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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1   Introduction

1.1   This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Meitheal Project, the aim of which is to facilitate the integration into Irish civil and cultural life of persons from new communities whose stay in Dublin 15 is of a lasting and stable nature. The definition of integration adopted by the project is: *"the ability* to *participate* to *the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having* to *relinquish his or her own cultural identity".*

1.2   The principal funder of the project is the European Refugee Fund (ERF) with match funding provided by the Blanchardstown Partnership (lead agency), Fingal County Council, IBM, Co. Dublin Vocational Education Committee and Integrate Ireland Language and Training. The project commenced in April 2006 and was completed in December 2007.

2   Context

2.1   The project is set in a national context reflecting a significant growth in the rate of immigration over the past decade. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) reports a population estimate based on the 2006 census as 4.235 million in April 2006 with close on 420,000 i.e. 10% of the population in Ireland, classified by the CSO as 'non Irish'. There is also recognition that the rapid growth of immigration into Ireland presents both opportunities for the country as well as challenges for the new and host communities (Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland (MRCI), 2006). Pearn Kandola's research (2003) suggests that barriers to integration exist and may be clustered under the nine key areas of: community and culture; language skills; housing; employment/training; recognition of skills and qualifications; education for children and adults; accessing mainstream services including health and social welfare; family reunification; individuals' vision for the future.

2.2   CSO data for 2006 records the population of Blanchardstown as 63,120. This reflects a rise of almost 25% since 2002, with new communities accounting for almost 20% of the population.

Since 2000, BAP has worked closely with other local agencies to provide supports and services to new communities in its catchment area and has developed significant experience and expertise regarding the identification, development and delivery of responses to the challenges involved.

3   Meitheal Project

3.1   The core focus of the Meitheal Project was the facilitation of communities working together for the integration and celebration of the diverse cultures of which the population of Dublin 15 is comprised.

3.2   There were six core themes for the project:
(i) Language and Communication
(ii) Reaching Vulnerable Adults
(iii) The Arts and Culture
(iv) Employment and Enterprise
(v) Awareness Raising Among Employers
(vi) National and international Links

4   Project Delivery
The project worked across the six key themes:

(i) Language and Communication - The focus of activities was on language provision with a concentration not only on language capacity, but also on communication skills, understanding of Irish cultural life, Irish mores and more specific in-depth understanding of business, enterprise and employment conventions, norms and opportunities.

(ii) Reaching Vulnerable Adults - Meitheal's outreach work was focused on the development and implementation of a pilot project to address the social and learning requirements of vulnerable adults from within the new communities.

(iii) The Arts and Culture - This theme focused on enabling members of the new communities to play a more active role in the artistic life of the community in Dublin 15 as well as enabling members of the new ethnic communities to become more informed about social norms and expectations in the context of Irish life and culture.

(iv) Employment and Enterprise
Employment-focused action sought to reduce barriers to employment and enterprise development for new community clients.

(v) Awareness Raising Among Employers
This action focused on a strengthening of relationships with local employers to actively promote recruitment of immigrant workers.

(vi) National and international Links
Meitheal aimed to forge collaborative national and international links with actors and agencies concerned with integrating new communities in Ireland and beyond.

5.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   An overall conclusion of the evaluation is that considerable achievement is evident regarding impacts for the target group in terms of: communications skills and language development and skills for employment access and enterprise development. Personal impacts recorded include: These included:
- Increased confidence regarding mixing with local people;
- Enhanced ability to ask questions to get information;
- More knowledgeable about where to go for particular services;
- having a greater sense of belonging to the local community;
- More knowledgeable about life in Irish society generally.

5.2   Lessons Learned
A number of important lessons have emerged from Meitheal in relation to the work of integration of new communities in the area:

- **Integration Is a Long-Term Process**
Meitheal has demonstrated that the challenge of progressing social and cultural inclusion is one that will involve a long-term process that is delivered as part of the broader community development efforts.

- **Barriers to integration are often complex and multi-dimensional**

The needs of many members of new communities relate to personal, social, cultural and economic issues. Meitheal has also shown how an effective outreach model can also be adapted to provide in-reach support that can facilitate good linkages and referral support for addressing these needs.

- **No one agency or group can bring about integration for new communities**

In view of the complexity of the barriers involved for new communities, there is need for active engagement of all relevant support agencies in developing and delivering an integrated support service model for new communities. All agencies, but in particular key support agencies such as FAS, HSE, VEC and DSFA, need to identify supports for new communities as part of their core work.

- **English language learning opportunities are critical to integration and progression**

Acquisition of Basic English is critical to the ability of those from new communities to successfully integrate into local life. The approach to providing English language courses must be culturally appropriate and must involve a range of provision so that learners can access at relevant levels and make a smooth progression from one level to another and have follow on progression options.

- **The local school system faces particular challenges in relation to integration**

The effects of the significant growth in new communities in areas such as Blanchardstown are particularly felt in the school system, and opportunities for schools to network and develop insight into the challenges they are facing are vital for these schools. Wide-ranging challenges were noted within the principals' fora.

- **Integration must be resourced and supported at government policy level.**

Many of the factors that impinge on the integration of new communities are outside the control of the local area e.g. housing policies and recognition of qualifications. A Government Policy framework that would have coherence with existing policy approaches e.g. combating racism, eliminating poverty and promoting equality, must create the conditions for integration.

5.3   The Meitheal Model of Integration

From the above lessons, Meitheal has provided a unique opportunity for Blanchardstown Partnership and key agencies involved in Meitheal to develop and pilot a community-wide framework for the facilitation of local integration. Key features of this framework are set out below.

Clear Definition of Immigration

Meitheal has defined immigration as a dynamic, two-way process involving new and host communities working together to build a local community in which differences are respected and each member is facilitated to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of local life, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity. This approach to integration has a community-wide focus and engages a multi-layered strategy with multi-sector involvement.

Framework of Meitheal Actions
Meitheal's framework sets out six key strategic themes of action or pathways (as in section 4) through which new and host communities can work together to provide resources and opportunities to build an integrated local community. Underpinning these actions or pathways to integration, is the understanding that they interact dynamically. Each has the power to reinforce of weaken progress in the other areas.

5.4   Recommendations
(i)   For Blanchardstown Partnership and Meitheal Stakeholder Agencies

- The Partnership and key stakeholder agencies in the Meitheal project should review the learning from Meitheal and identify appropriate ways to build on their experience and incorporate the lessons learned into their on-going work.
- The local Schools should continue to network and engage in information sharing with a view to influencing policy and practice, and making successful submissions to Government for the resources needed to support their integration-focused work.
- The Meitheal Stakeholder group should continue to meet to review the mainstreaming potential for Meitheal. Ideas that could be considered include:
  - Development of a template for a model of good practice in relation to delivery of services/supports to members of new communities;
  - Development of anti-racism and intercultural training for Stakeholder staff;
  - Dissemination of key findings. A meeting should be sought by Blanchardstown Partnership with the Minister for Integration to discuss the findings and mainstreaming potential of Meitheal;
  - Development of targeted initiatives focusing on access to key public services for immigrants.

(ii)   For Blanchardstown Local Development Infrastructure
A special policy forum involving the directors of Fingal County Development Board should be set up to review and discuss the learning from Meitheal. Blanchardstown Partnership and other key agencies involved in Meitheal should provide information inputs on lessons learned and identify the key elements that need to be considered for a strategic approach to integration across the local development infrastructure. These elements should include:
- Accurate and up to date profile information on new communities in the area;
- Insights on barriers identified in relation to integration and a strengthening of community-wide commitment to respond to barriers to inclusion;
- Development of integrated, targeted initiatives focusing on access to key public services for members of new communities;
- Supports for effective networking across key service providers for the purpose of ensuring synergy in terms of provision and development, and of facilitating maximum flexibility among statutory agencies to respond to local needs;
- Identification of appropriate mechanisms for inclusion of members of new communities into policy, consultative and decision-making structures in the area;
- Development of a community-wide media campaign to combat racism and promote interaction and understanding of cultural diversity;

(iii)   For Government
A coherent National Integration Policy should be developed. The process involved should facilitate the inclusion of all key stakeholders and have regard for the lessons emerging from projects such as Meitheal, in particular the need for appropriate long-term resourcing and flexibility for statutory agencies to respond to local need. Publication of a Government White Paper on Immigration would be a valuable contribution to this process.

EVALUATION REPORT

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION AND EVALUATION APPROACH

1.1   Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the Meitheal Project, the aim of which is to facilitate the integration into Irish civil and cultural life of persons from new communities whose stay in Dublin 15 is of a lasting and stable nature. The definition of integration adopted by the project is: *"the ability* to *participate* to *the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having* to *relinquish his or her own cultural identity".* The project's work is underpinned by a recognition of the complexity of the concept of integration as an ongoing social process with rights and responsibilities for both new communities and the host population. Objectives and themes of work set for the project are intended to provide the project with the opportunity to work at a multi-dimensional level addressing the key areas involved.

The principal funder of the project is the European Refugee Fund (ERF) with match funding provided by the Blanchardstown Partnership (lead agency), Fingal County Council, IBM, Co. Dublin Vocational Education Committee and Integrate Ireland Language and Training. Funding was also received from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform with the help of the Department of Education & Science as match funding for youth and education activities.

The project commenced in April 2006 and was completed in December 2007. Internal evaluations on the project indicated the achievement of significant success from the actions being implemented by the project, as well as valuable learning for the agencies and support services involved. The aim of this final evaluation report is to present:
- an overview of the project;
- an assessment of its success;

- an overview of the challenges involved; and
- recommendations as to how lessons learned can be mainstreamed.

1.2   Research Methodology

The external evaluation process commenced in January 2007 with the hiring of an independent evaluator. The independent evaluator's approach incorporated both quantitative and qualitative elements and involved two strands:

(a) Support for self evaluation by the project - a key focus of the evaluation involved the Evaluator working closely with the Project Coordinator both supporting the development of the project and the implementation of internal monitoring and evaluation for project actions.

