but she also needed to have a job that would help support her family. At the time Tehmina was working as the Director of the British Muslims for Secular Democracy charity in London for more than seven years.

"I wanted to move, live, and work in Ireland, but it was very difficult for me to get a job in my field. I sent in multiple job applications but got none. I had to stay back in London and visit my then-husband on his own trips back to Dublin. After several attempts, in 2016 I finally saw a job advert in Cork as the policy and advocacy coordinator of the Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance (CESCA) which I applied for and fortunately for me, I was accepted."

After her fixed-term contract with CESCA ended in 2018, Tehmina struggled to get a new job in her chosen field. During her first stint in Cork, her first marriage ended in divorce, and she met the man who would become her second husband. She needed to support herself so she decided to return to London where she could easily get a job while she kept searching for other opportunities in Ireland. During her time in London, she found out she was pregnant, and gave birth to the couple's first child in 2019.

"I wasn't comfortable staying in London while my husband lived in Ireland. I needed to reunite my family, so I intensified my job search and finally stumbled on an opportunity with an organisation that was looking for a coordinator for a Travellers' health project, which very much aligned with my field. I immediately applied and got the job. I am happy that I am back in Cork working, with my family living together. When I first saw this job, I knew I needed to work with Traveller Visibility Group (TVG) because Travellers are disproportionately discriminated against, and it has been my lifelong mission to counter racism and discrimination. The Traveller Community in Ireland are particularly discriminated against in the provision of goods and services; I recently completed an Equality Law course with FLAC and INAR which enabled participants to advocate on behalf of those who wish to bring claims to the Workplace Relations Commission."

Tehmina has a deep passion for creative writing and is currently working on her first book. She also loves concerts and enjoys visiting the Cork Opera House with her husband. She also loves traveling and organising events, she particularly enjoyed organising impactful events such as two Equality

Day conferences while she was still working as the coordinator for CESCA.

"I was overwhelmed and pleased with the way the Equality Days went and the turnout for both was exceptional. We had a lot of speakers coming from across Ireland, speaking on issues of human rights and equality, which was interesting. I also had a lot of fun organising Traveller Pride Week in Cork, which was great; it makes me feel really satisfied to know that I was able to showcase different aspects of Traveller culture here."

For Tehmina, Cork has been a welcoming community. She belongs to the Cork Three Faiths Forum and is a member of the board of directors of the Cork Educate Together Secondary School.

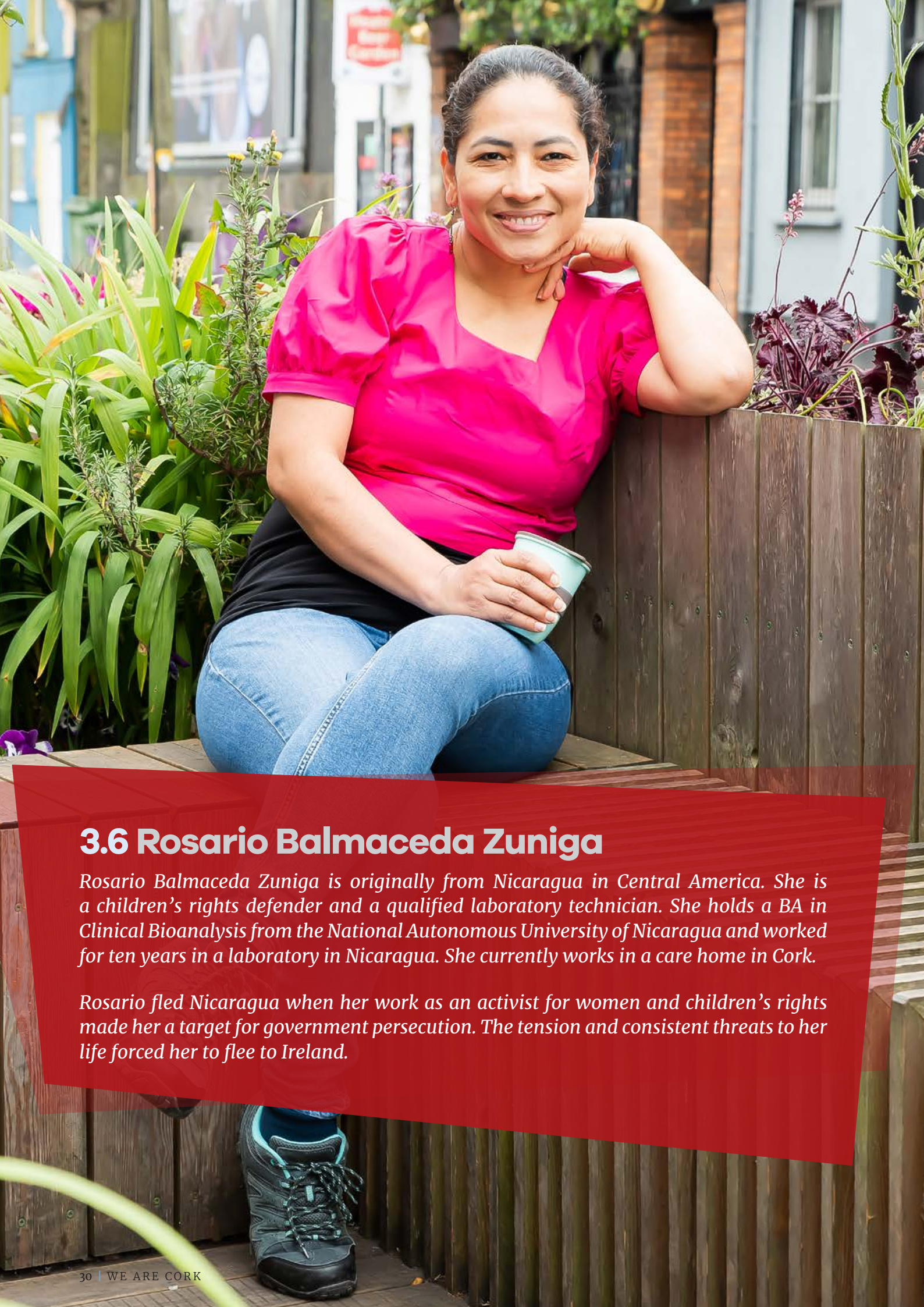
"Cork is a lot of fun. I have taken part in different activities like the annual Culture Night: a brilliant idea. I also love the Lifelong Learning Festival, since I am a big believer in education continuing way beyond college or university. I love living in Cork especially because of its sense of community. The people over the years have managed to retain their sense of community and close-knit family ties. This is something that is uncommon in our modern-day societies. It is also big and cosmopolitan enough that it has attracted people from diverse backgrounds into the city, which makes it unique. I also think Cork is a much better and safer place to raise children than London. My son loves spending time on his dad's dairy farm!"

I remember a day when I first moved to Cork in 2016 and I was going for a mental health event in Wilton, I was supposed to walk there or take a bus. Along the way I got lost and stopped at a post office to ask for directions. I didn't just get directions, but a stranger, an elderly man, who didn't know me, has never met me, was willing not just to direct me, but to drive me right down to the event venue. This is something I will never forget. This level of kindness you wouldn't get from someone in London - even though I wouldn't get into a car with a stranger in London. This is the reason why I appreciate the sense of community here. I have been warmly accepted probably because I am British. If I were born and bred in Pakistan like my parents, I suspect I'd have more barriers to overcome. I say this because of the experiences I have heard from migrants in the community."

For Tehmina, the lack of public transport options in Cork makes it difficult for new communities to integrate.



“One thing I would like to change in Cork would be greater public transport provision. This would be a great thing, especially for mums who struggle with taking their children to school or other clubs. I don’t drive. There are no buses in those rural areas either. I must depend on my husband or father-in-law to drop my son off to the childminder and then drop me off to the nearest train station so I can get into work, which is overwhelming on them and makes me dependent, which I am not used to. I honestly wish there were better bus or transport routes in rural Cork areas that connect different places.”



3.6 Rosario Balmaceda Zuniga

Rosario Balmaceda Zuniga is originally from Nicaragua in Central America. She is a children's rights defender and a qualified laboratory technician. She holds a BA in Clinical Bioanalysis from the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua and worked for ten years in a laboratory in Nicaragua. She currently works in a care home in Cork.

Rosario fled Nicaragua when her work as an activist for women and children's rights made her a target for government persecution. The tension and consistent threats to her life forced her to flee to Ireland.

“I have always been an advocate for change in my community. I grow up in a small community... where women were never really respected, their rights violated, and their voices silenced at every given opportunity. I watched our children be denied their rights to education, and I wasn't happy about it... I was holding secret meetings and when the government heard of these meetings, they started looking for us and we had to run for our lives. I watched so many people persecuted, and others disappeared, while others were locked up in very deplorable situations. I had to flee to Ireland to seek International Protection, to look for a better life. I wanted to find safety and to improve my English. In this way I will be able to properly present the plight of my people to the world.”

Rosario arrived in Ireland in 2019 and sought international protection. On arriving in Ireland, Rosario was met with new challenges as she struggled to settle in, particularly in adjusting to life in direct provision. “I have been living at the [direct provision] centre for almost two years now... One of the major disadvantages is the lack of privacy. One can never truly have their own quiet moment to think through lives and anything else because the others are always doing something, and you cannot stop them from doing it because they are facing the same situation as yourself. One must queue for everything, food, supplies, everything, and it's really frustrating most of the times. You must wait long hours just to have a bath or use the washroom and many other things a grown-up woman would like to do by herself. The advantage is the fact that you live with people who have the same kind of problems like yourself, so you share in each other's pain. Also, it helps me to improve on my English. English is not my first language. I have been studying English, but it helps me to speak with people around me.”

For Rosario, the uncertainty caused by the direct provision system and the difficulties in accessing information and services in Cork adds to the difficulty of integration. “I would like to see changes in the system – for people to be settled faster than what is happening. I have been in the accommodation centre since 2019 and I don't even know what my situation is. I would like to see an end to the direct provision system. I would also like to see Department of Justice have offices here in Cork so that we do not have to travel long distances to answer queries from the International Protection Office. I would also like to see more employment opportunities for migrants. I came to Ireland with a BA and ten years of working experience as a lab technician and yet I am unable to find a job in my field.

When I left [Nicaragua], I left my family behind and a paying job. Taking care of the family that depended on me back home was one of my major challenges. I

needed a job almost immediately, but I couldn't find one because I didn't have the right to work. It was many months before obtaining a work permit and getting a job was not easy from my end. I had ten years of continuous work experience as a laboratory technician, but I could not access any job in my field. I still cannot access any job in my field to survive and support my family, I had to start looking for whatever work that was available. I worked in a community home as a care assistant and housekeeper.”

Integration continues to be challenge and many migrants who travel without families or social support often find it difficult to orientate themselves within new systems and cultures. Rosario's support networks are other Nicaraguans and the Sanctuary Runners of Cork. “I always wanted to go out and relieve myself of the stress in the centre. The first thing I did when I got to Cork was to identify people from Nicaragua. I was lucky to know that we have up to five Nicaraguans living in Cork. We have formed the Latin America community. They have a small association where they meet and share ideas, so I joined, and we are now six in number. In this group, we try to meet and share ideas, help each other with opportunities and share contacts with each other that can help us access different services and organisations in the city for support with our asylum cases. We also share our cultures and speak in our own language which is very important for us to preserve. We share volunteer opportunities and available opportunities. I also love sports, so when I heard of the Sanctuary Runners, I joined without hesitation. They offer the kind of activities I needed to help my mind. These two groups have truly helped me a lot with my integration process in the community, especially the Sanctuary Runners. I also belong to an information group in my school where information on certain opportunities is shared. That has also helped me in my process of integration.”

During her time in Cork, Rosario has noticed some differences between her experience in here and in Dublin. “I really like Cork people, but they are very curious people and want to know everything about your life without saying a thing about themselves. They like to know about others and their cultural practices and even personal things about your life. But I love the fact that if you meet people even in parks, they try to speak with you and that makes me feel more relaxed. I lived in Dublin almost two years. If I compare the people of Dublin and those in Cork, I will say I prefer it here in Cork because Dublin is very busy and hectic, and people don't care about others. Here in Cork, it is small, not too busy and people like to chat and that makes me more relaxed than Dublin. The smallness of Cork makes it easier for me to do many things.”

- 
- take...
 - create compost from our green waste
 - recycle paper waste into insulation
 - use Irish grown where possible
 - increase our deliveries by cargo bike
 - start a community cycle of reusing
 - continue to promote Irish design
 - conserve water & harvest rainwater
 - use our platform to promote...
 - listen to your suggestions
 - drive less
 - keep smiling



3.7 Majo Rivas

Born in Paraguay, Majo Rivas is a migrant and community rights advocate and human rights lawyer. Majo holds a degree in law and an LLM (Master of Laws). Majo became a member of Scouts when she was only 12 and grew to become a member of the Ethics Committee of the World Organisation of the Scout Movement.

“Ireland was never really on my agenda until I met my now husband at an international scout event. We got together and we got married a few years later. I visited Ireland a few times, but it was only after we got married that I moved to Ireland in 2015. Love brought me to Cork and today I say I am from Cork. I have made Ireland my home and I am driven to make it a better place for everyone living in Ireland. I was born in Paraguay, but if anyone asks me ‘where are you from?’ – or even where am I *really* from –, I just say ‘Cork’, this is my home now.”

Majo Rivas has very strong opinions about the human rights of those who are marginalised and has over the years built a successful career advocating for rights of people from ethnic minority background, people with disabilities and advocating for change.

“My background is human rights law and I have been trained in human rights, women’s rights, and sexual reproductive rights. I have been working in these areas, providing support and advice to others on these issues. Here in Ireland, I worked as a Legal Information Officer for Nasc, an advocate for people with disabilities and an information officer working with people from all backgrounds. Now I am back at Nasc, as Community Sponsorship Manager.

