



RECOGNISING ABILITY CONFERENCE

Marino Institute of Education – 4th September 2003

Overcoming Barriers to Employment Experienced by
Refugees and Asylum Seekers, People with Disabilities and
Travellers

CONFERENCE REPORT

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the INOU Chairperson, Ann Fergus who Chaired the Conference. We would also like to thank the following Conference Speakers for their interesting and thought provoking presentations:

Niall Crowley, The Equality Authority; Helen Johnston, Combat Poverty Agency; Mary Keogh, Forum of People with Disabilities; Itayi Viriri, Irish Refugee Council; Thomas McCann, Irish Traveller Movement; Esther Lynch, ICTU and Peter Flood, IBEC.

The Afternoon workshops gained considerably from the Workshop presentation insights from:

Maureen Dunne, Challenge Programme (with Fingal Centre for the Unemployed); Brid O'Brien, Pavee Point and Kenny McAdams, Disability Action

Thank also to Delia Colohan, Galway LES; June Tinsley, INOU and Paul Billings, Tosach, who facilitated the Workshops and also to Tony Jordan, Ait na nDaoine; Anne McCloskey, Crumlin CIC and Rotimi Adebare, SUIL who agreed to report back from the Workshops.

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1. Introduction to the INOU

1.1 The INOU is the National Federation of individuals and local centres and groups concerned with combating unemployment. The organisation has over 180 Affiliates. These groups comprise of:

- Local community based organisations tackling unemployment
- Local community based organisations concerned with particular communities of interest or delivering specialist services of assistance to unemployed people
- National Non-Government Organisations concerned with related issues
- Trades Unions/trades councils
- Area Based Partnerships/Community Groups/LEs
- Other organisations expressing solidarity or seeking access to training and/or information

1.2 The INOU supports its members through the provision of services such as training, information and analysis of Government policies. The INOU is a National Anti-poverty Network and works at local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people. The INOU is also a Social Partner and participated, through its membership of the Community and Voluntary Pillar in the negotiations for the Partnership 2000 Agreement, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and its successor - Sustaining Progress.

1.3 The INOU is a non party-political, non-sectarian independent organisation.

2. Recognising Ability

2.1 This Report summarises the proceedings of the INOU's Recognising Ability Conference - Overcoming Barriers to Employment experienced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers, People with Disabilities and Travellers held at the Marino Institute on Thursday, 4th September 2003.

2.2 A Survey Questionnaire which the INOU sent to member organisations provided very useful feedback to assist in structuring the Conference Agenda. The morning session of the Conference provided a platform for national organisations including the relevant National Anti-poverty Networks, the Equality Authority, the CPA, IBEC and ICTU to present their analyses of unemployment and barriers to employment experienced by the different communities of interest represented. The Open Forum Panel Discussion ensured that Conference delegates had an opportunity to highlight their own issues and directly engage with the Conference speakers in relation to this work. The afternoon of the Conference focused primarily on the local perspective and comprised of three discussion-based Workshops with a problem solving focus. Each Workshop was chaired by a Facilitator and consisted of inputs from keynote speakers with a particular knowledge and experience in the related area.

The structure of the Conference Report follows the format of the Conference Agenda.

2.3 The Recognising Ability Conference was a key element of a broader INOU project. The Project aimed to:

- Enhance the capacities of INOU affiliated organisations that are service providers to respond positively to the needs of particular marginalised groups
- Generate a broader knowledge and understanding amongst the INOU membership of the policies of other National Anti-Poverty Networks on issues which affect particular communities of interest who may be affected by unemployment
- Build the capacities of, and create further opportunities for INOU members to network more effectively in relation to issues that may affect particular communities of interest who avail of their services

In addition to the Conference, the project contained two other principal components;

- A Briefing Paper on Barriers to Employment experienced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers, People with Disabilities and Travellers and;
- The development of a Training Module that reflects the particular Welfare to Work needs of the particular communities of interest.

2.4 The Briefing Paper was produced, in conjunction with the relevant representative organisations and has been widely distributed. Copies of the Briefing Paper are available from the INOU. It is also possible to read and/or download the document from the INOU website, www.inou.ie. The Training Module has been developed and the INOU intends to pilot the Training Module in 2004.

2.5 The INOU Project 'Overcoming the Barriers to Employment experienced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Travellers and People with Disabilities' has allowed the INOU to draw on the representative national organisations' particular perspectives and expertise on unemployment and barriers to employment as it affects these communities of interest.

2.6 It is intended that overall the project will address a need identified by a number of INOU affiliated organisations that provide services to unemployed people indicating that they would benefit from a greater knowledge of the issues and barriers (and in the case of Refugees and Travellers for example, cultural issues) faced by particular communities of interest.