(b) Independent evaluation by the Evaluator involved the following:

- Review and analysis of all relevant literature and documentation;
- Monitoring of data collection systems throughout the year;
- Regular meetings with the project co-ordinator in order to facilitate on-going review and monitoring of progress and also provide advisory support based on the learning emerging;
- Attendance at relevant meetings with key stakeholders for advisory, monitoring and reporting purposes;
- Survey questionnaire for key stakeholder and working group members (13 questionnaires returned)
- Focus groups with client samples engaged across project themes (3 groups consisting of a total of 19 people, men and women):
- In-depth interviews with key stakeholders from sectors relevant to each theme including manager and relevant staff of BAP Partnership (5 interviews conducted)
- Observation visits to selected activities across each theme (Succeed Enterprise certificate presentation to (13) course participants, and 2 Meitheal cultural events):
- Analysis and collation of all data emerging from the project over its duration;
- Preparation of an interim report. This was presented to the Project Working

Group at a facilitated review and planning workshop that focused on strategy for the final phase of the project and the challenges of mainstreaming learning and good practice;

- Preparation of a final report in the final phase of the project.

1.3   Report Format

This report is presented in 5 sections. Following this introduction, Section Two will outline the national and local context and the background for the setting up of the Meitheal Project. Section Three will present an overview of the project including the key strands of actions involved. This will be followed in Section Four by an assessment of the outcomes and impacts of the project actions. Finally, Section Five will present conclusions of the evaluation and recommendations for mainstreaming of the learning that emerged.

SECTION TWO

NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT FOR MEITHEAL PROJECT

2.1   National Context

Over the past decade, Irish society has experienced a significant growth in the rate of immigration from many different countries. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) reports a population estimate based on the 2006 census as 4.235 million in April 2006 with close on 420,000 i.e. 10% of the population in Ireland, classified by the CSO as 'non Irish'. The majority of non-Irish nationals were from the EU (275,776) followed by Asia (46,952), Africa (25,326) and North and South America (21,124) (CSO Population and Migration Estimates, September, 2006). The range of status categories applied to those immigrating into Ireland includes, asylum seekers, convention or programme refugees or migrant workers. Definitions of each of these terms are provided in the appendix to this report.

It is not yet clear as to the patterns of permanency that will develop in Ireland in relation to immigration. However Mac Einri notes:

> 'At the very least, however, we can state with confidence that Ireland is no longer a country where immigration can be regarded as a short-term or transient issue. The country has now definitively joined the European mainstream as a society where a population of mixed ethnic backgrounds is the norm.' (2007, p. 215)

It is beyond the brief of this report to engage in an in-depth examination of the issues emerging and the debates taking place regarding immigration but a number of summary points are drawn from recent literature in order to set out the wider international and national context for this research.

2.1.1   Challenges Related to Growth of Immigration into Ireland

Generally, it is noted that the rapid growth of immigration into Ireland presents both opportunities and challenges (Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland (MRCI), 2006). The new cultural diversity being experienced in Ireland is largely welcomed. However it is the economic impact which is often particularly emphasized and, as will be discussed below, there is a growing recognition that Ireland's economic success has been, and will continue to be, strongly linked to the skills input of new immigrant workers.

2.1.2   Immigration and the Irish Economy

Although a recent phenomenon to Ireland, migration, is part of a global process and Ireland's experience represents a pattern that is reflected all over Europe and the rest of the developed world. (MRCI, 2006). As in other countries, the contribution of migrant workers to Irish society is mainly perceived to be economically linked. Non-Irish workers now represent one in eight of the Irish labour force (CSO, 2006), one of the highest percentages in Europe. This trend is set to continue. Forfas forecasts that 420,000 new workers will be required by 2010 and that 'apart from immigration, other sources of additional labour supply are reducing, resulting in a requirement for significant immigration levels (Enterprise Strategy Group, 2005). Analysts of the current labour market status of immigrant workers in Irish society sound notes of caution in relation to the trends emerging. Research by Barret and Bergin (2007, p. 81) shows that immigrants tend to have higher levels of educational attainment and are not being employed to their fullest degree relative to their skills and education. MRCI (2006) notes that a forward looking approach to the changing needs of the economy, in the short and long-term, coupled with a planned approach to the long-term integration of migrant workers into Irish society is essential. Without this, migrant workers are in danger of becoming over represented and segregated in less stable, low-paid jobs (with little opportunity for labour market progression) and at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion. As seen in other European countries, this has vast implications for future generations, leading to high levels of unemployment for the second and third generation migrants, and a cycle of labour market exclusion that reinforces both direct and indirect racism. As noted by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform at a launch of Anti Racist Workplace week: ' *Migrant workers in Ireland are welcome, are positive and are essential for the economic development and social prosperity of this country …. We*

need to set standards for the treatment of immigrants now so that we will not see in 10 or 15 years time scenes like those unfolding in Paris'. (November, 2005).

2.1.3   Immigration and Social & Cultural Inclusion

Mac Einri notes that the debate in new immigration societies such as Ireland has up to recently, focused on 'who gets in and on the conditions for entry', but there is now an increasing focus on integration – what happens to people once they come here? Will they be expected to become Irish? Or will the country move to a more intercultural model? (2007, p. 215). He suggests that as has been the experience of other European countries, Irish society is now faced with very challenging questions. Furthermore the challenges involved are compounded by the fact that Ireland shares the tradition of the European nation-state, often defining itself in exclusionary ways and grounded in cultural, linguistic and historical experiences – white, heterosexual, Irish, settled, Catholic. Underpinning these challenges are the tensions involved in the search for a shared understanding of key concepts and issues including, multi-culturalism, integration and the role of Government policy in promoting integration. Currently there is no coherent immigration policy at national level. The main elements of policy concerns are typically related to legal and employment issues.

Throughout Europe and over time, there have been different approaches taken in response to emerging multicultural societies. The main models as outlined by MRCI (2006, p. 118 - 120) are:

- Assimilation – defined as absorption, incorporation and digestion. It involves the shedding of one's identity to become as if a member of the dominant group that makes up that society.
- Multi-culturalism – a policy that has been pursued in a number of countries e.g. UK / France. It has often involved activities such as providing supports for cultural expression, multicultural events etc. but it says little about either the situation or the status of the members of the different cultures. It only implies their presence.
- Interculturalism – defined as essentially about creating the conditions for interaction, understanding equality of opportunity and respect. It is about ensuring that cultural diversity is acknowledged and catered for, with inclusion of minority ethnic groups by design and planning, and not as a default or add-on.

In relation to cultural diversity, it is notable that cultural rights have been enshrined in international law since 1966 (Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the United Nations Universal Declaration). However, in spite of this focus, cultural rights have remained relatively invisible at international level. Ireland has tended to follow this trend, one key example being that 'The Irish State has been slow to recognise Travellers as a minority ethnic group' (MRCI, p. 117).

2.2   Individual Level: Challenges For New Communities In Ireland

Pearn Kandola's (2003) research identifies barriers to integration into local communities faced by refugees and those given leave to remain in the State. The findings indicate that there is a multiplicity of barriers facing refugees in attempting to integrate into Irish society, and also have wider relevance to other new community groups. Although noting that refugee populations are diverse in nature and that there is need for a recognition of different experiences and needs, the research suggests that the barriers may be clustered under the nine key areas of:

- community and culture;
- language skills;
- housing;
- employment/training;
- recognition of skills and qualifications;
- education for children and adults;
- accessing mainstream services including health and social welfare;
- family reunification;
- individuals' vision for the future.

The research also highlights that intangible barriers to integration such as public perceptions, lack of awareness, and lack of recognition of skills, which can sometimes result in racial discrimination, are major barriers in their own right. It suggests that they also underpin many of the tangible barriers such as difficulties in accessing housing,

education, employment, training and mainstream services, which are in effect basic requirements that every individual in Irish society may seek in order to establish an acceptable standard of living.

Pearn Kandola's report particularly notes the impact of the patterns of concentration that have developed in terms of the accommodation of asylum seeking and refugee families. The research points to significant concerns among some communities and service providers regarding the effects of these patterns both on sometimes already overstretched local provision, and also in relation to the level of social inclusion and mixing of immigrant families in local areas.

The report notes:

> 'Furthermore, some service providers commented that local people sometimes perceive the refugees as adding to social problems that may already exist in disadvantaged areas. This in turn may lead to refugees becoming the victims of racism and discrimination and cause them to seek alternative housing, closer to what they know. Therefore, they will live near refugees from the same country and same ethnic origin to seek comfort, companionship and social support. They will attend the same churches as they attended at home and may never have the opportunity to meet Irish people in their locality or integrate fully into their host community.' (2003, p.37).

The research makes a number of recommendations including the need to:

- Inform public opinion by raising awareness of the rights and needs of refugees and those granted leave to remain, in order to alleviate any misconception that could fuel discriminatory practices;

- Ensure service providers have sufficient information to encourage collaboration and co-operation in the provision of services to the refugee population at each stage of the integration process;

- Harness the skills and qualifications of the refugee community in order to facilitate integration and foster benefits for both the refugee and host community;

- Ensure that the availability of English language classes is made known to refugees and those with leave to remain and that classes are conducted in a culturally appropriate way;

- Provide refugees and those with leave to remain with the relevant information they require with regard to access to housing, education, training, employment, etc., in a culturally appropriate and timely nature.

2. 3 Local Context / Blanchardstown: Some Key Demographic Features

Blanchardstown is situated approximately 10 kilometers Northwest of Dublin City Centre. It is an area that has undergone major social and economic change over the recent past, and has experienced some of the most remarkable social and demographic change in Ireland. The April 2006 census, recorded a population of 63,120 persons for the Blanchardstown area. This reflects a rise of 24.73 per cent since 2002, making it the fastest growing area in the country based on electoral division boundaries. These enormous growth levels are significantly above the corresponding figures recorded for Dublin and nationally (5.7 per cent and 8.2 per cent respectively). The population of Blanchardstown is likely to continue to grow for the foreseeable future due to the large local land banks available for housing to be constructed on, especially in Abbotstown and parts of Blakestown around Hansfield.