Majo is a member of the Cork Cycling Campaign and is involved in cycling advocacy. For her, good cycling and public transport infrastructure are key to the social inclusion of migrants. “Unless you have a driving licence from an EU country or a very short list of non-EU countries, as a migrant (or a returning emigrant) you face many barriers to being able to drive. You cannot convert your driving license and obtain an Irish driver’s licence straight away no matter how many years you have been driving. Before coming to Ireland, I was already driving for 10 years. But to drive in Ireland, I had to go through 12 mandatory driving lessons – which were not cheap! – before I was even allowed to seat a driving test. I found this incredibly frustrating and angering, so it took me years to get my driving licence. Without being able to drive and with a less than ideal public transport system, I found it easier to commute around Cork by bike. I always joke that I cycle because I am lazy and impatient, it is faster than walking and I don’t have to wait for the bus”.

Majo also points out the social inclusion side of transport infrastructure: “So much of our city is designed around cars, and this excludes vast portions of the population. For example, undocumented people cannot access driving licences, and up until very recently asylum seekers

couldn’t either. Children and young people under 18 are not allowed to drive, and some disabilities and medical conditions exclude people from driving. And that is before we even get into how expensive it is to take driving lessons, insurance and just keeping a car roadworthy. Investment in good cycling and public transport is a matter of social justice.”

In 2019, Majo accidentally initiated a campaign that led to traffic lights changes in Cork. “In 2019, while on a train from Dublin, I made a freedom of information request to the Cork City Council to know how many traffic lights didn’t detect bikes. I got a list of 99 traffic lights in Cork didn’t detect people on bikes. Then the pandemic happened, and along with friends from the Cork Cycling Campaign we wrote to Cork City Council. We told them we were in the middle of a pandemic; we are meant to avoid public transport; and there were fewer cars on the road so you could be waiting a while until a car came along to activate the traffic lights. It just didn’t make sense. Through our advocacy, we can now say that Cork City Council sought funding to get at least some of these traffic lights fixed.”

Majo, shared some of her lived experiences in Cork in terms of accessing services and life in general in Cork. “Maybe because I worked supporting migrants, I am aware of the barriers that other migrants face and the privilege I have because my husband is Irish. I have support from amazing friends and family who often answer my many questions about how things work or guide me through processes, because if you didn’t grow up here so many things just don’t make a lot of sense. They introduce me to people and places; for example, unlike many other migrants, I didn’t have a problem getting a GP – I was just taken as a patient where my in-laws go and that was it. So yes, I had access to so many social connections”.

However, it is not only about social connections, Majo also points out to the differences in treatment she perceived: “I can tell I am treated differently. At the Garda Station, when queuing for my immigration card I felt I was treated differently, is it because I have a white Irish man standing next to me? Is it that I speak English fluently and with a Cork accent? I recall applying for a PPS number, and not being asked for proof of my immigration status... then learning that other people were asked for this, even though it shouldn’t be required. We are not all treated the same”.

PPS numbers and access of services for migrants is an issue that Majo feels strongly about. “Just to take something as basic as a PPS number. In order to obtain a PPS number, people are asked to present

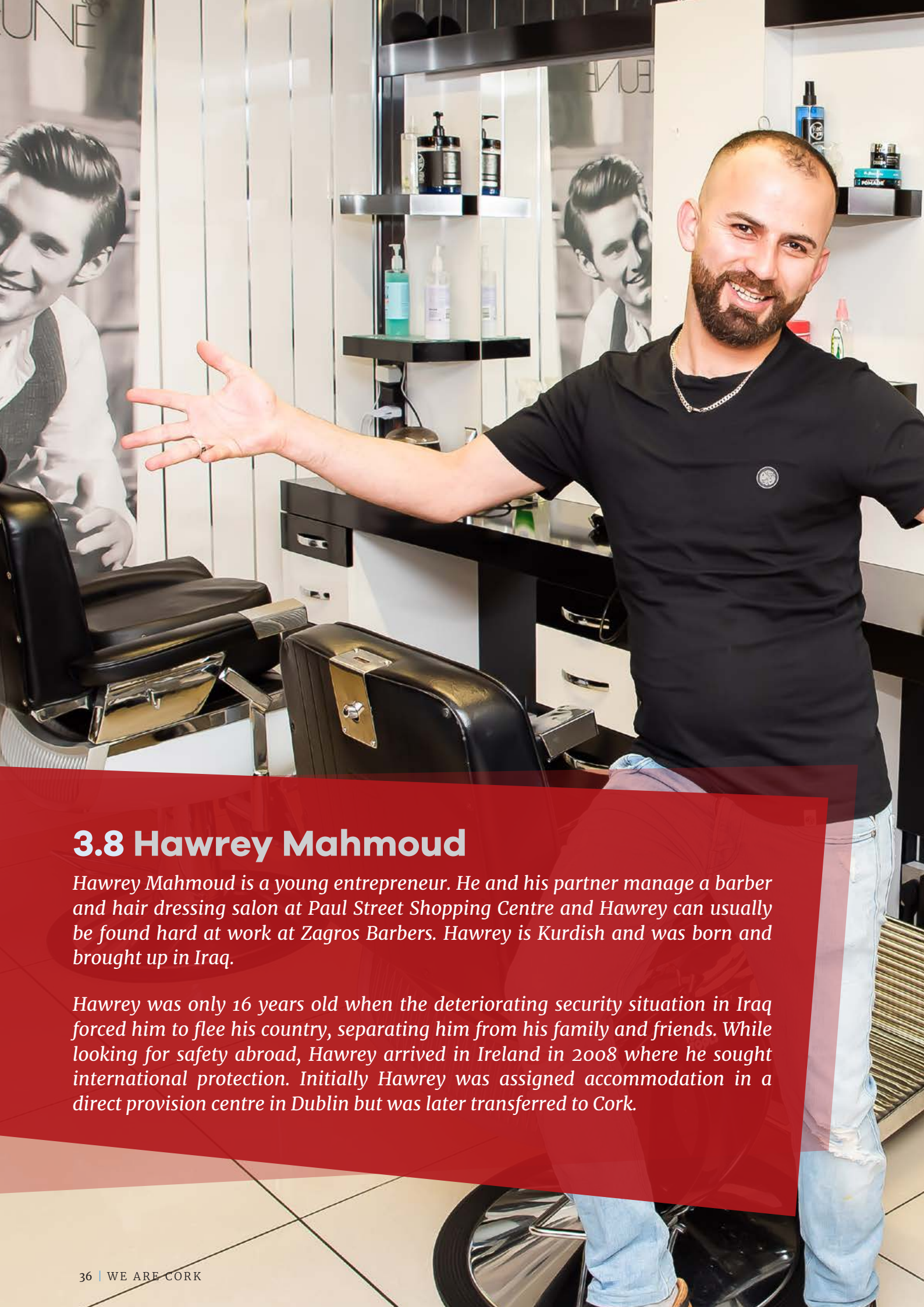
proof of ID, proof of address and a reason why you need a PPS number, but some are asked about their immigration status when this shouldn't come into it. Not being able to get something as basic as a PPS number is a massive institutional barrier which most Irish people probably don't see. Someone who is undocumented may fear applying for a PPS number and that means they can't even access maternity care, abortion services or even register the birth of their child. It makes no sense to me that in a place like Ireland there may be children without birth certificates. In recent years, we've seen massive delays in accessing PPS numbers, which affects all migrants –and Irish people born abroad. Again, you cannot apply for social welfare, housing supports or a GP visit card for a child, not even get your wages if you are working. These are all institutional and structural barriers, but decision makers don't see them and the impact they have on migrants' lives."

On institutional and structural barriers Majo also shared her opinion on the challenges migrants encounter in obtaining well paid and qualified jobs, and her own privilege in accessing employment in her preferred field. "When I first arrived in Ireland, I applied for so many jobs in the first few months,

but got no interviews. Then an unpaid internship in my area came up and I was privileged enough to have my family support me in going for it. This internship then led to a job in the field I qualified in, and I haven't had problems getting jobs after that. Most people, including migrants, don't have the support that would allow them to go for an unpaid internship, they have families to take care of, bills to pay, mouths to feed. I know so many amazing migrants with a wealth of experience and talents, but they just can't seem to get a break in the Irish labour market."

And while issues like cycling infrastructure, PPS numbers or the workplace appear unrelated, Majo keeps going back to human rights: "While people think that human rights are about international treaties or legislation, I always just paraphrase Eleanor Roosevelt... 'Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Places like the immigration queue, the PPS office, the housing department in the Council, the place you work in or even the way you get to those places. If rights don't have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.'"





3.8 Hawrey Mahmoud

Hawrey Mahmoud is a young entrepreneur. He and his partner manage a barber and hair dressing salon at Paul Street Shopping Centre and Hawrey can usually be found hard at work at Zagros Barbers. Hawrey is Kurdish and was born and brought up in Iraq.

Hawrey was only 16 years old when the deteriorating security situation in Iraq forced him to flee his country, separating him from his family and friends. While looking for safety abroad, Hawrey arrived in Ireland in 2008 where he sought international protection. Initially Hawrey was assigned accommodation in a direct provision centre in Dublin but was later transferred to Cork.



“ I was separated from my family by war when I was only 16 years old. I left home, still a minor, in search of safety and protection. My life was destroyed; my education was disrupted because I was only in the secondary school when things got worse. I was separated from my parents, siblings, and friends because of the war. I travelled through very rough routes with many others before reaching the shores of Ireland. The journey was horrendous. I got here in Ireland in 2008. What I wanted the most was safety and security. I felt I was safe, and I was happy about that but each time I think of the ordeal and what my parents might be going through, it often steals away that sense of security and quiet I had in me. We were first moved into a centre in Dublin and after a few months, we were then moved to Glenvera Hotel [a direct provision centre in Cork]. That place became my home for about 8 years. I lived in the direct provision centre for 8 years before obtaining my residency and freedom”

Coming from a completely Kurdish speaking part of the country, Hawrey knew if he were to make Ireland his home, speaking and understanding English was vital. He started attending the free English classes offered at Welcome English for asylum seekers. Acquiring English also opened many opportunities within the community and gave him the confidence to mingle with other people of his age group.

“I was very afraid to even go about freely when I couldn't speak English and that limited my interactions in the community. I was always at home or only hang around those who understood Kurdish. When my English was improved and I could speak freely, I was able to go out and meet with other people and it was a great feeling. While in the direct provision centre, I always go to learn from another Kurdish guy in the city who operated a barber shop. I worked with him and learnt how to barber hair and after some years, I was very good at what I was doing. A few years later, I got my refugee status, and I am now able to manage a barber shop which has been in operation for almost 5 years now.”

Hawrey, while in the direct provision centre had created connections for himself that helped much with his transition. While many may have challenges, especially in accessing different services, Hawrey, believes the connections he made within the direct provision centre have helped him to navigate his way through the various services available for him in Cork. “When I left the centre, I had little challenges getting a house (but) because I was already working with a lot of people while still at the centre, I got a lot of recommendations. After

spending time to learn, I never had any challenges accessing any service here in Cork or in Ireland. If there was ever anything I didn't know, I always call Nasc to ask for advice and they would readily give it to me. Each time I tell someone I have never faced any challenge accessing any service here in Cork or elsewhere, they always look at me surprised, but it is the truth. I am just lucky maybe and besides, Cork is not a very big city, and all the major services are almost around each other."

Hawrey, points to many of the challenges that migrants can face in Ireland. "Transition from the direct provision centre to the community can be very daunting for people especially those that have wasted so many years living in the accommodation. The stigma associated with those living in the direct provision centre has often played a major role in people's integration after direct provision. Aside from the stigma associated with those living in the centre, accommodation has also proven to be a major challenge even though [it's also] a general problem in Ireland, it has proven to be ... harder for migrants to easily access accommodation."

Due to the small number of Iraqis in Cork there isn't a specific community association. "Maybe as times evolves, if more Iraqis come to Cork, we might just form an association but for now, we know ourselves and we chat with each other. The community here is what we have as our community. We benefit from the same things that other Irish people benefit from. When I got here, I was given a good medical attention and ever since then, I have benefited from the free health system, housing support, and the free education I had. These are things I will hardly get in my country free of charge."

Hawrey, now considers Cork to be his home. "I am in Ireland for almost 14 years. I have lived in Cork for all these years, and I must say, Cork is the best place to be. I realised that Cork people are very welcoming, generous, always willing to help and of course love to hear why you came and what brought you to their country. The people are just amazing. I am not afraid to make a mistake with them when speaking because they would normally correct me with love and that is very comforting not like others who would just laugh at you and call you names with no correction. Many want to learn more about your country, your culture, and many other stuffs which in a sense is good because you not only learn their own culture, but they are also ready to learn about our culture. My partner is Irish, and we have been together for five years and she is an amazing person too because she is from Cork."

For Hawrey, the business he manages allows him to integrate with both the Irish and migrant community in Cork. "I truly feel very lucky to be in Cork. The people are very welcoming, and the people are amazing. My work allows me to meet with different kinds of people, migrants and Irish alike and that makes me feel like I am part of the community. We chat, we share ideas on different things happening both in Ireland and around the world. Football lovers talk a lot about football and others just share what they think is sharable and we learn from each other. Each time I talk with these people, I realised I could be myself without trying to please people or work myself to be accepted in the community. We all need each other. It's a give and take situation. To me that is already a community and that is the life people live here in Cork."





3.9 Stella Aigbogun

Stella Aigbogun is an entrepreneur and owner of the business Stella's African Food Shop. Stella is also one of the pioneer founders of Love and Care for the People organisation in Cork and a community leader. She holds a Diploma in Retail Sales and Researching and another Diploma in IT Office, Administration and Design. She is also the proud mother of three children.