3.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

10.45	Welcome and Introduction	Ann Fergus, INOU Chairperson
10.50	Opening Address – An Equality Authority Presentation	Niall Crowley, Chief Executive Officer The Equality Authority
11.05	An INOU Overview	Eric Conroy, General Secretary INOU
11.20	A Combat Poverty Agency Perspective	Helen Johnston, Director CPA
11.30	An Irish Refugee Council Analysis	Itayi Viriri, Policy Officer Irish Refugee Council
11.40	An Irish Traveller Movement Presentation	Thomas McCann, Equality Officer Irish Traveller Movement
11.50	A Forum for People with Disabilities Analysis	Mary Keogh, Co-ordinator Forum of People With Disabilities
12.00	An Irish Business and Employers Confederation Perspective	Peter Flood, Assistant Director Social Policy – Equality, IBEC
12.10	A Services and Industrial Professional Trade Union View	Rosheen Callender, National Equality Secretary SIPTU
12.20	Open Forum Panel Discussion	
1.00pm	Lunch	
2.00pm	Workshops	
	Campaigning and Lobbying Towards a Rights Based Approach	Kenny McAdams, Disability Action

Participation and Involvement:
Promoting Good Practice

Brid O'Brien,
Pavee Point

Practical Solutions to Overcoming
Information/Institutional Barriers

Maureen Dunne,
Challenge Programme,
Fingal ICTU Centre
for the Unemployed

3.10pm

Report Back from Workshops

3.25pm

The Next Steps

June Tinsley, Policy
Officer INOU

3.30pm

Closing Remarks

Ann Fergus, INOU
Chairperson

4. Opening Address: Niall Crowley, Equality Authority

Introduction

It is important and timely that a mainstream movement of the unemployed takes on to recognise the diversity of its membership. People who are unemployed have different experiences and situations. Equally they have a diversity of identities. This has implications for services to unemployed people if they are to be inclusive of and relevant to all who are unemployed.

This demands a focus by unemployed organisations on rights, on practice and linkages. Rights provide a key context for change in the experience and situation of those experiencing inequality and unemployment. Practice is a crucial focus given that equality and the accommodation of diversity inevitably require that organisations and institutions do things differently. Linkages are necessary with organisations of those experiencing inequality to build the knowledge base needed for new practices.

Equality Authority

The Equality Authority gets its mandate from the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. Both acts prohibit discrimination on the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community.

The Employment Equality act prohibits discrimination, with exemptions, in the workplace and in vocational training. It allows for positive action on the ground of gender and for people with disabilities, Travellers and older workers. It requires that employers reasonably accommodate people with disabilities subject to a nominal cost exemption. It prohibits sexual harassment and harassment.

The Equal Status Act prohibits discrimination, with exemptions, in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. It makes particular provision for registered clubs. It requires service providers to reasonably accommodate people with disabilities subject to a nominal cost exemption. It allows positive action across all nine grounds. It prohibits sexual harassment and harassment.

The mandate given to the Equality Authority is to combat discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity in the areas covered by the equality legislation. A mandate that covers nine different grounds allows a comprehensive approach to equality that avoids hierarchies between grounds, that acknowledges the intersections between grounds and the multiple identities people hold, and that achieves an administrative simplicity for employers and service providers in pursuing a multi-ground equality agenda in an integrated manner.

The Equality Authority mandate allows for a dual approach to its work. This involves both enforcement and development. The experience in both areas offers insights into approaches to unemployment issues that recognise the diversity of unemployed people.

Enforcement

The Equality Authority's case files highlight a reality of significant levels of discrimination. The case files inevitably highlight a particular set of barriers for specific groups of unemployed people. In 2002 the Equality Authority dealt with 489 case files under the Employment Equality Act. The breakdown of these case files across the grounds is relevant to this exploration of diversity and unemployment:-

- The gender ground accounted for 33% of the case files.
- The race ground accounted for 22% of the case files.
- The disability ground accounted for 19% of the case files.
- The age ground accounted for 10% of the case files.
- The sexual orientation ground accounted for 3% of the case files.
- The Traveller ground accounted for 2% of the case files.

Women, migrant workers, people with disabilities and older people emerge as experiencing significant levels of discrimination. It is important to note that Travellers and gay and lesbian people experience particular difficulties. The low level of case files on the Traveller ground reflects the low presence of Travellers in the workplace. The low level of case files on the sexual orientation ground could reflect significant fears of gay and lesbian people around having to "come out."

A key issue across the grounds of race, Traveller and disability is discrimination at the point of access to the workplace. Dismissal also features as a common issue across these grounds sometimes involving dismissal once a person's disability or Traveller identity is uncovered. A particular issue for people with disabilities is a failure by employers to make reasonable accommodation for them.