The 2006 census data also indicates that Blanchardstown is now home to a diverse community comprised of a wide range of different nationalities. Individuals from new communities now account for almost 20 per cent of persons resident in Blanchardstown. Further analysis of the data, shows that 65 per cent of the increase in Blanchardstown's population since 2002, has been composed of residents who indicated that they had a nationality other than Irish. Polish nationals (1261) represent the largest numbers of foreign nationals in Blanchardstown followed closely by Lithuanians (1045) and British (954) nationals.

Abbotstown ED contains the highest absolute percentage (35.56) of foreign nationals present, whereas Roselawn recorded the lowest with just under 10 per cent. Further

census data related to the Blanchardstown area is provided in the appendix to this report, prepared by the Partnership's research and evaluation officer.

2.3.1 Local Supports and Services for New Communities in Blanchardstown

A range of supports and services have generally been available to members of new communities living in the older parts of Blanchardstown with the main ones being focused on information, legal representation, housing, education and employment. These services and supports have been delivered mainly through existing provision including Fingal County Council, FAS, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Department of Health, County Dublin VEC, Citizens Information Centres, local schools and a range of community and local development agencies including Blanchardstown Area Partnership (BAP).

Since 2000, BAP has worked closely with other local agencies to provide supports and services to new communities in its catchment area and has developed significant experience and expertise regarding the identification, development and delivery of responses to the challenges involved. The range of the supports and services developed by BAP is reflected in an internal discussion paper prepared by the Partnership Evaluation Officer in 2006 with a view to examining existing initiatives supporting asylum seekers and refugees, and exploring ideas for strengthening this support. A template presented in this document provides an overview of the initiatives and actions involved is reproduced in Figure 2.1 below.

Following on from this exploration, it was concluded by Partnership staff that a number of strands of action were required in order to respond to the needs of the growing new communities in Blanchardstown. In particular the need was noted for a multi-stranded approach that would involve targeted responses to identified needs and would also harness the energies and experience of the key stakeholders involved.

Against that backdrop, a proposal was prepared and submitted to the European Refugee Fund (ERF) for support for the Meitheal project.

A complete outline of the background and development of the Meitheal project is set out in the project co-ordinator's report to the ERF in February 2007. As this is available for

more in-depth study, the next section of this report will be confined to setting out an overview of key features of the project.

Figure 2.1 Template reflecting Blanchardstown Area Partnership's initiatives and actions supporting asylum seekers and refugees between 2000-2005

7 STRANDS	SERVICE DELIVERY	CO-ORDINATION	INFLUENCING
Economic Development	o Jobs Club-FAS o Enterprise Start Ups (BTWEA) o I.T. training via BAPTEC o Blanchardstown Training Services o LES / Joblink o Equality Strategy	o EQUAL Initiative o Core Skills Pathways	o Rent policy paper o Mobile information unit
Community Development	o Asylum Seeker and Refugee Strategy report 2003-2004	o Need analysis research of asylum seekers and refugees in D15	o Blanchardstown Asylum Seekers and Refugee Network o Information provision foldout in liaison with BARN & EQUAL
Health	o Health discussions with asylum seekers and refugees		
Education	o Millennium Fund re 3rd level o After-Schools English Language Programmes o Preventing Early School Leaving-Accelerated language learning initiative		
Family Support and Childcare	o Greater Blanchardstown Lone Parent Management Committee	o County Childcare Committee	
Built Environment			Greater Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce

Source: BAP Policy Paper on its responses to new communities in Dublin 15

SECTION THREE

AN OVERVIEW OF MEITHEAL

3.1   Project Focus

The core focus of the Meitheal Project was the facilitation of communities working together for the integration and celebration of the diverse cultures of which the population of Dublin 15 is comprised. The vision of the project was derived from the Irish tradition of 'meitheal' which involved people coming together to complete a shared task such as saving a harvest.

The project was underpinned by a recognition of the complexity of the concept of integration as an ongoing social process with rights and responsibilities for both new communities and the host population. The objectives and themes of work set for Meitheal aimed to provide the project with the opportunity to work at a multi-dimensional level addressing the key areas involved.

3.2   Aim and Objectives

The aim of the Meitheal Project was to facilitate the integration into Irish civil and cultural life of persons from new communities whose stay in Dublin 15 is of a lasting and stable nature. The Project definition of integration was '*the ability to participate to the extent that a person needs and wishes in all of the major components of society, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity*'.

The aim of the project was to be realised through the following objectives:

• To strengthen the capacity of local, regional and national structures and networks so that they are better able to meet the education and employment requirements of

newcomers;

- To deliver language and communication training that will assist a range of newcomers to participate more fully in society;
- To explore ways in which those who are vulnerable to social exclusion may be able to access pathways for inclusion;
- To provide improved support and training for persons from new communities so they will be enabled to gain employment;
- To assist the host population in understanding and valuing the social contribution of newcomers.

3.3 Project Management and Staffing Structure

The Meitheal project was based in the Blanchardstown Partnership offices. It had a core staff of three:

- A Project Coordinator who had responsibility for the day to day management and development of the project including financial management;
- An outreach worker who had responsibility for the outreach actions of the project;
- A project administrator who had responsibility for the administration of the project and provides assistance with financial management;

Project Management was the responsibility of a Meitheal Working Group, chaired by the Partnership Manager. Other members of the group included key Partnership staff members who had responsibility for key themes or aspects of the Meitheal project.

The Working Group membership consisted of the following:

- Partnership Manager;
- Meitheal Project Coordinator;
- Deputy Manager of the Partnership;
- Financial Coordinator within the Partnership;
- Education Coordinator;
- LES and Jobs Club Manager;
- Community Development Leader;
- Enterprise Officer;
- Monitoring and Evaluation Officer.

The Working Group met on a monthly basis and each representative provided an update on progress in relation to the project objectives associated with their work area.

The project was also supported at a strategic level by a Stakeholders Group. Meetings of key stakeholders were planned to take place at least three times over the lifetime of the Project. These meetings provided a forum for giving updates on progress to the Stakeholders and facilitating discussion on lessons emerging so that agency representatives could provide feedback to their agencies on responses needed to specific issues identified, new ideas for working with clients from new communities and also contributions they could make to the mainstreaming of lessons and successful actions emerging from Meitheal.

3.4 Key Themes of Action

The project worked across six key themes:

(i) Language and Communication

The Language and Communication theme focused on utilising existing contact points: for example, schools, local community centres, health centres, youth organisations, employment organisations and specialist businesses.

The focus of activities was on language provision with a concentration not only on language capacity, but also on communication skills, understanding of Irish cultural life, Irish mores and more specific in-depth understanding of business, enterprise and employment conventions, norms and opportunities.

Individuals targeted included children, parents and adults presenting to services in the community, and vulnerable adults accessed through the special outreach initiative.

(ii) Reaching Vulnerable Adults

Meitheal's outreach work was focused on the development and implementation of a pilot project to address the social and learning requirements of vulnerable adults from within the new communities. An outreach worker identified and supported vulnerable adults who may be isolated within the host community due to barriers such as language difficulties, cultural differences and/or lack of social networks. 'In reach' was provided by engaging with, and advocating to, a diversity of education and training advisors within the Partnership to ensure that clients' learning and social requirements were progressed.

Liaison was also developed with agencies external and internal to Blanchardstown Area Partnership to ensure that approaches were integrated.

(iii) The Arts and Culture

The Project recognised the pivotal role of the Arts in breaking down barriers, fostering an appreciation of diverse cultures, and facilitating exploration of controversial issues. This theme focused on enabling members of the new communities to play a more active role in the artistic life of the community in Dublin 15 as well as enabling members of the new ethnic communities to become more informed about social norms and expectations in the context of Irish life and culture.

(iv) Employment and Enterprise

Employment-focused action sought to reduce barriers to employment and enterprise development for new community clients. Meitheal strengthened access to employment by building on the existing skills within the new communities. It also provided opportunities for training and skills enhancement and enables members of new communities to learn about the requirements of the Irish employment and enterprise sectors. The actions were based on the understanding that employment is essential to full integration.

In collaboration with Meitheal, the Partnership's existing Enterprise training programme was adapted to suit the particular needs of people from new communities. The Department of Social and Family Affairs and Fingal Development Board also supported this aspect of the Project.

(v) Awareness Raising Among Employers

This action focused on a strengthening of relationships with local employers to actively promote recruitment of immigrant workers. The Blanchardstown Area Partnership Employers' Group had already been active in this regard. Its members included IBM, Symantec, Blanchardstown Chamber of Commerce and several small local businesses. This group had initiated and implemented actions centred on equality issues, particularly those related to selection and recruitment. The Project proposed to build on the existing relationships and experience within the group and specifically address the requirements of members of new communities as they interact with employers.

(vi) National and international Links

Meitheal aimed to forge collaborative national and international links with actors and agencies concerned with integrating new communities in Ireland and beyond. The Partnership had already established links with two Partnership areas that had experienced a similar rapid increase in residents from new communities. Meitheal set out to build on these existing links.

3.5   Project Establishment and Development

The initial phase of the project focused on collaborative planning for new Meitheal initiatives and development of links and collaborative planning between relevant local agencies and services. In spite of delays related to recruitment of staff, a significant range of Meitheal actions had been completed by the end of 2006. A review and planning day held in January 2007 was attended by theme leaders and most of the staff involved in the actions. The review recognised the impact of delays on project progress but also indicated satisfaction at the initial progress made in relation to most of the project themes. Amendments required to the original plan were identified and further planning for the next phase of the project was agreed.

3.5.1   Monitoring and Evaluation

In recognition of the multifaceted nature of the Meitheal project, monitoring and evaluation was structured to take place at a number of levels and both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed. Monitoring and evaluation activity included the following:

- **SCOPE Reporting**

  In view of the fact that the Partnership contributes match funding to the Project from POBAL accounts, quantitative and qualitative data on relevant Meitheal actions was gathered and included in the Partnership's quarterly reporting to POBAL.