Stella arrived in Ireland from Nigeria. She was transferred to Cork after 3 weeks in an initial reception centre in Dublin. Stella found the immigration and international protections frustrating when she first arrived as it required her travel to Dublin regularly and she would like to see some branches of government offices open in Cork. “Most migrants must travel all the way to Dublin to follow up their documents. At times you must travel there maybe four times before you will be attended to. If just one document is missing, you will not be listened to. This is a problem especially because you must return to Cork the same day. It is costly and time consuming.”

The day that Stella finally became an Irish citizen is an important milestone and she has fond memories of the citizenship ceremony. “I will never forget the day I got my papers and finally my Irish passport. It was a special feeling; it felt like I was on the moon. I was very lucky to go for the ceremony. The day was a very hectic one because we had five different sessions, but it was worth it. The minister was very welcoming and gave us words of encouragement. He also welcomed the various ethnic minorities cultures and activities from every nationality. That really gave me hope especially when he [the Minister] said to us, everyone should bring in their talents and let’s explore it together. I said to myself, ‘yes this is what I was waiting to hear. Now we can show you guys what we got from Africa.’ I was truly amazed to say the least.”

Now a business-owner herself, Stella is conscious of the difficulties migrants face in breaking into the Irish labour market. “Some of the challenges I faced were at the very beginning. It was very difficult to integrate, especially getting a job. One ends up doing whatever is available just to pay their bills and eat. This is still a challenge today. I may no longer see it as a challenge personally because I am now self-employed. But for jobseekers out there, it remains a major challenge. Before venturing into business, I had tried on many occasions to get a proper job to no avail. I have never loved working for people, but I needed to start off from somewhere and I was completely disappointed at the rejections. The many rejections further confirmed to me that I needed to self-establish myself. That is how my business was born.

I have always been a business-oriented person, even when I was back [in Nigeria]. When I was settled [in Cork] and realised the opportunities that were available for me, I asked myself why not upskill and get established rather than sit and wait for the government to take care of my needs. I needed to

do something first for myself and then my children. I have always been independent, so I went back to school to better my business skills. After I completed my various certificates, I did a couple of jobs, raised money, then started off my own business – Stella’s African Food. I do love Irish food and I eat it a lot especially because my children love Irish food more than they do African food but as an African, I cannot completely survive without eating some of my delicious African dishes. This is who we are and that is our identity. I knew I wasn’t the only one craving African food in Cork during weekends or at different events. Even though we had at least one or two African shops in Cork, I knew opening another wouldn’t be a competition whatsoever. I did my survey and then started this business and I have been in it for over 10 years now.”

Stella is also a strong advocate for women and children. While in Cork, she immediately connected with the wider Nigerian community and other migrants’ ethnic minorities group to help her integrate properly. There was a strong need to meet and talk with people from her home country.

“When you move to a foreign country, I believe the first thing one should normally do is identify [your] own people and associate with them. Those that have been there before you would give you better advice on how to navigate yourself into the system. It has its good and ugly phases. Some just misorient you while others give you the best advice they can offer or direct you to the right quarters. I made sure to attend different migrants’ events in the city and make contacts. This is how I got interested in the idea presented about Love and Care for People which I didn’t hesitate to align with. It is a joy to be of service to people. I have been a member of Love and Care for People from its inception, and we have done incredible things in the communities especially helping women and children, distributing gifts to the homeless and providing support to newly arrived migrants. We make people smile... That is very fulfilling if you ask me.”

However, there are still some challenges that Stella feels exist, especially for those new to Cork. These include experiences of racism and barriers to institutional supports.

“People are not safe on the streets anymore. This is a general thing but with migrants, they are often intimidated and racially discriminated upon. At times you feel uncomfortable take your kids to certain events because of the looks you will get and how you would be treated. That alone is enough to make you keep your distance. I would prefer to stay

home and have my dignity intact than go somewhere mistreated and undermined.

For Stella, the role of neighbours has been instrumental in helping her feeling of acceptance in the Cork community. “I have made a lot of friends in Cork, and we have had very special moments. For example, for an Irish person to invite you into their home for a cup of tea or coffee or even outside their home, then you should consider yourself lucky and well accepted. In this country, you know you’re accepted when you live in a neighbourhood and everyone loves and appreciates you, invites you for home events and your kids are appreciated, then you should consider yourself very fortunate. I truly feel I am part of Cork. As years go by, I turn to love it more and I integrate more as well. If you get lost or need help in anyway, a normal Cork person will be polite to give you directions even if they don’t know where you are looking, you will normally see them pull out their phones and search the location for you.”

Speaking of her experiences in Cork, Stella points to a particularly memorable incident – “I think the life in Cork is more peaceful than the life in Dublin, I would prefer it any time and any day. Cork people are very peaceful, accommodating, hospitable and they make you feel like home. A stranger in Cork did something for me I would never forget. I was taking a walk in the city with my little daughter in a buggy. I was around Merchant Quays, while trying to climb the steps, I lost control, and my buggy was almost turning over with the child inside and a guy from nowhere rushed and caught the child and even injured himself. He was a real hero. This is someone who didn’t know me from anywhere and when I asked him why he did it, he told me the life of the child was his priority and he didn’t care if he was injured or not. I was in total shock and ever since then, I hold Cork people in very high esteem. If racism is stamped out of Cork, then, this will be the best place to live in Ireland.”



3.10 Fahmeda Naheed

Fahmeda Naheed is the Executive Officer, Graduate Intern for the Diversity for An Garda Síochána, Regional Office, Anglesea Street Cork City. Fahmeda holds multiple degrees including an M.Phil in Asian Studies from University College Cork; a Master's degree in Politics and European History from Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan; an MA in Teacher Education from Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Last year she completed a Certificate in Mental Health in Communities from University College Cork.

Fahmeda grew up in the busy city of Lahore, the capital of the Punjab Province, Pakistan. She had a desire to study in English so when Fahmeda was researching courses abroad, she found University College Cork (UCC), was satisfied that it had a very good international reputation and decided to apply to the M.Phil. programme.

“I grew up in a family where education was most important, and my parents often insisted that we speak English at home. That really helped in improving my English even though I also learnt English in school. From my teens, I knew I loved history. I studied European History and Politics at University. When I found UCC, I was very happy and enrolled for an M.Phil. degree in Asian Studies with focus on ‘Geopolitical study of China factor in Indian foreign policy’. As a teacher, when I got here, the system was completely different, and I needed to register for, and sit the Teaching Council of Ireland exams before my certificate as a teacher could be recognised. I successfully went through that process and can now teach History in Irish secondary schools. However, I decided to diversify and so I went into many things to upskill myself. I did a certificate in Mental health; I also did a certificate in IT studies, and all of these have given me great experience especially working with the communities.”

Fahmeda had only been in Cork for a few months when she started looking for ways to connect with the Pakistani community. Fortunately for her, the Pakistani in Ireland has a huge community network which made it easy for her to quickly link up with others. Even though she loved studying in UCC, living far from family and friends could be quite daunting and lonely at times.

“When I got to Ireland and stayed for some months, I started searching online for Pakistani diaspora living in Ireland. During my search, I realised that the Pakistani community in Ireland has a huge online presence where people could easily connect and link up with each other. We have different platforms through which we connect with each other. I felt very relieved because I had a lot of people around me... We have different professionals in different fields who share ideas and available opportunities. As an individual I help with translation work, conducting information sessions, assisting with any issue highlighting immigration supports and more.”

Fahmeda has had many causes for celebration since coming to Cork. “I have had a lot of special moments in Cork such as when I become a mother. The feeling was different and each time I talk about it, it makes

me smile. It was very special for me, especially living in a different country. When I passed my registration at the Teaching Council of Ireland, when I was graduated at UCC for my M.Phil. degree and when I got my Irish citizenship – these were very special moments for me and they make me feel that I am truly part of Cork. I am chattier now than when I first got here. This is a characteristic of Cork people. From the outside I feel a different person but within me, I completely feel I am Cork.”

Fahmeda has also spent time volunteering to teach other migrants and people living in direct provision centres IT skills. Finding employment is a challenge that Fahmeda herself faced and she is very conscious of the difficulty faced by other migrants. “Some of the challenges encountered as a migrant living in Cork... is the language barrier. Language remains a major challenge towards integration and any other thing in Ireland. Even though I had English before coming to Ireland, when I got here, I found out that the English was completely different and so I had to improve on English skills. There are many who come here with little or no English so you can imagine the challenges they go through just to navigate the system.”

Fahmeda also points to some of the challenges that other migrants, especially women may face in the active participation in their new society. “We also have major issues around childcare which hinder many migrant women to work effectively or go to college/universities and participate in different community activities. The childcare system needs to be improved.”

For Fahmeda there are several other prejudices that continue to make integration difficult. “People will always look at you differently thinking that you come from a country where the education level is very low and would treat you differently. I wanted to challenge those anti-social behaviours from people especially in the north side where I live.... and I promised myself I would prove the few individuals pushing that narrative wrong by excelling in everything I do. When I started having kids, I wanted to do something that will allow me to juggle between both. I diverted and started doing what wasn’t too time consuming for my circumstances at the time... Institutional racism and challenges remain a major problem for migrants and of course for integration as well. These are major challenges that are not talked about in public but when you work with the community daily, you witness and experience them.

As a newcomer and migrant in Ireland, getting a job has never been an easy task. This was my situation

when I first got here. I however didn't allow that to slow me down. I shifted my attention to my studies and made sure I would be very good in everything I did. After many years, I started having opportunities to do many things. I have now represented Ireland in different international fora."

Fahmeda continues to play an active role in supporting integration initiatives in Cork. "I have done many things with different organisations all focused on communities. I worked with the local council to know how local politics works in Cork City. I learned how you can start your political career, how to register as a candidate to run for

election and everything that can help you get fully involved in politics. I was trained on how women can fully participate in politics. I have been using that knowledge to train others. Recently I started working with an Garda Síochána Diversity and Inclusion Unit and I was part of the recruitment campaign for An Garda Síochána to encourage diverse communities to join An Garda Síochána. We also wanted to create a platform where we can discuss the challenges of migrants, especially in the areas of employment, through collaborating with different migrant organisations. Once you work in diversity you work and represent not just people from your home country but every other migrant in the community."





3.11 Jeannett Taku

Jeannett Taku is the CEO and founder of Vision Community Support Services where she works with migrants, linking them into other service providers in Cork City. She has a degree in Social Work and a master's degree in Contemporary Migration and Diaspora Studies from University College Cork.

Jeannett who is originally from Cameroon, first migrated to Ireland in 2002. She enrolled in a course in the Cork College of Commerce in 2004 and was then able to enrol in University College Cork (UCC) in 2005. She joined the New Communities Partnership, a migrant-led organisation, first as a volunteer and later became the Programme Coordinator for the Cork office.

“When I first arrived in Ireland, there was a certain level of internal peace I felt within me – immediately I knew this was the place for me. This feeling helped me to work hard within the community to make it more inclusive and accommodating to all migrants already living in Cork and those coming in. After settling in Cork, I started joining migrant networks and different ethnic minorities groups meeting just to identify myself with my own people... As a migrant, I fully fit in the shoes of any other migrant. When I got here, I immediately realised there were many gaps for migrants accessing information. Many migrants were literally frustrated as to what services to access or what schemes they were entitled to. Settling in a new country is daunting especially if you don’t have anyone giving you advice and directions. It is often a recipe for disaster because you work based on what others say without getting any form of professional help with your problems.

Jeannett’s studies at UCC, which included a three-month student social worker work placement, clearly illustrated to her how, at times, cultural differences can lead to challenges. “While doing my three months’ work placement during my undergraduate studies in social work, I realised that many migrants were constantly in trouble with their kids. Over 80% of children taken into care are migrant children. I realised this was because of cultural differences, new environment and culture, laws and the professionals who were dealing with the children had little or no

understanding of the cultural differences or relate with the migrants. This was a huge challenge, and I knew I needed to step in, in another capacity to provide the necessary support to the migrant women and children from a migrant standpoint. Also, when I started working with migrants, I realised they relate more with me because I understand them and have lived their lives, but it was important to educate them on these changes and how to access more help for themselves and their children.”

Jeannett speaks very positively about Cork and Ireland as a whole. Jeannett is grateful to have benefited from the Irish educational system. “As a migrant, I am grateful to have benefited from the educational system in this country. I have equally benefitted a lot from the health system even though it has its challenges. I have been very fortunate to be surrounded by incredible Irish families. I have lived in three different places in Cork in the last 19 years and in all these places, I have always been fortunate to have amazing neighbours.”

Jeannett loves different activities organised in Cork city including the Jazz Festival, Culture night, St. Patrick’s Day, multicultural day, and more.

“Cork is my home and I love it. With more collective work in the communities, I believe Cork will even be more welcoming to migrants.... In terms of the migrant community, I would love to see that those in the asylum systems are processed quickly enough, open an International Protection office in Cork, give more room to migrants to work white collar jobs rather than the meagre jobs they do. We are very much capable and competent to fit into any sector like any other Irish. We must not be limited in the hospitality sector; we have a lot more to offer the economy than doing cleaning jobs and sales.” a





3.12 Khalid Azrag

Khalid is a body weight fitness trainer and the CEO and founder of Blue Belle Fitness Centre located in Cork City centre.

Originally from Sudan, Khalid arrived in Ireland in 2008 and has lived in Cork since. Khalid has had a lifelong passion for fitness, and this has been the bridge for him, both in making friends and networks in Cork and in setting up his own business. Khalid takes a very positive view of the difficulties he has faced as a migrant to Ireland, seeing each obstacle as a barrier to overcome and an opportunity to learn.

“If you leave your home country to any part of the world, you will face challenges and that is not just because [you are] a migrant. Even if Irish people go to any other part of the world, they would be faced with challenges too. So, I consider anything that comes my way as an opportunity to learn a lesson from.”