- **Event Reports**

  Formative reports were prepared on specific events within project activities. These reports were designed to facilitate reflection on completed activities with a view to identifying achievements and challenges encountered so that the learning could be incorporated into the wider project.

- **Course Evaluation**

At the end of each Meitheal course, participants were requested to complete course evaluation forms. These forms aimed to gather feedback on content, delivery and supports provided as well as monitoring participant attendance and progress. The information gathered was used to identify aspects of the courses that work well and also those that need strengthening.

- **Meitheal Working Group Monthly Meetings**

Meitheal Working Group meetings also served as a monitoring tool for the project. The monthly reporting by each of the theme leaders, provided an insight into progress in relation to the project objectives and an opportunity for issues arising to be discussed and responses identified.

- **External Project Evaluator**

At the end of 2006 an external independent Project Evaluator was contracted to support the internal evaluation process of the project and provide an evaluation report at project level.

The data collected through this extensive monitoring process will be used in the following sections of this report which will provide an assessment of the outcomes and impacts of the Meitheal Project.

SECTION FOUR

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS OF MEITHEAL PROJECT ACTIONS

4.1   Evaluating the Meitheal Project Actions

The previous sections have set out the context and an outline of the development of the Meitheal project. The next section will now provide a summary overview of the outcomes and impacts of the actions delivered across the project. Detailed reporting on all of the individual actions across the six project themes is beyond the brief of this external evaluation report. It is mainly focused at the level of the overall project level. More detailed insight into project actions is available in the Coordinators reports to one of the main project funders, ERF.

The data used in this section includes data from internal project evaluations and reports as well as that drawn from the evaluation interviews, surveys and group discussions carried out for the external evaluation. As will be noted below, the data provides strong indications that the individual actions have had positive impacts on those engaged while also providing valuable learning for local practice and policy in relation to the facilitation of integration into Irish life of people from new communities.

4.2   Meitheal Action Implementation

Project reports indicate that a wide range of actions took place across all six themes of the Meitheal Project. The action overview based on project records is summarised in Figure 4.1 below and details are set out in the subsequent sections.

Figure 4.1   Overview of Meitheal Actions and Engagement

ACTION THEMES	ACTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT
Language training and communication skills	• Beginner English Classes - 37 participants • Jobs Club – 60 participants • Summer School Immersion courses - 52 participants • Schools – based actions – approximately 124 children per year • Early start programme – 28 parents participated • Two meetings of principals which resulted in key recommendations • Three meetings of after-school language teachers with exchange of good practice etc • Major seminar on cultural diversity and challenges of Irish education with international speakers (October 2007)
Outreach	131 people engaged
Culture and Arts	High levels of participation for a wide range of events . Total estimated to be in the region of 1,000 people each year.
Employment and Enterprise access	Range of employment supports provided to those who participated in Jobs Club language and outreach supports as outlined above 82 enrolled in 5 Enterprise courses. 72 completed and 24 established businesses.
Awareness raising amongst employers	One workshop for employers in November 2006. A total of 29 HR managers and other company managers attended. Similar one planned for December 2007
National and International Links	1 exchange visit organised with Cork City Partnership. 1 international visit to Berlin project by 6 staff

ACTION THEMES	ACTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT
Additional activities 　o　Supporting the development of a local learning community of principal teachers.	3 workshops attended by 21 of a total possible 29 principal teachers in the Dublin 15 region. Education seminar attended by 172 delegates.
o　Range of collaborative inter-agency actions	High level of collaborative inter-agency working
o　Dissemination of achievements and learning	Range of actions to enhance visibility and disseminate learning

4.2.1　Language and Communications

The focus of this theme was on adults and children from new communities who do not speak English as their first language. The key objective for the language and communications actions was to enhance their capacity to integrate into Irish society.

Language and communications actions were facilitated by Meitheal and were planned and delivered on a collaborative basis by staff of the Partnership's existing Education and LES work programmes, as well as Co. Dublin VEC and Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT). English language tuition was provided be VEC tutors as part of the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) and also by IILT.

Language classes catering for several levels of adult learners were provided with the intention of supporting job seeking skills as well as providing participants with the language needed for social and cultural integration.

The main activities under this theme were:

(i) Jobs Club Language Support

An integrated Jobs skills and language support course was designed and four of these courses were delivered by the VEC and LES for the Meitheal project. The courses took place on four mornings a week over an 8- week period. Originally it was intended to have full day sessions with a half day delivered by each of the delivering agencies.

However, issues such as childcare, resulted in the need to restructure the course as half day sessions and to reorganise the delivery approach by the two agencies.

The courses had a dual focus of providing work related language skills to participants as well as traditional Jobs Club training related to job searching, CV preparation and application form filling. Links were also made with relevant local service providers and employers who were invited to provide information inputs on their services to participants. For example, a representative from the Department of Social and Family Affairs gave a presentation to the attendees regarding their rights and entitlements. The participants also visited a prominent local business and were encouraged to ask about their recruitment processes.

An additional element of the courses was the parallel personal support provided by the Meitheal Outreach Worker. This support focused on working with individuals to address any difficulties impacting on their potential for effective engagement with the course. This support also sought to strengthen their general social and cultural inclusion in the area.

Following the courses, participants were awarded with certificates of attendance and were also assessed by the VEC who presented them with Council of Europe approved certificates providing information on their competency in English language skills.

In relation to the outcomes and impacts from the courses, records show that 60 people were engaged in the Jobs Club and English Language support. To date 8 of the participants have accessed employment and 23 have progressed to further training (including language skills and enterprise training). Thirteen others are receiving continued support from the LES in relation to their training and employment planning.

Feedback from the participants who were consulted by the external evaluator was generally positive regarding the course.

The value of the knowledge and skills gained was particularly highlighted.

As one man noted:

> 'In the Jobs course we learned what is expected by Irish employers. I had been writing many letters before I came on the course. I learned about what Irish employers want. It gave me a great push to move on. It gave me the practicalities I needed. I have an interview tomorrow and I hope I will do well.'

The importance of the social and cultural insights into Irish life was also perceived to have been very valuable.

As one woman noted:

> 'We got information about everything – information is power. It's not good to be living in a place and not know about it or people living there – their history and culture. It's very important to learn about these things.'

One of the main recommendations made by participants was for longer courses so that they could consolidate and further expand their language skills. It was also suggested that organisation of a work experience placement by the project would have helped them overcome some of the difficulties they believed many job seekers from new communities experience in relation to accessing secure employment. The main difficulties noted included their lack of links to local businesses and employee networks as well as the experience of racial discrimination in relation to recruitment to higher status jobs. In relation to the first issue, it was felt that an opportunity for links to be facilitated between course participants after the course was completed would reduce their sense of isolation and would allow information sharing on job opportunities. The main recommendation regarding the issue of discrimination was for support agencies to promote awareness raising in relation to racism among local businesses and other sectors.

These points were also reflected in the feedback by those involved in the management and delivery of the Meitheal actions. While acknowledging the positive outcomes for many of those who participated on the Jobs Club and English Language Course, those consulted suggested that the time-frame for the project was too short to provide the level of support that many participants needed to make them job ready. This was noted particularly in relation to the situation of refugees. While emphasizing their keenness to progress their language skills, it was suggested that their exclusion from the employment market for long periods of time while they await refugee status can impact negatively on their motivation and general skills.

In relation to the delivery of language training generally the importance of recognition of cultural diversity among different groups was also emphasised. For example, it was noted that virtually all who attended the last class were Muslim women, some of whom stated that they were not ready for the world of work but that they would like to continue learning the language and learning more about Irish culture.

(ii) Beginner English Classes

On behalf of Meitheal, IILT conducted a series of language assessments regarding language proficiency for potential participants between October and December 2006. A total of 96 people were assessed and offered places on Meitheal basic English classes. Four courses were provided by the project between November 2006 and July 2007. Tuition was provided by IILT. Records show that 37 people were engaged in the classes.

As with the Jobs Club and English courses, personal supports were provided to participants by the Meitheal Outreach Worker, in recognition of the isolation and barriers resulting from English language difficulties.

Those consulted reported positive impacts of the courses on their lives. Besides learning English, these included personal and social impacts such as:

- Increased confidence regarding mixing with local people;
- Enhanced ability to ask questions to get information;
- More knowledgeable about where to go for particular services;
- having a greater sense of belonging to the local community;
- More knowledgeable about life in Irish society generally.

As one woman who had been on a Beginners English course said:

> 'It's not easy living in a new country. Irish people are very close – it's hard to integrate especially if you can't communicate. The course gave me the confidence to talk and I have friends now. I feel I fit in better.'

As with the Jobs Club and English Language courses, the relatively short duration of the course was highlighted by all of those consulted and it was also felt that the lack of opportunities to move to the next level of proficiency was a major gap for the participants involved. While one person went on to complete her Leaving Certificate and 2 secured

employment, most of those involved felt they needed to continue to attend language classes.

From the perspective of those involved in management and delivery of Meitheal English Language classes, concern was also noted at the fact that the project did not have the capacity to respond to the needs of all those who had been engaged in the project and identified as needing language support. In view of the limited resources available to the project, it was not possible to provide these supports to the numbers needing them. It was noted by a number of those consulted that unless there is significant expansion of local capacity to follow up on and provide for these and others yet to be engaged by local services, their needs are likely to remain unmet and their isolation and social and cultural disconnection sustained. As one member of the Working Group noted:

> 'Meitheal has just touched the tip of the iceberg in relation to services which we should be providing to the target group … It has shown us how many people are out there that need support'.

(iii) Immersion Summer Schools

Four English language Summer schools were delivered through Meitheal during the school summer holidays of 2006 and 2007, two with the support of the Blanchardstown Youth Service and two at the Blakestown Community College. In total 52 students attended the courses.

The programmes at Blakestown Community School. were held over a four-week period in June and August 2006. They targeted those students identified as being most in need of language and literacy support, in particular those who were newly arrived in the school. They also focused on bridging support for those moving from primary and secondary levels at the Blakestown Community College. . A secondary aim was to assist the learners to build a network of social contacts upon arrival in the school. The programmes were organized and delivered collaboratively with costs being shared across different local projects. The school financed an additional tutor to enable one-to-one tutoring to take place to those students with minimal English language skills. Transport for programme outings was provided by the Blakestown Mountview Youth Initiative.

In relation to the Blanchardstown Youth Service (BYS) courses, the BYS outreach worker identified the learners by making contact with them in their neighbourhoods. Anecdotal information would suggest that despite having a high representation in terms of population, there are few young people from new communities taking part in youth club activities in the area. The aim of the classes was to engage young people from new communities in English language classes in an informal educational setting with a view to promoting their involvement in informal education and social development. The classes were primarily focused on language, with less emphasis on education. There was also a strong emphasis on making social links with the young people so that they could be encouraged to participate more in local youth club activities.

As a result of the classes, it is reported that, a number of young people have continued their involvement with the youth worker involved and are now participating in other youth groups and clubs. The classes have also acted as a mechanism for the development of trust between the Youth Services and the parents of young people from new communities in the neighbourhoods. This has enhanced the ability of Youth Service staff to engage with the families. The need is highlighted for further work in this area, and also for more of this kind of classes as many young people from new communities are still struggling both socially and in their formal education.

(iv) School-Based Programmes

- ### Support for Early Start Programme Parents
In addition to the immersion programme, the Home School Community Liaison Officer for Scoil an Ceathair Álainn developed an innovative course of parental involvement for the parents of 60 children attending their Early Start Programme. This was delivered during November and December 2006. The programme consisted of informational question and answer sessions hosted by teachers, as well as opportunities for the in-class participation of parents. The parents learned how to work with their children in the completion of learning tasks within the school. This programme served the dual purpose of improving the parents' language and communication skills while also increasing their understanding of the school curriculum.

• **Language Reinforcement Classes**

Eight schools were provided with either after-school or mid-term language reinforcement classes. In general, the schools determined the content for these classes depending on the needs of learners.

The after-schools and mid-term activities provided educational support for newcomer children and also supported their social and cultural integration.

Monitoring reports from teachers who provided classes recorded a total attendance of approximately 124 children from a range of nationalities each year. Very positive feedback was provided by the schools concerned regarding the importance of these additional classes. Many of the teachers involved reported that they were observing improved class participation and ability to complete homework for the children they were teaching during school time. Teachers also suggested that their experience was highlighting the need for a focus on supporting parents in their interaction with schools.

• **Principals' Fora**

Three networking fora were facilitated by Meitheal. The aim of these meetings was to provide an opportunity for principal teachers in the Dublin 15 region to identify the challenges they are experiencing in relation to the increasing diversity of the children/young people attending their schools. Classroom teachers, principals, assistant principals and some language teachers representing 21 schools (primary and post primary) in the area attended the meetings. Presentations were made by representatives of agencies and organisations including Amnesty International and St. Patrick's College in Drumcondra, Dublin.

The Principals' meetings, provided a valuable forum for discussion of issues facing local schools and allowed for the exchange of information and ideas on good practice already in operation within local schools including that in relation to involvement of parents from new communities. Comprehensive reports were prepared on each of the meetings and the dissemination of these reports further enhanced the learning from the discussions. The information shared empowered the principals to articulate the issues and identify

responses needed. This has been particularly valuable in view of the high media profile given to the Dublin 15 area in relation to school enrolments for September 2007, when serious issues have been identified regarding a shortage of school places for newcomer children.

An education seminar was held in October as the culminating activity for the work with Principal teachers. There were 172 delegates at the seminar with preference for attendance afforded to school principals and representatives from Dublin 15. The seminar consisted of two sessions. The plenary morning session was addressed by the Keynote speaker for the conference, Handel Kashope Wright from the Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia.

In the afternoon, participants were invited to attend a facilitated workshop. The workshops addressed the following topics:

- The intercultural classroom and school.
- The Classroom Teacher: A key role in language support
- Creating Intercultural community responses
- Teacher Education for diversity
- The immigrant voice, Learning from personal experiences
- Promoting linguistic diversity
- Working for diversity and integration within youth groups: Challenges and opportunities.

The seminar concluded with the launch by the Minister for Integration, of the research report, *Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15*. This report by Enda McGorman, a local school principal and Ciaran Sugrue was funded by the Social Inclusion of the Department of Education and Science. It provides the findings of research conducted on the teaching and learning needs of culturally diverse schools in Dublin 15. The value and relevance of the report both locally and nationally is indicated by the reference to it in the Irish Times editorial *Questions of Integration,* of October 22nd 2007.

4.2.2 Outreach

The core aim of the Meitheal Outreach theme was to identify, engage and support vulnerable adults from new communities in the area, and to provide a dedicated outreach service appropriate to their need. Records indicate that a total of 131 people have been supported through the Outreach work.

Core elements of the outreach work included:

- developing links with relevant local services and supports, in particular the Department of Social and Family Affairs, FAS and the Health Service Executive;

- promotion of Meitheal and other relevant services and supports to people from new communities;

- supporting the engagement of people from new communities in relevant Meitheal themes by identifying potential barriers to their engagement and helping them eliminate or alleviate them. As outlined in 4.2.1, this support was particularly vital in relation to those participating in Beginner English and Jobs Club English Courses.

Initially the outreach work focused on the wider community of newcomers in the area. A number of informal discussion groups were held with members of new communities with a view to gaining insight into their experiences and the supports they felt they needed to access language and other key services as well as general social and cultural integration into the area. As the project developed and the participant base expanded, the focus was mainly confined to supporting those participating in Meitheal activities. Supports provided included information and advice as well as those related to practical issues such as opening of bank accounts for course payments transfers.

The Outreach Worker also worked with the Partnership's Community Development programme. A number of drop in groups were set up in local community centres with a view to encouraging social integration within local neighbourhoods. An outreach clinic was collaboratively set up at the Blakestown Youth Service offices where the community development worker assisted in hosting the clinic. In addition to one to one supports this group established a regular meeting of two women's groups. All 8 of those who attended the first women's group meeting were keen to access language and literacy classes, organised through contacts with the local VEC. In addition, the women's groups concerned were provided with information sessions regarding violence in the home

(through the Well Woman Centre) and were also provided with information sessions regarding how to access education for children (provided by the Partnership's Education Coordinator).

In addition to the support offered at the Blakestown Centre, members of new communities were also able to access an outreach centre at St Luke the Evangelist Church in Mulhuddart. At both centres advice and support was provided as well as referrals to the Local Employment Services in the Partnership and to other key services including the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The outreach worker also offered advice over the telephone and on a one-to-one basis in the Partnership offices.

4.2.3   Culture and Arts

The core focus of this theme was to assist the host community to understand the valuable contribution of people from new communities and to provide positive opportunities for cultural expression and interaction among all the communities of Dublin 15.

A number of events were facilitated as part of the Meitheal project. The main ones were the two CELEBRATE festivals, held in October 2006 and 2007. These events were a collaborative undertaking between Fingal County Council and the Meitheal Project with significant contributions of time and planning being contributed by the Partnership's Community Development personnel.   A report on the October 2007 event was not available at time of writing this report. In relation to the 2006 CELEBRATE event, the associated activities included:

- The preparation of a photographic exhibition on Blanchardstown by ex-offenders in the local BOND project. This featured photographs of people from new communities in Dublin 15 taken by one of the ex-offenders. The Education Officer from BOND indicated that this experience had assisted the individual concerned to change their perceptions and preconceptions regarding ethnic minority communities in Dublin 15. The exhibition was hosted in the Fingal County Council shared space.

- For a period of three weeks prior to CELEBRATE, an estimated 90 school children had opportunities to use the medium of storytelling and music as different media to explore the concept of shared identify and differing cultures.

Among the main events of the 2006 CELEBRATE festival were the following:

- The official launch of the festival by the Cathaoirleach of Fingal County and the Chairman of the Blanchardstown Area Partnership.

- A photographic exhibition of a Traveller lifestyle in the Dublin 15 area in the shared display space of County Council offices. This was the first time that such an event had been hosted in Fingal County Council space so it was seen as an important cultural milestone.

- A gala concert attended by about 180 people. The concert had performers from Poland, South Africa and Nigeria. In addition to the concert, a mobile cinema showed films from a variety of different countries.

- A hip-hop competition for teenagers and young adults. This was attended by an estimated 150 young people from different schools and different ethnic communities, all of whom were eager to show their dancing skills.

- A variety of performances held at the Blanchardstown Shopping Centre attracted an estimated attendance of 350 people. These performances helped to raise the profile of the Project as well as enabling the host community to appreciate the cultural diversity of the area.

The numbers involved each year in the various cultural activities are recorded as significant with 120 children involved in school activities and an attendance of 180 at the Gala concert in 2006. A general consensus was that intercultural awareness was heightened considerably among all of the target groups during the CELEBRATE festival and that it provided a high profile for Meitheal, for example the local newspaper the Blanchardstown Gazette featured a three page photographic spread of the event.

Building on the experience of CELEBRATE 2006, there was a strong community involvement in the planning, organization, preparation and implementation of the event in 2007, with community representation on the steering committee. A core group of 18 volunteers from a variety of cultural backgrounds provided support on the Saturday. An estimated 250 people participated in the festivities on Friday night, and an estimated

1,000 people participated on the Saturday. Fingal County Council have expressed an interest in maintaining the festival into the future.

In October 2007, The Multilingual Books Project provided an innovative way in which schools could reach out to and involve parents in the life of the schools and the wider community. Some 6 primary schools, 17 teachers and 150 children became involved in the Project which saw the 'publication' of books in English, Irish and a host of other community languages that celebrated the diversity of backgrounds in this part of the County. Children wrote books about themselves, where they come from, their likes and dislikes and these books are now displayed in the Blanchardstown Public Library.

Other events throughout the year included an Intercultural Day which provided an opportunity for people representing diverse cultures in the area showcasing their food, music and fashion and also providing information on their countries of origin.