After his arrival in Ireland, Khalid saw an enthusiasm for sports and fitness amongst people in Cork. By joining joggers in the mornings or walking in the parks, Khalid started creating his own contacts and making friends. Coming from an Arabic speaking nation, the language barrier was his main challenge to integration, so Khalid immediately enrolled himself in English classes.

“Before coming to Ireland, I was always practicing, running and very active with my body. I have passion for that and when I got here, I already knew what I wanted to do with my life. I didn’t want to start trying to fit into different fields especially because I knew if I invest my time to better my skills, I would do more than what I was already doing. First, I knew I needed to upskill myself, learn English and attend any available studies in fitness.

After I completed my English studies, I immediately enrolled for a course in fitness training and after I completed that, I started working as a volunteer in One Fitness gym in Cork. Years later I become one of the trainers and trained there for eight years. Today I have my own business space, even though we are still in the opening stages. It’s been a journey of resilience and steadfastness. I have always wanted to do this, but I got more time to put everything in place during the pandemic. Most gyms were closed at the time, and I thought to myself, why not use this time to get yourself a place for your own business? I knew what I wanted from the outset, and I went for it which is something most people find difficult to put together.”

When it comes to fitness, Khalid takes his role as a trainer very seriously.

“Even though I have always had interest in fitness, I still needed to know how the human body works, how the human body functions, what needs to be touched or not, everything that had to do with protecting the body from breaking while in the gym and how to take care of them if they do break. If you want people to entrust their bodies to you to train it, you should be able to know how the body works and functions. I went to a fitness instruction school

where I was taught what I needed to know and after graduation, I become more confident to work with people. I love to help people get back to shape, keep fit, feel confident with themselves.”

Growing up in Sudan, Khalid experienced uncertainty and insecurity from a young age and he now feels that Cork is truly his home. “Cork is my home; at least this is the way I feel. As the years go by, I get more involved into the Irish life and that makes me more at home than I first got here. People treat me differently now compared to when I first got here. I work mostly with Irish people in the community, that has changed a lot of their perspective about migrants, and we all have mutual respect... When you feel comfortable in another place the same way you would normally feel when you are back in your home country, then you would very much call that place your home. I feel very secure here and I feel very welcome and accepted which is amazing.

I have a lot of Irish people who have accepted me as one of their own even though I am Muslim. They invite me to celebrate Christmas with them and any other events they celebrate. This has given me a place in the community, and I do not take this for granted. I have a lot of respect for Ann, one of my friends and neighbours. We call her ‘Granny Ann’ because she is a mother to all of us. I go to them as though I am going home, and they have no restrictions for me. Just like my baby mama’s family, they are an incredible family, they have respect for me, they have accepted me as part of their family, and I am very grateful for that. There is also Liam who is friend and a business owner and treats me like a brother. He is amazing and we do a lot of things together.

When I walk in the streets, I can be greeted by over 15 people in the space of two minutes and this tells you that these are my people, they have love for me, they respect me the same way I respect them, and I feel truly at home here in Cork.

What I am building here [in my business] is a community. I call it ‘a community of friends’, people respecting each other’s talent. What I value the most is talent. If you have the talent and what it takes to set up a shop within the complex, I welcome you with open arms. Here, there is nothing like colour, race, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, or any other thing. That doesn’t count to me at all. All we see here are people, talents, and willingness to grow or make a change. That is all what I look for. We are now a family. It is a multi-community of business.”





3.13 Roos Demol

Roos Demol is an entrepreneur, a community leader, the founder of International Community Dynamics (t/a Recruit Refugees Ireland), and creator of the podcast 'Migrants in Ireland'.

Originally from Belgium, Roos had hoped to pursue journalism or sociology, but her mother persuaded her to become a nurse. Her first job as a nurse was in the Prison Hospital in Belgium. Roos made the move to Cork in 1998 when her husband was offered a job in Ireland. In the years since her arrival in Ireland, Roos has become well known as a passionate advocate for refugee and asylum seekers.

“When my husband got the job in Ireland, I knew I had to move with him to Ireland. I had never in my life imagined that I would live in Ireland. Moving to a new country is never an easy task. We arrived in Ireland in 1998, I was also heavily pregnant with my third child at the time. Things in Ireland were completely different from what I thought they would be. Being in the EU, I thought we would have almost the same services, but it wasn't the case. The childcare support system was non-existent in 1998, and education was also different. As I was seven months pregnant at the time, my husband was the only one working to support the family.”

Following the birth of her baby, Roos started looking for means to engage with the local community. “My integration wasn't very difficult because, you know, Irish people like asking questions and love to know things about people's lives, so integrating was very easy for me. I joined the church choir; I became the chairperson of the Parent Teacher Association and I later the Cork Opera Choir because of my passion for singing. It was truly a great experience that made me become even more involved with the community.”

As a migrant, Roos understood the challenges of living in a different country and sought to share those experiences. Initially Roos started a blog called ‘A Fleming in Ireland’ about her own experience but after a few years, she no longer wanted to write about herself. She was eager to continue exploring the experience of migration in Ireland so when she met Moira O' Brien of Irish Radio International and was invited to host a show for and about migrants in Ireland, she quickly agreed. The radio show, called ‘The New Rebels’ led Roos to meet and become friends with many people living in direct provision. Roos began helping with finding people clothes and trying to link people in with sport or cultural activity as well as using her own platforms to advocate for the rights of people in direct provision.

“In 2014, there was a big protest at Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre, so I went there to give my support. From there, I never looked back on issues of DP [direct provision] centres. I started helping the people in the centres as much as I could. I spoke continuously and extensively about the situation in the centres in my podcast and I gained a lot of community sympathy. A lot of people started donating clothes items and other support to those in the centre. I had an agreement with Mary O'Donoghue from Bandon, who owned a charity shop, that she would give me some of the surplus clothes to give to people in Direct Provision. I would

do that once or twice a month and would lay out the clothes as if it was a market. I gained a lot of friends in the centre then. I was also known in the local press and the radio stations, so once when one manager tried to stop me from bringing clothes, I contacted the press, and it went immediately live on 96FM and in the Echo.”

Roos found herself spending an increasing amount of time in direct provisions across Cork City, and as a musician herself, was keen to support people who wanted to play. However few people were able to bring instruments with them to Ireland and buying their own instruments was completely out of reach for people receiving only €38.80 per week. Roos began using her own contacts as well as her extensive social media following to try to source donations of musical instruments. This work led her, together with Norbert Nkengurutse, a refugee from Burundi to form a musical group called ‘Citadel’ which was made up of people living in direct provision. Citadel has been invited to perform across Ireland.

Another relationship led to the creation of a cricket team, KRAC 11. Gradually the International Community Dynamics Organisation was formed, to work to support people from across Ireland and often their families in African countries.

When the government introduced the right to work for some people in the international protection process, Roos noticed some significant challenges. “The first thing I noticed was that most employers were not aware of the right to work granted to international protection applicants. I started up with more advocacy through my podcast, interviews with other radio stations in Cork and webinars, where I explained the right to work to employers.”

Roos noticed that it was very difficult for people to find work – especially decent jobs and was determined to create a resource to link international protection applicants to employers. This led to the creation of ‘Recruit Refugees Ireland’, a recruitment database for employers to source talent and skills needed in their organisations. The website, www.recruitrefugees.ie, hosts job opportunities for employers actively seeking to recruit employees who are refugees or who are in direct provision.

Roos' experience has given her perspective on the barriers faced by people in direct provision in applying for jobs. “CV development has also been a challenge to most people and that also has hindered many from obtaining certain jobs in their fields. Most migrants lose their confidence especially

those who spent so many years sitting in the direct provision [centre]. Staying out of job for three, five or six years, steals away one's confidence once they get back out there."

Roos notes, "After some time working as recruiter, I understood that Intercultural dialogue has to be part of the recruitment process. It is very important that the job requirements and expectations are explained in clear language, so new recruits know exactly what is expected from them before they start working. For example, one of our recruits was hired as a chef and he ended up only doing the duties of a kitchen porter. Of course, he was very disappointed. It seemed afterwards that the real issue was one of intercultural misunderstanding. So we now offer workshops on intercultural dialogue and being trauma-informed for employers, managers, and supervisors."

Turning to the issues that create barriers to integration for migrants and international protection applicants Roos highlights some of the barriers to integration including language barriers and larger structural barriers. "Language has always been a major challenge to many migrants' integration, many people also are very sceptical of people accepting migrants into the communities. Institutional barriers are also a major hindrance to effective integration for most migrants and the list continues."

In terms of her experience in Cork, Roos says she does feel a part of the city but is aware not everyone is welcomed equally. "A few years after I got to Ireland, I was diagnosed with cancer and while in the treatment process, I realised that the nurses there were amazing. That made me feel very special and I consider those days very special moments in my life. I feel I am part of Cork, in March last year I was called 'Cork Person of the Month'. Since then, I feel like I have become a part of Cork. However, I am careful about Cork being a welcoming city for migrants. Not everyone in the city is as welcoming. There is a lot of showcasing about people welcoming migrants in Cork but, that is not always the case, because we still see a lot of stereotyping, people being discriminated against because of their skin colour or how they speak and how they dress. For example, I was once told by someone to go back to my poxy country and my son was called a Belgium b*****d once in school which was very shocking to me. These are things people don't like to accept, but it is important that they do reflect on this. We all need to check our biases."

Roos points to the example of Galway, which she sees as a more welcoming city for migrants. "The Galway Integration Strategy was very inclusive and each time you talk to the people [in Galway], you discover something different about events and other supports for migrants."






TRAOLACH
MACSUIBHNE
1879-1920
TEACHTA Dála
AíRDMHÉARA

20 MÁRTA-
25 DÚNGAIBH
FÓMHAIR 1920

3.14 Cilly Tshamano Ndou

Cilly Tshamano Ndou, is originally from South Africa. She is a health care worker and an award-winning community volunteer.

Growing up in Pretoria in South Africa, Cilly, experienced life in a diverse neighbourhood from a very young age. Cilly arrived in Ireland in 2000 and has lived in Cork City since then. Shortly after Cilly's arrival in Ireland, she began engaging with community volunteer groups to provide support to the needy.



“I started looking for an organisation to join and when Ini, the Founder of Love and Care for the People, brought the idea to us while we were in the asylum system, I embraced it and gave it my best. The mandate was to help the needy on the streets and to extend the help back home in Africa. We did a lot of work in the communities by sharing clothes and food items to people in the streets, identifying people in needs and reaching out to them. It was during our work in the community with Love and Care for the People that I won the award for ‘Best Community Volunteer’ presented by minister David Stanton during the 2018 Cultural Day event in Midleton. I was very happy to be recognised even though I was only contributing my own quota to economic development and community growth. My children were very proud of me and ever since then, many people who never knew me still stop and greet me on the streets. This event changed my thoughts because it came with a different kind of attachment to the community.”

Cilly is also very active amongst the South African Community networks in Ireland. “I belong to the South African Community here in Cork and we keep close contact with other South Africans in other parts of the country. We use our gathering to help newcomers integrate, meet with fellow South African and help provide them with available opportunities and information where needed. We often come together to share our cultural dishes, practice our dance just to keep the spirit of South Africa going, not just for us, but for our children who are born in this country to learn the culture we have back home.”

Cilly's volunteer work helped to provide an escape from life in direct provision. She spoke about the stigma, particularly for her children, of living in a direct provision centre and how the family's lives have changed since they were granted status and were able to move out.

“I stayed in the direct provision centre for months before receiving a permission to remain in Ireland.

My experience out of direct provision is something completely different. I feel that my children are now free and the stigma they got when they were at the centre is no longer there. My children used to feel very uncomfortable interacting with other kids in their schools or playing around with them because of the things that they have been told for living in a direct provision centre. Leaving the centre has truly given my children freedom and I cannot be any happier.”

Despite the stigma Cilly and her children faced while living in direct provision, she is upbeat about life in Cork. “Cork has always been a very welcoming city for migrants because Cork people are lovely people. Cork people are very easy going. Even if you don’t know anyone, someone passing by you will usually say ‘hello’ or even stop to have a chat with you. Another thing about most Cork people is that many of them are very curious and love to learn about different cultures, where you come from and what life is like in your own home country whereas in places like Dublin, people don’t even have the time to speak to you or care to know what is going on with your life.

I have made a lot of Irish friends with whom we celebrate different events with their families. Activities such as the Africa Day celebration, St. Patrick’s Day, The Jazz Festival, and the Cork City Marathon in September are activities I love to watch and participate in.”

Cilly is a health care assistant by profession, an area that was under a significant strain during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cilly feared for the safety of her children while she worked with patients that may have had Covid-19. “Working in this field, I know I owe it to my clients to help them through the most difficult times. When the pandemic broke out,

I knew I owed it a duty to assist those I have been working with. It was the scariest thing to do but I owed it to them and to myself. So yes, I am one of the frontline workers who served my country during the peak of Covid-19. The outbreak of the pandemic was unexpected by all and so it came with many trials. It was the most trying period for everyone but most especially for us working in the health sector. Many of us worked very long shifts because most people were sick and would not make it to work... Truth be told, it was the scariest period for me and people who had kids at home. I also contracted Covid-19 during the period, and it spread to my children at home. It was the darkest time of our lives.”

There have been many benefits for Cilly during her time in Cork, but she is also aware of many challenges that still face migrants, particularly with regards to employment. “I have benefited a lot from the government especially because where I come from, the government doesn’t give this much support to migrants. My children and I have benefited in education. When I got here, I went back to school and got a certificate in Health Care and that is what enabled me to get a job. The health system to is something I have benefited from. I also have benefited from government housing. I just got my Council house, and I am very happy about it... Even though there are many things I love about Cork, I also have few things I truly wish could be changed. The lack of employment for migrants in Cork is a huge challenge. It’s so frustrating and has destroyed so many homes because people leave to look for jobs in the UK. Also, migrants suffer from underpaid jobs despite their qualifications. It is either they get jobs that are below their qualifications and skills, or they don’t get at all and that pushes them to look elsewhere. I would love to see more opportunities for migrants living in Cork in terms of employment. There should be equal opportunities for all irrespective of who they are and their skin colour.”