The main recommendation for ways that actions within this theme could have been strengthened was for more visibility for the CELEBRATE event both in terms of location and in terms of public relations. The organisation of a range of smaller-scale and neighbourhood-based intercultural events was also recommended. It was suggested that these kinds of events would provide meaningful opportunities for new and host communities to work together.

4.2.4 Employment

The core objectives of this theme were to proactively target people from new communities who are most distant from the labour market and to help them to explore employment and enterprise options available to them.

Key elements of the employment support offered as part of this theme were the Partnership's LES mediation service and the Jobs Club and English language classes. As noted in 4.2.1, the Outreach Worker also played a significant role in the initial engagement and support of many job seekers from new communities in the area. Overall the support offered by the agencies involved sought to respond to the typical barriers experienced including: poor English language skills; lack of a recent

employment record; understanding of the requirements of the Irish labour market; and the possibilities of racial bias in the recruitment process.

In relation to outcomes, it was acknowledged that numbers supported into employment were significantly lower than those originally envisaged. While considerable effort was made by LES mediators and Jobs Club staff to eliminate the barriers involved, the time and resources available were considered to be inadequate for the challenge involved. However the fact that a model of support had been piloted and refined and could now be adapted by LES as a mainstream activity was viewed as a valuable outcome from this strand. In response to the challenges of responding to the needs of new communities that have emerged from Meitheal, LES staff have now undertaken specific staff training. As a follow on from involvement in Meitheal, LES staff also expect to be exploring ways to develop a targeted strategy specifically dealing with the needs of people from new communities. This is expected to involve forming alliances with FAS, Co. Dublin VEC and the Department of Social and Family Affairs to deliver a more joined up employment support strategy incorporating language assessment and support as well as employment-related skills.

Enterprise

In relation to enterprise supports, SUCCEED, a tailor made enterprise training course was designed and delivered by the Partnership Enterprise officer as part of the Meitheal project. The course was designed as an intensive two-week programme to provide training to those from new communities interested in setting up their own business. Core elements were:

- Communications and Culture;
- Core Business Skills;
- Business networks (locally and nationally);
- Raising Finance;
- Talks & Encouragement from local entrepreneurs, Chamber of Commerce, Bank Manager, BASE Enterprise Centre;
- Advice on Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme.

Within the Communications and Culture section, a key area of focus was on business communications in Ireland and opportunities were provided for participants to explore cultural differences in business and general communications. Participant reviews took

place at the completion of each course and recommendations made were incorporated into courses as far as possible.

Five SUCCEED courses were delivered between November 2006 and October 2007. Reports from the Enterprise Officer indicate that a significant number of participants have moved on to mainstream Enterprise support services and established businesses. Of the 72 participants who completed these courses 24 have set up businesses.

Feedback from the SUCCEED course participants consulted for the external evaluation was unanimously positive and particularly emphasised the professionalism of the course and the high level of benefit they felt it was to them.

Participants reported how they felt their confidence had increased both in terms of their business plans as well as their general social integration into the area.

Particularly highlighted were:
- The excellent coordination of the course;
- The high calibre of the tutors;
- The practical and relevant content – business planning, taxation, legal structures, writing a business plan, marketing;
- The focus on English language skills needed for business communications;
- The practical business scenarios used in role play situations;
- The opportunity to meet others planning to set up their own businesses.

As one participant summed up:

> 'This course has taken my idea of setting up a business to another level. I feel more confident about my business plan. I have learnt a lot about starting and running a business, where to get useful information about my business and a whole lot more. I have met and heard other people with the same challenges and how they plan to overcome them, and those who overcame and became successful.'

In relation to recommendations for improvement, the main suggestions made across all of the consultations with participants were for longer courses, availability of mentors to them and support for them to continue networking so they could support each other.

4.2.5   Awareness Raising amongst Employers

Awareness raising amongst employers was an additional and related theme to that of employment. The core focus was to influence and support local employers to actively recruit refugees in order to enhance the opportunities for employment for immigrant workers and also support diversity awareness training within the workplace.

A workshop was held in November 2006 and a total of 29 HR managers and other company managers representing 21 different companies attended. There was close cooperation between Meitheal and the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown in planning for and hosting the workshops.

A similar workshop is planned for December 2007.

4.2.6   National and International Links

The core focus of this theme was to engage with Irish and EU Partners involved in ERF funded projects to identify best practice and share learning and new ideas.

Towards the end of 2006 networking links were established with Cork City Partnership. A visit by Meitheal and relevant Partnership staff to some of the Cork Partnership projects was viewed as valuable in terms of acting as a catalyst for creative discussion and reflection on Meitheal. It was reported to be an opportunity for sharing experience and also provided concrete ideas regarding future planning, particularly in relation to outreach to the most vulnerable groups of new communities. In 2007, the invitation was extended to Cork Partnership to attend the two school principals' meetings.

In September 2007, a visit took place to Berlin. The trip focused on familiarization with lifelong learning services provided through Lander based 'learn shops' which are open door advice centers for unemployed persons seeking a way back into employment through further education. Six people participated in the trip including the Blanchardstown Partnership Education Coordinator, the LES Manager, the Research

Officer and the Employers Liaison Officer. The trip was viewed as informative for general Partnership work and from the Meitheal perspective it was found that the holistic approach adopted throughout the Partnership was one which some of the German partners may wish to consider as a means of providing an integrated range of services to refugees.

National links were also facilitated through the Meitheal Coordinator's attendance at the Community Links networking meetings in Dublin. This also provided an opportunity for the information and learning on the project to be shared.

4.3   Overview Feedback from Working and Stakeholders Group

In relation to the above outcomes and achievements feedback from the Steering and Working Groups particularly highlighted a number of facilitating factors.

(i) Integrated approach

The fact that Meitheal was integrated into the existing Partnership structure and linked to key services in the area including Co. Dublin VEC, local schools, youth services, Fingal Local Authority and FAS, was seen as a key facilitating factor for the development of the project. In the external evaluation survey, a high level of commitment was reported to implementation of the actions across all existing Partnership work areas. Commitment was also noted in relation to the identification of lessons emerging in relation to effective supports for clients from diverse backgrounds in order to strengthen or adjust their services as appropriate.

(ii) Management approach

The chairing of the monthly review meetings by the Partnership manager and the active involvement of key Partnership staff was also believed to have been of key importance to the project's achievements. The high level of commitment to regular reporting, information sharing and reflection among this group was viewed as key to the project development and to the identification and alleviation of issues arising.

(iii) Dedicated and committed staff team for Meitheal.

The commitment and skills of the core staff team of the Meitheal project were also viewed as key factors in the positive outcomes from the project. The challenges involved

for the coordinator and staff team in relation to commencing work on a new project linked so closely with the existing Partnership Action Plan and an existing well bonded staff team were particularly acknowledged. Furthermore, the pressures resulting for the Meitheal staff team from the delay in project start up and the subsequent impact of this delay on the project's capacity were also noted by those consulted by the external evaluator. It was generally felt that the professionalism and sensitive approaches of the core Meitheal staff and key Partnership staff involved in the project, meant that any difficulties in relation to the integration of actions and staff roles were addressed, and very good working relationships were developed.

(iv) Stakeholders Engagement

A core feature of Meitheal was the engagement of the project with local service providers at a strategic level so as to ensure the availability of mainstream services for people from new communities with a particular focus on education, enterprise and employment. Among the stakeholders' contributions that were core to the delivery of Meitheal were the following:

- The VEC assisted with the design and implementation of the language course for the refugees Jobs Clubs. A model course was designed for the Project and there is a recognition of the effectiveness of the format adopted for the course, including outreach support, access to the Local Employment Services and the provision of language tuition and supports through the VEC;

- IILT provided contribution in kind for the teaching of participants in the beginner language course. IILT have indicated their willingness to continue their classes at least until the end of 2007. There is a possibility that the classes may be continued into 2008 and that the Fortlawn Centre may become a regional access point to refugees in Dublin 15. This is contingent on funding being made available from within IILT to facilitate such a move.

- The Department of Social and Family Affairs provided funding which was used as part of the funding for two additional SUCCEED Enterprise programmes held in October 2007 and November/December 2007. The Department was also instrumental in supporting the possible mainstreaming of the SUCCEED programme fro potential entrepreneurs.

- The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) worked closely with Meitheal in the design and the delivery of the workshop targeting employers entitled 'Managing for Diversity'. The Institute also provided critical logistical, technical and professional support with the hosting of the Meitheal education seminar 'Diversity in Education'.;

- While planning for CELEBRATE, the Meitheal Project worked closely with Community Development Officers from within Fingal County Council. The Blanchardstown Library played a critical role in facilitating professional development for teachers involved in the 'Multilingual Books Project'. The books produced as an outcome of the Project were displayed in the library;

- The Blanchardstown based section of the Department of Social and Family Affairs provided a guest speaker for those attending the Jobs Club. The DSFA was also instrumental in supporting the possible mainstreaming of the SUCCEED programme for potential entrepreneurs;

- Local firms, most noticeably IBM and Xerox, provided logistical and technical assistance to Meitheal for different facets of Project work. This included IBM providing volunteer support during the main CELEBRATE events;

- The Blakestown and Mountview Community Centre assisted with the roll out of the outreach programme;

- Local schools engaged in delivery of schools-based Meitheal actions and also in the Networking fora;

- High levels of engagement by local principals in targeted meetings, with representation by the Department of Education & Science at one meeting;

- Broad representation from local education personnel and high level representation from local and national organisations and Government Departments with the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform launching the report.

(v)   **Promotion of Meitheal**

The Project attained a high level of visibility both locally and nationally in the first months of operation. This level of visibility was developed as a result of coordinated efforts within the Partnership to disseminate information regarding the Project.

- Information meetings held for the Plan Implementation Boards, which are part of the enabling structures for the Partnership, were informed about Project actions.

- News regarding the awarding of funds from the ERF was headlined in the Partnership Newsletter that was issued to 11,000 households in the Blanchardstown area and to all schools and points of contact.

- The Partnership Website hosted a designated page for Meitheal actions.

- The Community Links electronic magazine, which is distributed nationally, was accompanied by descriptions of the Project.

- Flyers developed to advise potential participants regarding access to English language classes were distributed widely in all ethnic food stores and hairdressers in the greater Blanchardstown area these were displayed prominently.

- Posters and flyers were developed and extensively circulated for CELEBRATE - over 50 posters and 2000 flyers were developed for the 2007 event.

- PowerPoint presentations were developed for networking meetings with principal teachers and with other stakeholders.

- The Project made extensive use of local print media avenues to disseminate the progress of Project actions. In particular, extensive coverage was afforded the CELEBRATE event. News articles appeared in the Community Voice, which is distributed free of charge to upwards of 30,000 homes in the Blanchardstown area, and in the Blanchardstown Gazette. Additionally, news articles appeared highlighting the SUCCEED programme and discussing other components of the Project.

4.3.1   Challenges Identified

Against the backdrop of the positive outcomes noted above, the evaluation feedback also highlighted the significant challenges involved in relation to achieving the objectives of the project and ensuring that all actions planned for the project themes were delivered. Some disappointment was evident in relation to the progress made for some actions but in relation to this feedback, the following challenges were noted.

(i) The challenge of setting up the structure and systems needed to deliver a project as multi-layered as Meitheal within such a short time frame was emphasised. It was suggested that the timeframe was in fact closer to one year by the time funding was received and staff recruited. Time constraints were reported to have been particularly pressing in view of the need for clarity regarding roles and lines of responsibility for the different actions and also for structures to be in place to support communications flow within the project. While there was a general sense within the consultations that these

challenges had been met to a large degree, there was an awareness that it took some time for systems to work effectively. In view of the already restricted time available for the project delivery, this meant that prioritisation was necessary in relation to project actions and some actions e.g. international links and learning from best international practice received less attention than others.

(ii) The complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the needs of many members of new communities was also highlighted within the consultations, and it was stressed that a significant level of sustained support is needed if integration is to be achieved. The experience of Meitheal endorsed that of research discussed in the introduction to this report, regarding the impact of issues for new communities such as low levels of confidence, poor information on local supports available and on Irish social and cultural life, mismatch of skills and also lack of certification required for employment. In addition to these personal and skill related blocks, other practical difficulties in relation to access to training and/or employment were also highlighted by Meitheal. These included:

- Childcare difficulties impacted on attendance at courses. .At the beginning of the project, childcare support was made available to participants in Meitheal actions. However in view of the level of need identified, it was acknowledged that Meitheal could not sustain this support both in terms of Meitheal budget constraints and also the fact that the Partnership could not provide childcare for one target group, and not for any others.

- Programme operational guidelines also resulted in barriers in relation to access to further education and employment for some new community members. One particular area highlighted was the issue that arose for some clients who wished to engage in education or training courses in order to enhance their employment opportunities, but were not deemed eligible for welfare supports as they had qualifications in their country of origin. For many of these clients, it was noted that their qualifications were not recognised or valued by Irish employers and/or the process of official recognition with FETAC appeared to be overly complex.

- Another major block noted by those consulted was the rent supplement issue, and the slow roll out of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). It was

suggested that current arrangements regarding rent supplement effectively prevent refugees from working and this will only change as the new scheme takes effect and they are provided with access to suitable, affordable accommodation with local authority support and quality guarantees, even after they access employment.

- A further concern expressed by some of those consulted was that for many of those who had engaged with Meitheal supports such as Beginner English and employment/enterprise training, Meitheal was only able to provide support for the first stage of their progression process. It was highlighted that it is vital that those who are on progression paths as a result of Meitheal will receive the longer-term support they need to build on their initial progress after the completion of the Meitheal project. For example, it was noted that difficulties are often experienced by participants on enterprise/employment programmes eventually finding employment or starting a business. After acquiring the necessary skills, many additional barriers often still remain, particularly in relation to securing finance or employment and it is important that continued local support is made accessible for them.

(iii) A strong view emerging from the consultations is that the level and range of services needed to support the integration of new communities is not currently available in the area. It was suggested that Meitheal demonstrated the extent of the need for a wide range of services – particularly education, training and employment support at a range of different levels - for new communities. This was particularly demonstrated in relation to the numbers of people coming forward for language assessment and the numbers needing English language classes at all levels.

(iv) The impact of the rapidly changing local environment was noted as a further challenge to the work of all of the agencies involved in Meitheal and to the degree to which the objectives set for Meitheal could be achieved. The major transformation in terms of demographic profile for the Blanchardstown area was highlighted and it was suggested that the challenges presented by the changes involved are significant and relate to the types and extent of service delivery required within the area. Furthermore, it was noted that a key challenge relates to the task of transforming the social environment

into one which welcomes and accommodates diversity. This challenge is viewed as complex and requiring a multi-faceted response which facilitates a collaborative critical analysis of how systems are working in relation to the facilitation of inclusion and integration of new communities and also the barriers and impediments that are impacting on this process. In assessing the achievements of Meitheal, it was suggested that progress has been slower in relation to the area of cultural and social inclusion both in relation to new communities and the host community. As many of those consulted noted, this element is at the core of the project and, as indicated in literature cited earlier, it is the most challenging for communities across Europe.

(vi) Alongside the practical challenges outlined above, a final over arching challenge was noted in relation to the objective of the Meitheal project to facilitate greater integration of new communities in the Dublin 15 area. This is the fact that this work is essentially dependent on the commitment set out at Government level for the identification and naming of the needs, challenges and opportunities involved in immigration and for the development of a clear understanding of integration. Integration policy at national Government level remains a somewhat vague concept. While the process of integration will involve all actors at local level, it needs to be state driven and state funded if it is to be successful; with clear structures and objectives in order to ensure that it is given priority in the policy context.

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SECTION FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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5.1   Summary Conclusions

In relation to the objectives set for the different strands of action across the Meitheal project, an overall conclusion of the evaluation is that considerable achievement is evident regarding outcomes and impacts for the individuals from new communities engaged, particularly in language and employment and enterprise supports.

In relation to Language training and communication skills

A range of opportunities were provided including Beginner and Jobs Club English classes (37 and 60 participants respectively), schools based actions (approximately 124 children per year), summer school immersions courses (52 participants) and sessions for parents of Early Start children (28 parents).

As intended by the project for this strand of action, these activities concentrated not just on language capacity but also on communication skills, understanding of Irish cultural life, Irish mores and more specific in-depth understanding of business, enterprise and employment conventions, norms and opportunities.

Other important outcomes for this theme of the project were the facilitation of meetings of School Principals (2 meetings took place and resulted in recording of key recommendations) and meetings of after-school language teachers with exchange of good practice (3 meetings). A major seminar on cultural diversity and challenges for Irish education also took place in October 2007, with international speakers

In relation to Outreach

Outreach support was provided to 131 people through the project and this was followed through with 'in reach' support targeted at addressing specific social and

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learning requirements in order to alleviate barriers to engagement and participation.

In relation to Culture and Arts

The project succeeded in engaging high levels of participation for a wide range of events that fostered an appreciation of diverse cultures in the area and enabled new and host communities to play an active role in the artistic life of the community. (Total participation was estimated to be in the region of 1,000 people each year).

In relation to Employment and Enterprise access

A range of employment supports were provided to support job seeking for the project target group. These included integrated jobs skills and language support classes (60 participants in total, 8 of whom were supported into employment) in addition to Meitheal outreach supports and the mainstream supports provided by Blanchardstown LESN.

Tailor-made Enterprise training was also provided. 5 SUCCEED Enterprise courses were run and this involved an enrollment of 82 people with 72 completing and 24 establishing their own businesses.

In relation to awareness raising amongst employers

One workshop for employers in November 2006. A total of 29 HR managers and other company managers attended and a similar one is planned for December 2007

In relation to National and International Links

One exchange visit with Cork City Partnership and one international visit to a Berlin project took place.

The outcomes outlined above facilitated important opportunities to those involved in relation to support and training as evidenced by the feedback in previous chapters. This feedback also emphasised the importance of the personal impact that engagement in the project had for them.

These included:

- Increased confidence regarding mixing with local people;
- Enhanced ability to ask questions to get information;
- More knowledgeable about where to go for particular services;
- having a greater sense of belonging to the local community;
- More knowledgeable about life in Irish society generally.

At the level of the overall project aim i.e. facilitating the integration of new communities within the Blanchardstown area progress made is not as clearly evidenced due to the short-term duration of the project and the complexity of the challenges involved. However, the evaluation data presented in the previous section gives strong indications that the Meitheal project has provided valuable lessons in relation to the key themes of action and the approach required to support integration of new communities in the area.

5.2   Lessons Learned

A number of important lessons have emerged from Meitheal in relation to the work of integration of new communities in the area:

1)   Integration Is a Long-Term Process

Meitheal has demonstrated that the challenge of progressing social and cultural inclusion is one that will involve a long-term process that is delivered as part of the broader community development efforts. The project has shown that this process must be based on the understanding that effective integration involves a dynamic two-way approach based on equality and mutual respect in which newcomers and the host society work together. If this process is to be effective core elements must include:

- Opportunities for informal dialogue between new and host communities focused on development of insights regarding the barriers affecting integration and empowering new communities to voice their opinions on the supports they need;
- Outreach to those who are isolated and disconnected from existing supports or services in order to facilitate initial contact and encourage and support engagement.

2)   Barriers to integration are often complex and multi-dimensional

The experience of Meitheal has endorsed the findings of research such as that of Pearn Kandola (2003) that the needs of many members of new communities are complex and multi-layered. As noted in Section 2.2, these needs relate to personal, social, cultural and economic issues. Meitheal has also shown how an effective outreach model can also be adapted to provide in-reach support that can facilitate good linkages and referral support for addressing these needs.