3.15 Dr. Mutahira Lone

Dr. Mutahira Lone is originally from Pakistan. She is a qualified dentist by profession. She is now a lecturer and a program coordinator in University College Cork. Mutahira was a dentist in Pakistan and taught dental students in the Jinnah Medical and Dental College, Karachi for many years before moving to Ireland with her husband who was studying for his master's degree in University College Cork (UCC).

“Ireland was never in my plans. I was already a successful dentist and taught dentistry students in the university back home so moving to another country wasn't exactly in my plans, but love happened. My husband was already in Ireland studying in UCC and when we eventually got married, I had to move with him to Ireland.

I came into Cork in 2004 and when we got here, there weren't as many immigrants back as we have today. One of the key advantages I had as a Pakistani migrant woman when I got to Ireland was that I had English from the outset because I studied in a private Catholic school in Pakistan. My English was very good, and most people were very surprised each time they heard me speak because most people they had met from my country or different places always had a language barrier...”

When Mutahira moved to Cork as a dentist, her priority was to navigate her way through the medical/dental institutions in Ireland. “When I first got to Cork, my first thought was how to navigate my way through the system as a dentist. I needed to do my professional dentistry exams and find a niche in the academic and educational sector. First, I knew I had to register as a dentist, so I immediately registered for the Dental Registration Exam from the Dental Council of Ireland after which I got the membership exam from the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland. Over the past few years, I decided to do a Master's in Dental Public Health followed by, a PHD in Anatomy in UCC and a Master's in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, again in UCC. I did all these degrees to keep upskilling myself constantly because the world is changing very fast and that is how I had an effortless integrated journey into Irish communities.”

Mutahira now works at UCC and has made many friends and connections through the years. She also finds Cork a friendly and welcoming place to raise a family. “Immediately when I got here, I found out that the people in Cork are very friendly, welcoming, and helpful in the broad sense of these words. I speak not just from my own point of view but also from the point of view of most people I have worked and interacted with. They share the same thoughts and express the same views. Each time you meet someone on the street and ask for directions, Cork people will go out of their way to give you directions and when you meet people on the streets, they stop and greet you, especially those you've had an earlier encounter with. This is something that I value and appreciate—true Cork love!

The art exhibitions that often take at Fitzgerald Park are one of the many things I love in Cork, I enjoy the music festival, the St. Patrick's Day Parade and I love traveling to different places in Ireland. I also love meeting up with friends, colleagues, and family for time out. I have learned to have fun in all my kids' activities and walks in parks with friends. These are very refreshing activities that give me room to think.

Cork is now a cosmopolitan city filled with different people from across the globe. It's becoming the fastest growing city in Ireland with different migrants with different skills to offer. We have a variety of migrants with different challenges depending on what brought them into Ireland. For example, I wear a head scarf and I have never once faced any form of resentment from my community or from work environment but that does not mean others haven't encountered certain challenges.”

The Pakistani community in Cork has also played an important role for Mutahira since moving to Ireland. “I met an incredible Pakistani community, and they welcomed me with open arms. We encourage and motivate each other which has also been a driving force behind my progression. The Pakistani community in Ireland is a huge community and here in Cork we also have a fast-growing community. I am part of the leadership, and we do a lot of work to help with integration and to give back to the community. For instance, here in Cork, our community meets often just to support each other emotionally and to know what is happening in people's lives to ascertain the kind of help, as a community, we can offer the individual. Another example, if someone has a new baby, everybody will make food and drop it over to the person's place for at least a month just to support the person not to stress up after childbearing. Also, if someone were to have a death in the family, we come together and help as much as we can and many more examples of community supporting each other. [In] the month of Ramadan; we bring whatever we have as a community not just Pakistanis but all the Muslims in Cork, we come together at the mosque to break our fast. Our children learn from these practices and after Ramadan, we also come together as a community where everyone brings a dish, and we all share and celebrate together. We also associate with other ethnic minority groups where possible to learn and share ideas.”

As a Muslim migrant woman, Mutahira knew she would have to make some changes that would help in her integration process, but she also strove to maintain a sense of her own cultural identity. “Firstly, as a migrant we all need to adapt to the new life we find in Ireland. I also want state clearly

that when I talk of adapting, it does not mean to toss away one's identity and adopt a new one to be accepted. No, not at all! Adaptation for me is when you keep your values and identity but also include social and cultural experiences of your new home and city. A lot of people do tell me that I have picked up the Cork accent and it makes integration even easier for me. My colleagues see me more like one of them and that is the process of integration in the UCC community. When I first came to Cork, I was the only migrant in the [housing] estate. That was way back in 2004 and now we have over ten migrant families from different parts of the world. There was some isolation since I was alone, but I had incredible neighbours to help me and welcome me and for me that is something that makes Cork different from other places in Ireland."

For Mutahira, life in Ireland has brought an important quality of life, though she is conscious this is not the same for all. "I have access to health care,

I have a very good quality of life, I have a fabulous job, I have a healthy fabulous family. When I had my babies, I had access to a fantastic health support. These are not things anyone can take for granted. My children were born and raised here in Cork, and they had a good health support system. Each time when we visit the family in Pakistan, the children will always be like 'when are we going back home'? After many years in Cork, I realised that everything worked very smoothly for me compared to others. I have access to all the help I need, and I get direct access to the GP which is not the same now because I have people who have complaint that they have not been able to register with a GP because most of them are not accepting new clients. Some may argue that Cork is not a welcoming city for migrants, but I see Cork to be a welcoming city for migrants especially international students. I say this from experience as I have spoken to many students. I am a Cork person (and am proud of this) and it is my home too."





3.16 Cecilia Gamez

Cecilia Gamez, originally from Mexico City, is a co-founder of the Mexican Community in Cork. She volunteers on different projects, and acts as pro bono Director for Programas Educativos Interculturales, an intercultural exchange, not-for-profit organisation in Mexico.



Cecilia always had a desire to travel and explore other countries and cultures outside of her own. After returning from a trip to the United States, she took up teaching English and started volunteering with an exchange programme. Being active in the exchange programme arena introduced her to her future husband, an Irish man, and it gave her the opportunity to move to Ireland in 2004.

Moving to Ireland full-time presented challenges. Despite being a qualified teacher in Mexico, Cecilia found it difficult to get a job in that field. She also discovered that there was very little understanding of Mexico or Mexican culture amongst people in Cork and no visible Mexican community presence.

“A lot of people had a very bad impression about Mexico. People associated Mexico with drugs and violence, and I took it up to educate people on our culture, our traditions, the food, the history, and the many good features of Mexicans. I decided I wouldn’t rest until I changed the narrative. Each time someone invited me for an event or party, I tried to promote a positive image of my country.”

Battling homesickness herself, Cecilia became a point of contact for anyone coming from Mexico. What started out as chats about Mexico over coffee or at work functions grew into something much bigger and resulted in Cecilia and friends founding the Mexican Community Group in Cork.

“There was the need to connect with someone who spoke your own language. I don’t just mean Spanish but your own cultural language. At times it was just for fun and to talk about certain things like why there weren’t coffee shops open till late, or why Irish people couldn’t hug as we do... Differences just made us laugh. We also needed to look after each other and shared experiences on how to access various service providers to obtain documents like PPS Numbers, GNIB registration, to secure safe accommodation or to health resources. Now the community has changed. The long-established members of the community have become a support for the new ones coming in. If they have issues with paperwork, or if they need to go to a doctor and don’t feel confident in English, or they need to pick someone up from the hospital they know that there is someone they can contact to help them. As we gather to celebrate our traditions and party, we are also there on dark moments. That is the community we have built for the Mexicans coming to Cork.”

After 21 years in Cork, Cecilia feels like she belongs. She’s comfortable in balancing her identities both a

Cork woman and a very proud Mexican woman. She talks enthusiastically about the place she now calls home, “There are a lot of things I truly like about this city. I love the vibrant festivals held here: music, plastic arts, multicultural celebrations. However, I think multicultural festivals should include more of the Irish community. It’s usually just different migrants’ communities enjoying ourselves; to really achieve full immersion we need more Irish to get involved. My first experience volunteering for the city was in the Cork Film festival where I learned a lot. I love St. Patrick’s Day parade too, I used to enjoy it as spectator but now it is more exciting when I am dancing with the rest of the Community. It’s our way to thank the city for its warm welcome. I just like it when I walk into the English Market, and someone addresses you, ‘What can I get you girl?’ a phrase that sounds sweet and strange at the same time. It feels truly amazing and enchanting to see the change of the city over the years. Today I see people of different ethnic backgrounds in their numbers on the streets unlike before, I now see more flowers blossoming in the city, more people enjoying green areas, and it feels good.”

Although Cecilia’s own experience has been positive in Ireland, helped she believes both by her husband being Irish and by her friendship with a close-knit group of neighbours, she has experienced few incidents of racism, but she is aware that others experience racism on a much more regular basis. Cecilia also says that she is also aware that there can be a difference in how migrants are treated depending on their reason for coming to Cork and people coming here for work or for love have a very different experience to those seeking international protection.

She recalls a situation one afternoon while walking into the city with her husband. Cecilia’s husband was approached by a lady asking for spare change and on politely refusing her request, the lady responded with a slur against Cecilia. Cecilia remembers the words clearly, “You don’t have any coins for me, yet you are spending all your money on this ‘black’ woman”.

“My first reaction was to laugh and replied: well, I’m brown, not black. My husband on the other hand was furious and was ready to call the Gardai for what she had said, to him, it was racist. Where I come from most of us look this way. I look at my skin and I see that I am brown, so I asked my husband not to pay any attention to it. In Mexico, we have mostly social differences rather than racial differences. Each time I talk about that incident, I laugh, but it opened my eyes to see the way people can be treated differently because of their colour.”

For Cecilia, a real moment of belonging came during the Covid-19 restrictions: “The most fantastic thing I’ll never forget happened last year; in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions we couldn’t celebrate our Independence Day, a date that is very important for us in Mexico. I contacted City Hall and they kindly agreed to raise the Mexican flag in honour of the 200th anniversary of the end of our Independence war. I immediately summoned everyone in the Community to meet at the City Hall gate. The plan was to be there for about 20 minutes only, to take some photos and then move away. It was a special moment for us all, and we spent more than an hour there. To see the Mexican flag flying over City Hall left me almost in tears, I was like – we are finally part of the map of Cork.”





3.17 Miriam Shauti Counter

Miriam Shauti Counter is from Johannesburg in South Africa. Miriam is currently studying Health Care at University College Cork. She is also a wife and a mother of two children. She has a passion for community service and helping those in need.

Miriam and her family found themselves living in Ireland by complete chance. “Coming to Ireland was truly by chance. South Africa is known for its many xenophobic attacks on foreigners way back in the 90s. However, the 2008 attack was different because people got killed and then it escalated in 2015. The 2015 attack was far worse than the previous ones because people at that time [pre-2015] were more interested in looting than killing. Subsequent attacks became bloodier and that is when we knew we must move. My husband was a prime target because he was a foreigner and foreigners with businesses were targeted and killed. We decided [to leave] and moved to Ireland – at least that was the first country we thought of. When we arrived in Ireland in 2015, we were very fortunate to meet a very kind couple that allowed us to live with them for a while. One day we heard there was a street march for all refugees in Dublin and we decided to attend and that is how we finally went to the IPO (International Protection Office) and asked for international Protection. We were sent to a first reception centre and after three days we were moved to Cork. My husband and I were very grateful that we had a roof over our heads and enough food to eat for us and our little baby.”

Although Miriam found an initial relief in feeling herself safe in Ireland, this was short-lived as soon after her transfer to a direct provision centre in Cork, she fell seriously ill. Miriam describes “growing weaker and weaker” and making her way to the reception of the direct provision centre and asking for an ambulance to be called. “The receptionist called the manager and placed the phone on loudspeaker and what the manager said in the hearing of us all I will never forget till I die. She said to the receptionist, ‘that woman must fall down dead before I will waste my time to call an ambulance for her.’ We all shouted, and my husband was very furious and didn’t know if he should curse her or what. The other couple, with whom we travelled together from Dublin, heard what she said, and they immediately went in and brought out some money and called the taxi for us. At that time, we had no money on us, the little we had we had spent in in Dublin during the days we lived at a friend’s place, and we were completely useless to ourselves at that time. I was rushed to the hospital and immediately a first check was done on me, I was immediately sent to the Intensive Care Unit and the doctor told my husband that if he had wasted anymore time, I would never have made it. I had a blood infusion and ever since then, I meet with my doctor every three months for my injections and other check-ups. That was the first time in my life I had so many tests conducted on me almost simultaneously. I was

in the hospital for three weeks before I was released to return. Instead of apologising and admitting that what she [the centre manager] said was wrong, she kept trying to twist it and said she didn’t mean it like that. I decided not to insult her or do anything but one thing I told her was to avoid me and never to mess with me again. ‘You said very hurtful things to me, I will forgive you but any time I see your face I will always remind me of those hurtful words you use on me even in my dying moments’. I will never wish, even my worst enemy, those words that manager used on me.”