3)   No one agency or group can bring about integration for new communities

In view of the complexity of the barriers involved for new communities, there is need for active engagement of all relevant support agencies in developing and delivering an integrated support service model for new communities. All agencies, but in particular key support agencies such as FAS, HSE, VEC and DSFA, need to identify supports for new communities as part of their core work and to collaborate in the development of strategy for a local service approach that has the flexibility to address barriers experienced by new community members. New approaches are needed in relation to the delivery of traditional services and agencies need time and resources to explore new ways of working with multi-cultural client bases.

4)   English language learning opportunities are critical to integration and progression

Acquisition of basic English is critical to the ability of those from new communities to successfully integrate into local life. The approach to providing English language courses must be culturally appropriate and must involve a range of provision so that learners can access at relevant levels and make a smooth progression from one level to another.

Follow on progression options must be made available to members of new communities who have acquired Basic English language competency in order to support their social and cultural integration into the area. Furthermore the opportunity for a range of accessible, affordable life long learning opportunities that can be accessed at appropriate levels should be made available to new community members interested in engaging in further learning and/or education/training aimed at enhancing their employment opportunities. Consideration should also be given to the provision of English language immersion courses for children and young people attending school with little of no English

5)   The local school system faces particular challenges in relation to integration

The effects of the significant growth in new communities in areas such as Blanchardstown are particularly felt in the school system, and opportunities for schools to network and develop insight into the challenges they are facing are vital for these schools. Wide-ranging challenges were noted within the principals' fora facilitated by Meitheal. Those particularly highlighted related to the pressure on school places for new community children, the supports needed by schools to meet the learning needs of children of immigrant families, and also those related to communications with, and supports for, parents of children attending the schools.

6)   Integration must be resourced and supported at government policy level.

Many of the factors that impinge on the integration of new communities are outside the control of the local area e.g. housing policies and recognition of qualifications. A Government Policy framework that would have coherence with existing policy approaches e.g. combating racism, eliminating poverty and promoting equality, must create the conditions for integration. Such a framework would recognise the unique challenges facing areas such as Blanchardstown and the level of long-term resourcing required to facilitate effective integration actions across all local services and supports. Rather than local services having to 'stretch' existing budgets to include a focus on the integration and social inclusion of migrant workers, they should be able to expect the additional resources required for this additional work.

5.3   The Meitheal Model of Integration

From the above lessons, Meitheal has provided a unique opportunity for Blanchardstown Partnership and key agencies involved in Meitheal to develop and pilot a community-wide framework for the facilitation of local integration. Key features of this framework are set out below.

Clear Definition of Immigration

Meitheal has defined immigration as a dynamic, two-way process involving new and host communities working together to build a local community in which differences are respected and each member is facilitated to participate to the extent that a person needs

and wishes in all of the major components of local life, without having to relinquish his or her own cultural identity. This approach to integration has a community-wide focus and engages a multi-layered strategy with multi-sector involvement.

Framework of Meitheal Actions

Meitheal's framework sets out six key strategic themes of action or pathways through which new and host communities can work together to provide resources and opportunities to build an integrated local community:

(i)   Language and Communication as Core Skills

The Language and Communication theme is based on the understanding that communications is central to integration. It focuses on language provision with a concentration not only on language capacity, but also on communication skills, understanding of Irish cultural life, Irish mores and more specific in-depth understanding of business, enterprise and employment conventions, norms and opportunities.

(ii)   Outreach and Inreach Support for Vulnerable Groups

Outreach work focuses on identification and support for vulnerable adults who may be isolated within the host community due to barriers such as language difficulties, cultural differences and/or lack of social networks. It is complemented by an 'in reach' element which supports links and referral to the services and progression options that are relevant.

(iii)   Arts and Culture

The pivotal role of the Arts in breaking down barriers, fostering an appreciation of diverse cultures, and facilitating exploration of controversial issues for multi-cultural societies is recognised within the Meitheal framework. This theme focuses on enabling members of the new communities to play a more active role in the artistic and cultural life of the community as well as facilitating an exchange of knowledge and personal experience regarding social norms and expectations in the context of the life and culture of Irish people and of new ethnic communities.

(iv)　　Employment and Enterprise

Employment-focused action seeks to reduce barriers to employment and self-employment for new communities. Opportunities are provided for training and skills enhancement, and members of new communities are enabled to learn more about the Irish labour market and share their existing knowledge and experience. The actions are based on the understanding that employment is essential to full integration.

(v)　　Awareness Raising Among Employers

This action focuses on a strengthening of relationships with local employers to actively promote recruitment of immigrant workers and to support the development of an intercultural workplace.

(vi)　　National and International Links

Development of strong national and international links between agencies working on integration-focused projects is essential in order to ensure the transfer of lessons learned to national policy level and the sharing of good practice models and new ideas.

Underpinning these actions or pathways to integration, is the understanding that they interact dynamically, and each has the power to reinforce of weaken progress in the other areas. For example, language and education are strongly linked with employment access and also crucial in relation to access and participation in services and the social life of the community.

In this context, the framework affirms the importance of an understanding of integration as one involving:

- a community-wide focus;
- multi-sector involvement; and
- a multi-layered strategy.

This framework provides a valuable guide to the development of local and national policy and practice and the individual pathways can provide a tool for facilitating integration as well as a means of auditing the extent to which integration is being achieved.

5.4   Recommendations

1)   For Blanchardstown Partnership and Meitheal Stakeholder Agencies

1.1   The Partnership and key stakeholder agencies in the Meitheal project should review the learning from Meitheal and identify the most appropriate way for them to build on their experience and incorporate the lessons learned into their on-going work. For example, Blanchardstown Partnership should set 'integration' as a core theme into its new plan 2008-2010 and maintain a specific focus on outreach and language/communications supports for new communities within key areas of work including employment, enterprise and community development.

1.2   The local Schools should continue to network and engage in information sharing with a view to influencing policy and practice, and making successful submissions to Government for the resources needed to support their integration-focused work . The research paper produced by McGorman and Sugrue (2007) should be used as a core tool to support this work.

1.3   The Meitheal Stakeholder group should continue to meet to review the mainstreaming potential for Meitheal. Ideas that could be considered include:
   o Development of a template for a model of good practice in relation to delivery of services/supports to members of new communities;
   o Development of anti-racism and intercultural training across Stakeholder staff;
   o Dissemination of key findings. A meeting should be sought by Blanchardstown Partnership with the Minister for Integration to discuss the findings and mainstreaming potential of Meitheal particularly the core elements of outreach and English language supports for employment and enterprise;

o Development of targeted initiatives focusing on access to key public services for immigrants e.g.

> - Information access for vulnerable immigrants
>
> - Person-centred, support networks focused on empowerment, and generating the conditions for people to self advocate and engage in processes of dialogue within the community;
>
> - Language learning for all levels of learner, inclusive of all groups including those in low paid, insecure employment; and recognising the diversity of situations and needs of newcomers e.g. immigrant women have particular needs.
>
> - New Community representation at all levels of local life including Local Development agencies and County Development Board;
>
> - Recognition of qualifications and other employment related issues;
>
> - Follow-up on new community clients currently engaged in Meitheal.

2)　　For Blanchardstown Local Development Infrastructure

A special policy forum involving the directors of Fingal County Development Board should be set up to review and discuss the learning from Meitheal. Blanchardstown Partnership and other key agencies involved in Meitheal should provide information inputs on lessons learned and identify the key elements that need to be considered for a strategic approach to integration across the local development infrastructure. These elements should include:

- Accurate and up to date profile information on new communities in the area;

- Insights on barriers identified in relation to integration and a strengthening of community-wide commitment to respond to barriers to inclusion;

- Development of integrated, targeted initiatives focusing on access to key public services for members of new communities;

- Supports for effective networking across key service providers for the purpose of ensuring synergy in terms of provision and development, and of facilitating maximum flexibility among statutory agencies to respond to local needs;

- Identification of appropriate mechanisms for inclusion of members of new communities into policy, consultative and decision-making structures within the area;

• Development of a community-wide media campaign to combat racism and promote interaction and understanding of cultural diversity;

3).   For Government

A coherent National Integration Policy should be developed. The process involved in this development should facilitate the inclusion of all key stakeholders and have regard for the lessons emerging from projects such as Meitheal, in particular the need for appropriate long-term resourcing and flexibility for statutory agencies to respond to local need. Publication of a Government White Paper on Immigration would be a valuable contribution to this process.

MAIN REFERENCES USED

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www.cso.ie/census

APPENDIX 1

Explanation of Terms used

The term 'refugee' is commonly used by the public to refer to any individual who has entered the Country seeking asylum, irrespective of their legal status. For clarity, a comprehensive list of terms is outlined and defined below.

Asylum seeker

An asylum seeker is someone who applies to the State to be recognised as a refugee under the terms of the 1951 UN Geneva Convention and its supplementary 1967 New York Protocol relating to the status of refugees.

Convention refugee

A Convention refugee is defined in section 2 of the Refugee Act, 1996 as,

'a person who, owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality and membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'

The term 'Convention' relates to the 1951 UN Geneva Convention and its supplementary 1967 New York protocol relating to the status of refugees.

Programme refugee

Section 24 of the Refugee Act, 1996 defines a programme refugee as

"… a person to whom leave to enter and remain in the State for temporary protection or resettlement as part of a group of persons has been given by the Government … whether or not such person is a refugee within the meaning of the definition of a "refugee" in section 2 (of the Act)"

Over the last two decades, groups of programme refugees have been admitted from Chile, Iran, Vietnam, Bosnia and Kosovo, and a small number is admitted under

Ireland's resettlement quota. In general, they have been afforded the same rights as Convention refugees.

Individuals granted leave to remain

This status is granted at the discretion of the Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to persons whose claims for asylum are not considered to meet the criteria set out in the 1951 UN Convention but who are not returned because their country is at war or for some other compelling reason. In general terms, persons granted leave to remain have similar rights to persons granted refugee status.

APPENDIX 2

CSO 2006 census data breakdown for Blanchardstown area

(Prepared by Blanchardstown Partnership Research and Evaluation Officer)

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