Overall, Miriam has found Cork to be a welcoming city. “I have had amazing friends in Cork and Cork people are the most amazing people one can ever asked for. They are very welcoming and always ready to help you even if they don’t know you. If you meet an average Cork person on the street and ask for help, you would be surprised how they would respond as though they knew you from somewhere before. Also Cork people like to know more about where we come from. I can’t tell you how many times I had to talk about the xenophobic attacks in South Africa or to confirm one or two things they read or saw on the news about the attacks in South Africa. Over the years, I have built a strong relationship with many Irish people in the community and that has really helped me with my integration process. When you get yourself active in the community while you are still in Direct Provision centre as a migrant, community integration becomes very easy because the same people you worked with while in the centre are the same you meet in the community. I would say Cork is a very welcoming city to migrants. I wear a headcover and not once have I been insulted unlike other places where people complain about stuff like that. I might be wrong because other women are complaining but as an individual, I have never experienced such a treatment.”

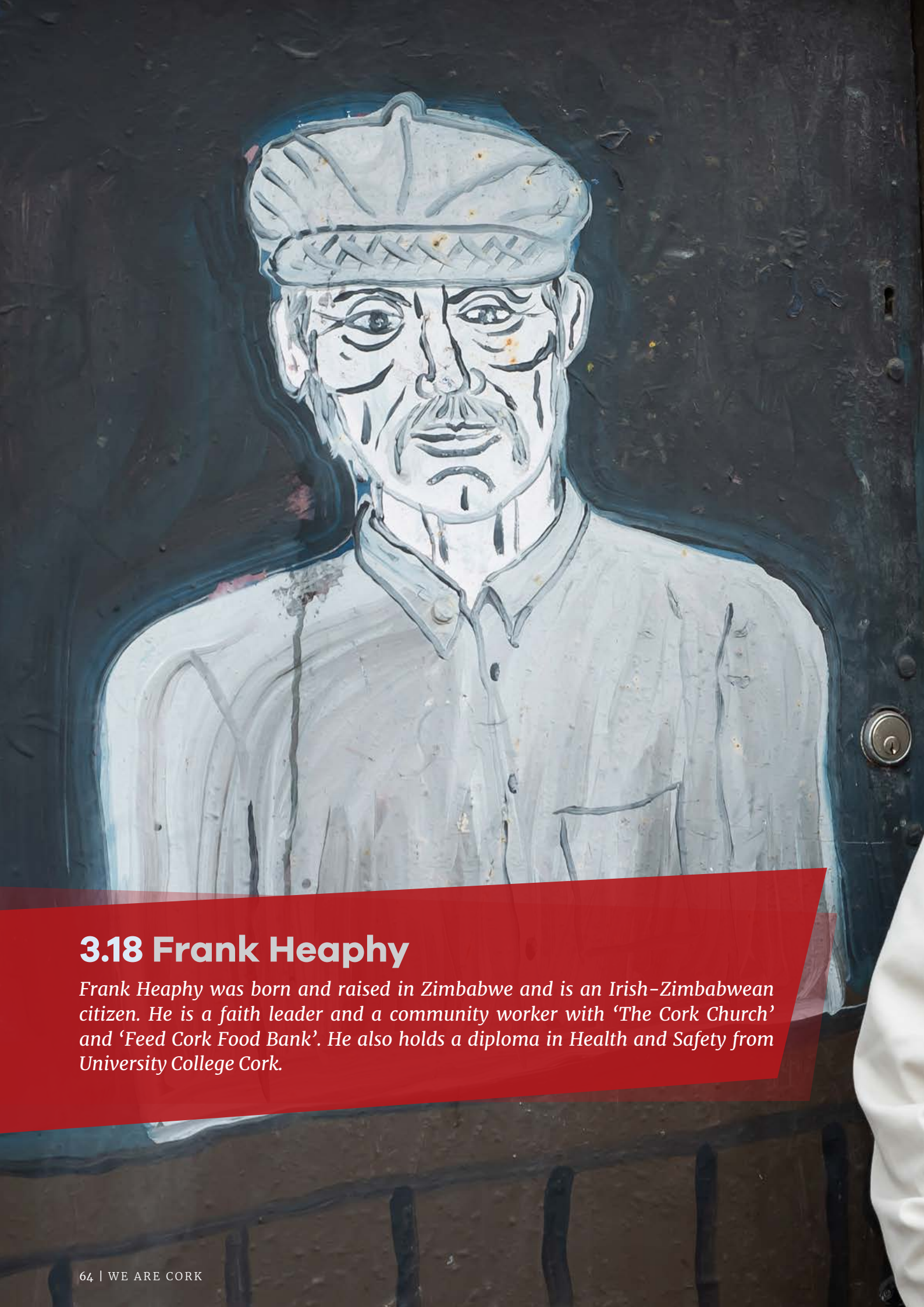
Miriam has also found opportunities to share community experiences with other migrants and with the Irish community. Groups such as the Cork Migrant Centre “Mothers and Toddlers Women Group” have allowed Miriam to meet other mothers and migrant women and share experiences. Cultural events in Cork have also made it easier to connect with different communities. “Meeting Irish people and making friends with them is very special because you feel accepted and welcome. Meeting people from different parts of the world is itself an experience and I cherish them. For fun activities in Cork, I have always loved St. Patrick’s Day, I always travel from Midleton to attend the one in Cork city, I love the colours, the activities and the Halloween, Africa Day, and cultural week. The only restriction that prevents

me sometimes to attend the African day is because it happens in the Holy Month of Ramadan.”

Miriam also added that as a migrant, she and her family have benefited a lot from the health and education systems in Ireland. “As a migrant, I have benefitted not just from the system but from the community. I have gained my freedom as a migrant and that is something I must be grateful for. Even though by the nature of our being we all have as a

right to freedom, not everyone enjoys the right of freedom and right now, I enjoy that right and I couldn’t be any more thankful. I also have benefited from the health system and educational system. The system allows you to further your education and offers many opportunities to better yourself.”





3.18 Frank Heaphy

Frank Heaphy was born and raised in Zimbabwe and is an Irish-Zimbabwean citizen. He is a faith leader and a community worker with 'The Cork Church' and 'Feed Cork Food Bank'. He also holds a diploma in Health and Safety from University College Cork.



“My dad by nature was an adventurer. He spent most of his life traveling different parts of the world. I was born in Zimbabwe, where we stayed until I was about 11 or 12 years old when we moved to South Africa. I did my Junior School in Zimbabwe and when we moved to South Africa, I went ahead and did my High School Leaving Certificate there. Many years later we moved to Lesotho where I met and married my wife Jacki, and we had our son Shane. We settled in Lesotho for many years until late 1998 when there was unrest and many things, including the economy, got destroyed. At that point, I knew we had to move and restart our lives elsewhere. At that juncture, I had two opportunities either to look for a job in South Africa or move to Ireland. Instinctively, I knew it wouldn't be long before the same thing happened in South Africa and so, I decided to move to Ireland instead.”

Frank arrived in Ireland in 2001 and moved straight to Cork. In Cork, Frank secured employment and his wife Jacki and son Shane joined him in Ireland in 2002. Frank worked in the meat sector until he later decided to further his education.

“My background is in meat and butchering, and I did a Diploma in Health and Safety at University College Cork. I was working in the Health and Safety sector for many years before the Covid-19 pandemic breakout. I did a lot of consultancy work with different organisations where I offered Manual Handling Training and other health and safety services. When the pandemic happened, many companies were less busy, and I decided to go back to meat and butchering. I seem to be loving it even more and have no plans of leaving it again. I will continue to offer training and services to different companies where needed, but I love being here.”

Frank and his family have been active members of the Cork Church and he serves as a deacon, child protection officer and a long-time member of the Feed Cork foodbank which is an initiative sponsored by Cork Church to fight food poverty and provide for the needy. “These individuals [that we help] don't necessarily have to be Christians and we give to all in the same quantity and quality. We partner with a lot of charities in Cork that assist people with food and homelessness. Through my involvement in this initiative over the years, I have worked and interacted with countless migrants from different continents of the world. The church is usually the first place for people to meet. We welcome new people regularly in the church and we help to link them up with members of their communities who are already in the county, and we work with them

to build relationship with Christ and with whatever brought them to Cork.”

Through his community work, Frank has also seen the importance of providing support and information to those who have just moved to Ireland. “We are always a linking point to many, and we provide as much help as possible to the newly arrived. We also have professionals in different fields in our church and we help to link them up for advice and support where necessary. Through my experience living in Ireland, I know the stress of moving to a new country. I always advise people based on my own experience even though we have different experiences. I do not give them professional advice in areas I have no knowledge of, I work with them to build their spiritual lives while the professionals do their part. I have lived in different places, and it was never easy integrating properly even though I often moved with family. However, I didn't face many challenges because I identified myself with the church and it became very easy for me to integrate.”

For Frank, his paternal connection means that he has a deep attachment to Cork and he has seen the city grow and change since he first arrived in 2001. “When I moved to Cork, I met very friendly people. Not saying other parts of Ireland are not friendly but Cork is a lovely city. There is plenty for everyone to do aside from bars, restaurants, and cinemas. When I got here, I identified myself with people of like minds and spirit. We have different churches in the city, higher [education] institutions and we have a whole lot of social activities taking place in Cork which means everyone can blend once they identify themselves with what they really love to do. Cork is quite a huge diverse city now compared to when we first got here 21 years ago. Aside from the fact that Cork people are very friendly people, I also have a sentimental attachment to Cork since my dad came from Cork.”

Frank also points out some of the other benefits of being based in Cork. “Aside from being safe in Cork, there are many other benefits I have obtained living here in Cork. I have built relationships with people across the world. If I travel to different parts of the world, I am sure to meet with people with whom I have worked with or associated with through the church. We also have educational opportunities, a lot of opportunities for advancement and that is something that everyone can benefit from. The proximity to Europe is an advantage and you can easily travel to any place in Europe without stress.”



3.19 Dr. Naomi Masheti

Dr. Naomi Masheti is originally from Kenya and arrived in Ireland in 2000 in search of adventure and new beginnings. After arriving in Ireland, Naomi settled in Cork where she lives with her husband and three children. As Programme Coordinator of the Cork Migrant Centre, Naomi coordinates and run multiple migrant-centric projects with young adults, asylum seekers, women, mothers, and toddlers as well as the general migrant and refugee community in Cork.

In Kenya, Naomi had been involved in humanitarian assistance work, especially working with refugees from Sudan and Uganda with the International Committee of the Red Cross. When Naomi finally got to Ireland, her humanitarian work experience helped shape her interest in furthering a career in this field. Working with those fleeing conflict, Naomi noticed a high demand for mental health supports and therapeutic sessions which increased her interest to pursue a Master's in Clinical Psychology.

"I had a dream of pursuing a master's degree in Clinical Psychology but due to being a mother and having to move from Cork to either Galway or Dublin I had to decide to switch. This was a challenge for me, so I had to switch to something else but also something very close to this. My motivation for my studies is, I would say, personal experiences. My personal experiences motivated me to venture into psychology."

Motivated by a desire to understand and bridge the gap between Western psychology and non-Western Psychology (from Africa and Asia etc) Naomi completed her BA, MA and ultimately her PhD in Psychology in University College Cork, Ireland. Her PhD research explores lived experiences of African migrant children in Ireland, as constructed by the interaction of the child with people around him/her (family, neighbourhoods, schools, migration institutions and peer culture). She also focused on their psychosocial wellbeing, access to support services and factors that influence their choices.

Naomi loves for Cork but has a special fondness for Ballincollig where she has lived for the past 22 years. "I allow the positive things I have heard and seen about Ireland to serve as a driving factor for my new adventure. I had part of my family in Ireland and that also motivated me. When I settled in Cork, I immediately fell in love with Ballincollig because it's a combination of a country and a city at the same time which is a true reflection of my home country Kenya. It was small village but now it's a big town and it continues to grow. It feels special to be part of the community because you know your local postman, you know your neighbours. For instance, my neighbour bakes cake for my children's birthday and at Christmas, my neighbours often knock at my door just to say 'hello'. You look through your window and you see your neighbour. This is what makes Ballincollig a special place because it makes you feel part of the community and you have been accepted and loved. This is the lifestyle we practice back at home."

For Naomi this strong community connection was

most apparent in an incident when her son went to a friend's house without letting her know. "I called the school [when he didn't come home] but there was no one there to answer because they had closed and were long gone. All my neighbours were alarmed at the news, especially because it was long past the normal closing time for all the schools. The babysitter was out looking for him and the neighbours knew. My whole estate came out and started looking for my son. ...They were ready to call the Gardaí if he did not come back at that time. After placing many calls across his friends' homes, one of his friends' parents answered in an incredibly cheerful voice, 'Yes he is here with us, he came back with my son from school.' One could feel the relief from everyone's faces and voices after that call. That incident made me feel the love of those [neighbours] across me, I belong to this community, I felt that sense of acceptance and empathy from the people around me and I will never forget that incident."

For the last 22 years, Naomi has worked closely with her community and neighbours to make Cork a better and more welcoming place for her children, migrants already living in Cork and children from migrant backgrounds. Alongside her community development work, Naomi also lectures in Psychology on a part-time at UCC. For the last three years Cork Migrant Centre (CMC) has worked in collaboration with UCC school of Applied Psychology in an engaged community research project whereby the Community Psychology Masters students come together with the Cork Migrant Centre for a Friday morning group at Nano Nagle Place. At CMC the students learn craftsmanship from the expertise of the coffee morning women while the women benefit from the expertise in research on the impact of crafts on mental health.

Having lived in Cork for so long, Naomi has had to make a conscious effort to keep her Kenyan accent. "I have made a deliberate effort not to pick up any [of the] Cork accent. I have felt in terms of my identity the only thing about me Naomi I can keep that is me, 'Naomi from Kenya', is my Kenyan accent. I preserve it with everything I have." However, one thing that Naomi has fully adopted is a love of a local Cork delicacy. "If there is anything I like unapologetically in Cork it is the spicy beef. I can eat the spicy beef from January to December."

Through her work, Naomi has heard many stories of how barriers to health care such as accessibility of GPs, unfamiliarity with the medical system in Ireland, lack of access to interpreters during medical consultation as well as instances of racism have impacted migrants. These stories inspired Naomi

to write multiple academic articles including, “The race for equality is never-ending” in which she captured how the death of George Floyd provoked people in Ireland to talk openly about racism and discrimination, and “Race and Ethnicity shouldn’t matter in maternity care- but they do” in which she also explored the moving stories of migrant and ethnic minority women who suffer discrimination in maternity care, with sometimes fatal consequences. Naomi’s work focuses strongly on racism and discrimination in government institutions, local communities and schools.

“When you are a person of colour living in the west, the issue of race and ethnicity is always there. You live

it, you read it, you see it, you think it and you feel it. You can read something on the street, and it triggers it, you hear something on the radio it triggers it, you see certain adverts on TV they trigger it. This is the reality. If you walk into any school in this country, you will see ‘Zero tolerance for bullying’ when you enter most offices, you see ‘Zero tolerance for bullying’ but there is nowhere I have gone to that I see ‘Zero tolerance to racism and discrimination’ This is something we must be extremely aggressive about.... discrimination in schools, we should all be angry with mothers being discriminated against in the hospitals. I think we are not doing enough in Ireland.”





3.20 Dr. Lekha Menon Margassery

Dr. Lekha Menon is originally from Thrissur, Kerala, India but was born and brought up in Kovai, Tamilnadu, India. She is a Technical Officer at the School of Microbiology in University College Cork (UCC) and the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Ambassador of the School of Microbiology. She is also the President of the Indian Alumni community in UCC, the founder of Aatma India dance group and a leading member of the Indian Community Support Group in Cork which was set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by the Ambassador of India to Ireland.

Lekha first arrived in Ireland to visit her husband who had found employment at UCC. After an initial stay of six months in Ireland, Lekha returned to India. “Finally, in 2008, I moved to join my husband in Cork and to pursue doctoral studies at UCC. It was not easy for me to get an opportunity especially being a non-EU [citizen]. I had to knock at every door within the department of Biochemistry and Microbiology and eventually there was an opportunity. I applied and got accepted. When the opportunity came, I said to myself ‘this is it’ and I took it especially because it is related to my field, and I love marine biotechnology. When I set out to study my bachelor’s degree in Biochemistry back in India, I did it because I wanted to be part of those who serve lives through science or discovering new things. After my masters’ studies, I took a break to gain experience and in course of that, my zeal for new knowledge grew by the day. Identifying drugs from bacteria and trying to discover something new that will be of help and make a difference in the world has always been my motivation. After a couple of postdoctoral research contracts, today I work as a Technical Officer at the school of Microbiology at UCC.”

While in Ireland, Lekha noticed significant cultural difference in almost everything as compared to India. “First of all, Cork is an amazing place to live. I feel very welcome since arriving in Cork. When I first got here, I was very worried who I would talk to but to my amazement, when I walk the streets, people randomly just say ‘Hello’ to me and that is very strange because it wouldn’t happen in India. In the span of two years, I made a few acquaintances who asked about my wellbeing and there was really no age difference with whom you speak... Just the sense of freedom to express oneself makes me feel alive each time I am here in Cork. For instance, in India, you address your lecturer as ‘Sir’ but here in Ireland, it is completely different, I address them by their first names. The first day I entered my lab and was asked to introduce myself, I got up and addressed my Postdoctoral Researcher as ‘Sir’ and he said to me, ‘Oh no! you really do not have to address me sir, just call me by my first name.’ I found that very strange and I kept wondering about it and even had to explain the incident to my husband and he smiled at it because he was living in Ireland before me and wasn’t surprised anymore like I was.”

Not long after Lekha settled in Cork, she searched for opportunities to link up with her community after noticing the absence of the Indian ethnic minority group in most migrants’ events in the city. In her spare time, Lekha got involved in community work, including fund raising events for other groups.

She noticed the absence of Indians in these social functions and decided to do something about it.

“When I noticed that people are very welcoming and willing to learn, I decided to build a platform for people who are passionate about dance. Being a Bharatanatyam dancer since I was 4 years old, I noticed there was no Indian dance group in Cork... and so I decided to create a platform to bring them together. This is how the Aatma India dance troupe in Cork was formed. This group also helped bring together the Indian community in Cork and we have performed in different cultural events. The Cork City Council knows about our existence, and we can see a lot of things changing in Cork that were not there before. Through this dance group and my involvement in other community events, I have made many friends from different backgrounds. I have friends from different communities such as Irish, Spanish, Mexican etc., and we know each other very much.”

For Lekha, local cultural events allow for opportunities to celebrate the diversity in Cork “I have my Cork families with whom we go on vacation together and we do different activities together as a family. I also enjoy activities like the Africa Day, St. Patrick’s Day, and Culture Night.”

In 2019, Lekha participated as an independent candidate for the 2019 local elections in Cork.

“My interest in politics was born in Ireland. I had no political interest whatsoever when I was in India. What motivated me was when I attended the ‘Migrant political participation in elections in Ireland’ workshop which I attended in the City hall. I learned so much from there and I didn’t even know that a non-Irish could vote and even a migrant could stand as a local councillor in Ireland. After being in Ireland for so long, I didn’t know that a migrant could vote or even stand for local election and that is because the knowledge was not there. I did it because I wanted the migrant community to know that they could vote and also that they could be candidates. Some Indian students and I set up a stand at UCC campus just educating migrants that they have a right to vote and that made a lot of migrants to register and vote during that election period. This was a very profound moment for me, and to many of our migrant youths who maybe had dreams of leading political offices in Ireland but didn’t know they could do it. It was truly a special experience for me. When I registered myself for the 2019 local elections, the migrant community accepted me and some of them said things like, ‘We have never been asked what we think or what we want, people just



come and drop their flyers telling us what they want to do and not care to listen to what we think or want.’ The 2019 elections laid the foundation for my political career especially because I didn’t expect the number of votes I got being an independent candidate and running for the first time. The outcome was mind-blowing for me, and I knew at that moment that migrants also want to be represented by their own kind – by someone who looks and speak like them and someone who understand what it means to be a migrant and what see what they see daily.”

Lekha shared some of the challenges she encountered as a first-time candidate and a migrant, in a local election. “The first challenge I had was being an independent candidate. It was my first time and I had to do everything by myself, canvassing and campaigning and everything. The other challenge I faced was the fact that many people already identified themselves with one political party or another and they kept asking me why I wanted them to vote for me.”

For Lekha, access to housing and public amenities are issues that she advocates strongly for.

“I wish Cork could build halls for hosting events of different communities at affordable prices aside from halls in Cork City Hall. Homeless issues should be properly addressed, and issues of public toilets. It’s very important to have public toilets. Public shelters are also the need of the hour.”



3.21 Rosa Chauque

Rosa Chaque is a professional hair stylist and a business owner originally from Mozambique. Her hair salon Rosa-Rosa is located on Shandon Street in Cork City.

Rosa arrived in Ireland in 2004. She fled an eruption of violence in Mozambique and had a harrowing experience trying to get to safety. “We were moving from one place to another seeking security. At first, my family and I were moving in a group but later it became important that we separated in case something bad happened and killed us all. My other family members were moved to one group and I to another. Finally, we got here in Ireland. After few weeks in Dublin, we were moved to Cork and since then I have lived in Cork. I honestly do not know how I found myself here in Ireland. It was not in my plan to be here in Ireland. I was just running for my life and finally found myself here and I am glad to be here.”

From a very early age Rosa wanted to be a hair stylist. Her mother had her own hair salon and Rosa would rush home from school so she could help with hair styling and make-up. “I had so much passion for hairstyling and paid more attention to it than going to school. No matter what my mom did to send me away, I would go to my aunt’s [salon] if she wouldn’t allow me in her shop.”

Growing up, Rosa’s parents who both spoke Portuguese and French, encouraged Rosa and her siblings to study English and to speak English at home. However almost all the customers who came to the hair salons spoke in French or Portuguese. Rosa remembers, “Very few people spoke English and it was seen as a foreign language”. However, as soon as Rosa settled into life in a direct provision centre in Cork, she began attending English classes again.

Rosa lived for several years in Kinsale Road Accommodation Centre before she finally got a positive decision on her case and was able to leave. Unfortunately, after leaving the direct provision centre, she found herself in an abusive relationship. The seven years she spent in that relationship were extremely painful for her. She faced real difficulties in finding support to leave the relationship

“When I left the asylum centre, I moved in with my partner but for seven years I could no longer function well or work with the people I was helping while in the direct provision centre. I was in an abusive relationship, where I was restricted for seven years. I sought government assistance, but I wasn’t given the kind of support I was supposed to receive so I finally left the relationship.

I felt in love with Cork the very time I was sent here. The only problem... I have with Cork is the way my domestic violence case was handled. I faced domestic

violence for seven years and I was never taken seriously. I went through multiple depressions and instead of receiving professional help as one would expect, I ended up receiving support from friends. The government never took me seriously and to date, I still feel angry each time I think of what I went through and how the government neglected my case. It wasn’t until I left that relationship that I started up my own business.”

Rosa is quick to say that she has also received support from the Irish state in other ways. “I have benefited from the government especially when it comes to my children and their education and medical assistance. That is something I will always be grateful for. If I had the mind to further my education, I would have benefited from that too, but I knew already I wanted to set up my own business. I have a roof over my head and that is something I have benefited from the government. It wasn’t easy at first, but it finally happened, and I am grateful for that”

Once free of the relationship, Rosa began planning to set up her own salon and Rosa-Rosa hair salon on Shandon Street Cork was born. “At Rosa-Rosa, we do a lot of things. Anything that has to do with the hair and body. We fix nails, we do make-up, do anything [with] hair. We sell hair extensions, designer dresses and bags, African designer dresses and more.”

For Rosa, her passion for her work has provided her with opportunities for deeper community integration. “In all the places I have lived in Cork, I made great friends. Only a few never really liked me but most of them liked me. Cork people are very hospitable and friendly once they get to know you better. Cork is my home, and I can’t imagine living elsewhere in Ireland. I have made many business contacts in Cork, and I wouldn’t give that up by trying to move to a different part of the country. Those that hated me ended up liking me because there was one thing we did in common and that is ‘hair’. As a hairstylist, I meet and make friends daily. The nature of my business requires that I smile and make people feel comfortable and welcomed. I love to chat, and salons are places where people chat and say all sort of things. I am naturally a very friendly person and once they come close to me, they realised I am a lovely person, so they stay. Through my work, I have been able to better my English skills. I have also been able to help many young migrants who have a dream to start their own business. For those whose passion is [to work] in this sector, I always open my space for them to showcase what they can do. I give them the opportunity to shine and if they are good, I keep them... The more I interact with people, the more I learn and that is something I am very grateful about.

My children now have a lot of Irish friends especially because they were born here but also because most parents bring their kids to me to do their hair and they in turn to create that connection. My children only know Cork as their home because they were all born here, and this is where they call home.”

Rosa also expressed disappointment with the kind of racist incidences she has face in her day-to-day activities in Cork. “Cork is a beautiful place no doubt, but we still have a lot of issues with racism. I have been insulted on many occasions on the street by teenagers and old people alike. I was once told by an elderly woman to go back to my country, that I do not belong here. At times I feel uncomfortable with myself when I am walking on the street because of what people would say to me.”

For Rosa, the opportunity to take part in different cultural activities in the city have proven important to promote within the community.

“I always take my children to watch the St. Patrick’s Day parade. I have never missed it since I got to Ireland. I also love the cultural week and the Africa Day celebration. I always do different colourful hairstyle for people during the culture week, St. Patrick’s Day and more. Most Irish people like to do their hair to reflect this day and during the cultural week it happens the same. I love the Jazz Festival week.”





3.22 Joanna Dukkipati

Joanna Dukkipati was born in Mumbai, in India. She is the founder of the media platform 'Good Day Cork' and co-creator of the 'Think, Speak, Do' community events which have been running in Cork for over six years.

Joanna Dukkipati was in her teens when she started developing an interest in volunteering. After working for many charities in India, Joanna longed to expand her skills and volunteer abroad and took the opportunity to travel to Zimbabwe in the early 2000s to volunteer as an English tutor at a local school for six months. After completing her postgraduate studies, Joanna worked with a PR agency in Mumbai but soon made the decision to volunteer again. In 2008, Joanna travelled to Mozambique as a volunteer and through her voluntary work met with the Irish charity SERVE. She then successfully applied to volunteer with SERVE in Belfast. Joanna arrived in Belfast in 2010 and then met her husband through her work. In the last ten years, Joanna has returned to volunteer in both Zimbabwe and Mozambique with the small, local training centres.

In 2018, in Cork Joanna began a magazine called 'Good Day News' to celebrate the human spirit. The magazine highlighted the many ways that people overcome their challenges to achieve success. After a year of publishing four issues, Covid-19 hit, and the print magazine became a digital space to amplify marginalised voices and today it's called 'Good Day Cork'. Joanna started using social media more so she could connect with other migrant organisations, participate in every event that presented itself and take any opportunity that would help her meet with others, access their needs, and provide support.

"I realised that marginalised communities don't have a space to speak up and speak out. I wanted to build this space and use my skills to gather the voices. 'Good Day Cork' is a media platform which amplifies unrepresented voices and helps to change the narrative on minority communities in Cork. Also, I realised that there is a gap between communities and so my friend Eilis Dillon & I launched 'Think Speak Do' Community Events six years ago. We designed events to meet the goals of a group and facilitated meaningful discussions. Today, we focus on facilitation only and call ourselves Think Speak Do Community Engagement"

Joanna highlights that the numerous languages spoken in Cork are not heard or even acknowledged as being part of the mainstream culture in Cork. And so, she began multilingual prose and poetry gatherings in Cork called 'Many Tongues of Cork'. This aligns with the goals of 'Good Day Cork' which is to amplify marginalised voices. Since starting these gatherings, Joanna points out, "It has been a remarkable journey for the 'Many Tongues' spaces....it began as a mark of rebellion because we wanted to claim space. It's important to hear from

different cultures through languages so that we may evolve and become a city free of discrimination. We've been invited by the Winter Warmer festival and also the Cork City Libraries to host pop-ups of 'Many Tongues of Cork'. This implies one thing - the different languages and cultures are slowly [being] accepted as a part of Cork."

Joanna has had both positive and negative experiences living in Cork. "Cork is a very small place compared to Mumbai where I come from. Working in the communities and with communities has given me room to interact with different cultures and people. There are of course those who make you feel unwelcome but there are also others who truly appreciate you being here and what you have to offer." Having lived in different places in Cork, Joanna realised people in different parts of Cork behave quite differently even though they are all part of the one city. "I have lived in two different places in Cork. First on Blarney Street and now in Douglas. Even though these places are both in Cork, the community life in both places is completely different. I have just been fortunate and probably well accepted to an extent because I am married to an Irish man from Cork. This has often given me protection compared to others and the stories I hear daily. My neighbours in Douglas are very welcoming and friendly people... When you come from a place like Mumbai with such a busy pace, then you would need a very long time to adjust to the slow pace in Cork."

Despite having good moments in Cork with her family, Joanna has also been a victim of unpleasant situations while going about her daily activities.

"One day, I was in the city with my then four-year-old son like any other mum and son would be. We got to the bus stop after a long day, and he began crying either because he didn't want to sit with me or simply being naughty. Where I come from, we train kids at a very young age to be able to do things for themselves or be responsible. In India, one can comfortably send a five-year-old kid to carry out a task. There was my son crying and because I knew he knew exactly what to do in a bus stop which is how to stay off the road and stand in the bus stop, I went and sat down behind the bus stop waiting for him to join me after trying multiple times to get him to sit down. Even though I was seated a bit away, my eyes were closely fixed on him. A man standing by kept telling me to go get my son and another woman joined in and they both started threatening me that if I do not call my son to sit down, they were going to call the Garda on me. I told the guy I can see him, and I am watching him from where I am sitting. No matter what I said, he wouldn't listen but kept



shouting at me and threatening he was going to call the Gardai. Immediately my son noticed what was happening, he rushed up to me and held me by my leg and then we both sat back down waiting for the bus. Another lady who witnessed the entire incident, walked up to me, and offered me a drink of water. She comforted me because she said, “You did well to have stood up for yourself. He had no right to do what he did. You did nothing wrong; I saw that you were closely watching your son.” This incident left Joanna quite shaken for days, though she found consolation in the words of the lady who walked up to her to offer kindness.

Ultimately, Joanna believes the common goal of integration of all communities in Cork will help provide a positive outcome for everyone. “I first came to Cork for a job, but love has since kept me in Cork and Ireland. There are many others who are here because of different reasons. Some fled from wars in their countries, others came as professionals or skilled workers, others as students or through marriage/civil partnership. Whatever brought us all here doesn’t really matter to me, all that matters is that we have all made Ireland our home and we continue to work towards its improvement and better conditions for migrants and others.”



3.23 Br. Kevin Mascarenhas

Br. Kevin Mascarenhas was born in Karachi, Pakistan. He became a Canadian citizen after serving with the Presentation Brothers in Canada. He is a community leader with over 25 years of experience of community-led initiatives and holds a diploma in Community Development. Kevin is the founder and CEO of the Integration and Support Unit (ISU) Ministry. Kevin is one of the leaders in the Presentation Brothers congregation which has a presence around the world.

Kevin's work with the Presentation Brothers has taken him around the world, always with an emphasis on working in the community. Kevin worked with youth communities in England, returned to Canada for a few years, was posted to the West Indies and finally came to Ireland 22 years ago.

"When I joined the Presentation Brothers, I knew that I would have no permanent home. We are called to serve. I have travelled to many different places in the world, and I cannot with certainty say that Ireland would be my last home to work. I try to make every place I go a home and build as much connections as possible. Our mission is to impact lives and if you achieve that in any country you are sent to work, then you can conveniently call it your home... I liked the fact that it [Ireland] was small which means it will be easier to navigate and work. I first lived and worked in Dublin for five years. In those five years, I worked with migrants, asylum seekers, young people and people suffering from homelessness. After five years, my organisation asked me to move to Waterford. I moved to Waterford, and it was in Waterford that I founded the ministry called 'The Integration and Support Unit'. I had three staff members working with me and over 30 volunteers working under me. The ISU ran English classes for migrants and people whose first language was not English. It ran information and support sessions, training for migrants, classes for young people who had issues in schools and enrolment and many other programs. I coordinated and ran these projects for 14 years and we created a lot of impact in the communities.

During my time in Waterford, our work in the community was very visible because Waterford is a very small place. A few years after living and working there, I was asked to join the board of the 'Places of Sanctuary' which is the overall board of the City of Sanctuary Movement. Places of Sanctuary is a place where we make people feel welcome. We also do this with schools with a movement called 'The Schools of Sanctuary'. We have a good number of them already across the country and there are many schools signing up for the Schools of Sanctuary. It is important that people feel accepted and welcome in school. This also enable them study freely and conveniently. It is very important to make people feel accepted, feel they are all equal, and welcomed.

We have also started Universities of Sanctuary with over 10 universities in the country including University College Cork, Trinity College, University of Limerick and more. Each year, 3 to 7 scholarships

are awarded to deserving students in the asylum process and refugees. The scholarship covers their tuition fees."

When Kevin was asked to move to Cork City and to take up a leadership position, he worked on building the Sanctuary Movement in Cork. "Before moving to Cork, I decided it would be a great idea to form a City of Sanctuary Movement in Cork. So, when I arrived, I held consultations meetings with the Cork City Council, Nasc Ireland, Cork Migrant Centre and many other migrant organisations where I presented the idea, and the movement was born in Cork. Ever since then, I continue to be part of the Sanctuary Movement and continue to work in a volunteer capacity with the City of Sanctuary Movement in Cork, while I remain on the Board [of Directors] of Places of Sanctuary."

Serving as a Presentation Brother, Kevin's experience may differ compared to others who have made Cork their home. "I live in Blarney Street and have made it my home for the last five years. As a brother, we are not allowed to get married. We live as a community and that forms our family. I however have siblings, nieces and nephews living in the UK and some in Canada."

Kevin's role as a community leader has also led to close links with many social issues affecting both asylum seekers and the disadvantaged within the local Irish community. In Cork, Kevin has set up another ministry called 'The Sanctuary of Faith' where Faith and Church groups work to support asylum seekers, migrants, and refugees for their effective integration. They also work with Irish communities, especially people experiencing homelessness. He works closely with the St. Vincent De Paul and other charitable organisations supporting migrants. Taking up a leadership role in the faith meant Kevin can be on the move at any time across the world, at short notice. In the last five years, Kevin has been sent to places like Ghana and Nigeria, either to visit communities and schools or attend the final profession of new brothers into the Congregation.

Having lived in both Waterford and Dublin previously, Kevin points to some clear differences he has noticed. "I find living in Cork fun especially because Cork is bigger than Waterford and the people are very welcoming. Also, I love Cork more because it quite easy to integrate more than you would do in Dublin or Waterford, and I say this completely out of my experience living in all three places. I also learned



that Cork people call themselves the Rebel County, they see themselves as a separate Republic in Ireland because of their involvement in the war – or so I am told. I truly feel a part of Cork...I love to listen to Cork people speak because they have a very good accent and when they talk, it feels like they are singing. I very much love the St. Bridget Feast celebrations, St. Patrick's Day, and the Open Day in the Presentation Brothers centre where people just come in, eat, and enjoy themselves."

Kevin also highlights some of the challenges to integration – "There are still a lot of racist incidences in Ireland against mostly migrants.

This is something I would call the attention of the government to work hard to eradicate. So far, I haven't faced any challenges in Cork or any part of Ireland probably because I am more involved with the churches and work with Irish people. But I have heard people say a lot of about the challenges they face in the community and racists incidents they encounter."



Nura Hagi

Nura Hagi is a Somali Irish woman. She is the CEO and founder of the Karti Project for Women Peace and Development. She is a Development Education practitioner, a community leader, and a part-time lecturer at the Adult Continuing Education Centre at University College Cork. She serves on the Oversight Group for Ireland's third National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security, (2019–2024).



Nura's activism, her commitment and passion for human rights can be traced back to her early years growing up in Mogadishu, Somalia. She became an activist against the human rights violations perpetrated by Somali warlords and their militia groups during the war in Somalia.

"I grow up in a complex, war-torn society, a country that had a mix of good and bad things happening at the same time. Historically, Somalia was a very beautiful and safe country but when the war broke out, everything went down the drain. There was no respect for the most fundamental human rights such as the right to education for both males and females, the right to work, the right to freedom of speech and the list goes on. I decided to form 'Somali Young Women Activist Network' for peace-building. We activated a conflict resolution programme where we fought for human rights and advocated for an end to the culture of impunity by demanding justice for victims of human right violations. I grow up in an environment of civil society specialists composed of lawyers, peace builders, religious and traditional leaders' youths and women's groups who work in peace building, conflict resolution and more. They all worked at the grassroot level negotiating for peaceful transition and the development of the country."

Nura arrived in Ireland in October 2005 as a participant of the Frontline Defender program for human rights defenders across the world - The Dublin Platform. She was invited by the founder Mary Lawlor when they met at the 60th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Before arriving in Ireland, Nura had already been targeted by the militia and had suffered a shooting that almost took her life.

"Coming to Ireland was not just for me to attend the conference and share my experience with the world, it was equally an opportunity for me to heal. Heal from the bullet wounds, heal spiritually, and mentally by listening to others and healing in the process. I remember at [the] time I became a prime target for an armed group implicated in human rights abuses that I was investigating. On several occasions I was threatened by the group and they demanded I pay a bribe of \$4,500 if I wanted to live. I was only fortunate that a negotiation was reached with them without me paying the said amount. I knew if something like that were to repeat itself, I wasn't going to make it. I am forever grateful for that opportunity. Being in Ireland also gave me the opportunity to bring the plight of Somalians to the international level."

Realising that she would risk her life if she returned to Somalia, Nura sought asylum in Ireland and entered the direct provision system.

“I am one of the very few cases to have stayed in the system for less than a year. There are people in many centres across Ireland who have been there for over eight years and their cases were still pending a final decision which I consider totally unacceptable. I would say It is an inhumane system and depressing to those who live there. The people have not many choices. People flee from their country to seek protection and to heal from the various persecution they’ve been through in their respective countries. Keeping them locked up in direct provision centres is completely inhumane and adds more salt to their many injuries.

Ireland is a beautiful place with many beautiful people, a beautiful government, and beautiful laws. However, I think they can do better, and I know they will. The reason why I always go close to those in the system, work with them and advocate for the end of Direct Provision in Ireland is because I have lived it, I felt it and I understand the challenges faced by those locked up in those centres.”

Before coming to Ireland, Nura had acquired a High School Certificate and had undertaken some university studies. Over her years in Ireland, Nura has been able to obtain different degrees and certificates that have further equipped her in her activism and work in Ireland. She earned a BA in Community Development in Cork Institute of Technology (now part of Munster Technological University), and an MA in Global Ethics in Sociology and Philosophy from UCC.

Nura now considers Cork home. “Cork is now the home I know. Ireland took me in and offered me a new home free from the gunfire and the conflict that made me flee in the first instance. When I first got to Cork, it was more like a settling phase, learning and getting acquainted with the people and the community. Now I truly feel a sense of belonging after my 16 years in this country. I have lived in four different areas in Cork and in all three places, I have had incredible neighbours who welcomed me with open hands and that alone changed everything. It’s amazing because I meet people on the street sometimes and they will be like, ‘Hi Nura’. I have no clue who they are. I just smile and greet them back. I know they know me from somewhere. It could be through my work in the community, or one of my former neighbours and it really feels good to know that people care about you. There are people who can live in a place for years and none of their neighbours

would know their names. I am very privileged, and I feel a special connection with the people and community. I truly feel like a Corkonian girl.

One of my children were born here, they study here so it is also their home. I am particularly grateful to a particular couple, Anita and Tony (and their) family when I first got into the community at Dillon’s Cross. They are an incredible couple and till this day, we remain friends and family. The couple was so kind to me that my children thought they were my parents! I remember my daughter asking me how come my parents are all white and yet I have brown skin? This is to tell you how close I was to this couple; they took care of me, and my kids and I remain in close connection with them. Each time I have a family visit from home, they would come over to welcome them, irrespective of where I am. This is the same with most of my neighbours in all the places I have lived in my 16 years in Cork.

Nura has very good working relationship with every migrant organisation working to support inclusion and the rights of migrants and is a respected advocate. She was appointed by then-Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Simon Coveney, to serve the Oversight Group for Ireland’s second and third National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security in 2019. She is a member of the Muslim Community in Cork and a member of the Cork Sanctuary Movement and more.

In terms of things that could help improve the integration of those coming to Cork and Ireland in general, Nura highlights the barriers to housing and employment as particular challenges.

“Housing is a general problem in Ireland but it’s a major challenge for the migrant community most especially the Muslim and the black community. If there can be a policy that allows people to access this freely without any form of discrimination, then it will honestly help us to feel more accepted. I also wish to see more migrants employed in respectable jobs. It’s so hard for migrants to get well paid jobs in Cork and in Ireland in general. If one does not speak their kind of English, they don’t consider that people competent which is not okay. The same people who get rejected as not qualified will apply and get a job in say Dublin or London without any problems. I would also like to see more women get involved in decision making and more young people become active in the community. We have so many resources that we can offer to this country, and we should be given the opportunity to do so.”



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