The case work experience highlights the importance of rights as a basis for progress for those experiencing inequality and unemployment. The right not to be discriminated against is foundational in this regard. People with disabilities enjoy an additional and important right to be reasonably accommodated such that they can be fully capable in the job (subject to a nominal cost exemption). This more positive right could valuably be extended across all nine grounds covered in the legislation. Making adjustments and providing facilities to accommodate diversity and to ensure everyone can make their full contribution is surely in everyone's interest.

The enforcement experience of the Equality Authority has highlighted the importance of people experiencing discrimination having access to a range of supports. The Equality Authority provides legal assistance only in cases of strategic importance. Trade unions have a long tradition of advocacy in this area on behalf of their members. In more recent times there has been a welcome emergence of community advocacy. Community advocacy has involved community based groups, including unemployment groups playing roles as:-

- Sources of information and knowledge about the equality legislation.
- Advocates for claimants taking cases under the legislation.
- Sources of dissemination about casework outcome so that individual cases can have a collective benefit.
- Advocates for the legislation itself, defending it and seeking its further evolution.

These advocacy roles are crucial if the rights established under equality legislation are to be effective.

Development

The development work of the Equality Authority also offers insights into diversity and unemployment. Research work has been important in identifying a typology of labour market barriers experienced by older people, people with disabilities, Travellers and minority ethnic people (in particular refugees). These include barriers of:

- Context, where negative perceptions, attitudes and stereotypes limit access or where infrastructural or transport barriers exclude people with disabilities
- Institutional practice, where a diversity of identities, experiences and situations are not accommodated in areas such as eligibility criteria, location and timing of programmes and support for caring responsibilities
- Communication, where there is a reliance on written communication rather than face to face contact or specific outreach to groups and where there is a failure to provide materials in different languages and formats
- Cost, where participation in labour market programmes involves actual cost or participants have to forgo other casual income generating opportunities
- Disposition, where previous negative experiences can create attitudinal and motivational issues

Research creates a necessary knowledge base. The Equality Authority has sought to apply this knowledge in particular initiatives. Partnerships with Congress and IBEC have been valuable in this regard. Planned and systematic approaches to equality and making reasonable accommodation of diversity emerge as two key themes in this work.

Planned and systematic approaches.

It is important to plan for equality rather than leaving equality strategies to be reactive and defined on the basis of incidents of discrimination. An equality infrastructure is necessary for planned and systematic approaches within all organisations. This involves:

- Commitments expressed in equality policies and strategies to realise these commitments.
- Capacity development through equality and diversity training which builds awareness of equality issues and develops competencies to ensure this awareness is reflected in practice.
- Evidence based action where equality action plans are put in place on the basis of a review of policies, practices, procedures and perceptions in the organisation.
- Allocating responsibility with an equality officer and an equality committee mandated to drive forward this focus on equality in the organisation.

This is the infrastructure that will allow any organisation to be proactive on equality issues, to invest effectively in equality strategies and to realise practical benefits from this focus on equality.

Accommodating Diversity

Labour market programmes need to take practical steps if they are to realise benefit across the diversity of unemployed people. Diversity needs to be understood in terms of a combination of:

- Identity, a group's values, beliefs, language and perception.
- Experience, a group's relationship with members of the wider community.
- Situation, in terms of a group's economic, educational, health or accommodation status.

Programmes need to gather data and information along these headings to build a knowledge base on diversity. Communication strategies of providers require attention to the profile of the programme, to outreach initiatives, to a diversity of formats and media, and to building confidence and trust between providers and potential participants. Service design requires a specific exercise to test out the potential impact of decisions made on participants and potential participants from groups experiencing inequality and unemployment. Service delivery requires attention to participative decision making, to targeting without segregating, and to mainstreaming that can achieve outcomes for all.

Conclusion

In conclusion this exploration of the experience, work and thinking of the Equality Authority suggests:

- The importance of legislation prohibiting discrimination and of evolving this legislation to require a proactive approach to equality.
- The need to ensure effective implementation of equality legislation with community advocacy being resourced and developed as an integral part of the role of community and voluntary sector organisations.
- The need for organisations to be planned and systematic in their approach to equality and to develop the necessary institutional infrastructure for this.
- The need for service providers to develop and apply strategies to accommodate the diversity reflected in the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation.

This is an agenda that challenges all employers and service providers. It is an agenda that demands stimulation, support and leadership. The INOU and its affiliates have much to offer in this regard.

5. Eric Conroy: An INOU Perspective

I would like to thank Niall Crowley for his interesting and thought-provoking presentation and to thank all the other speakers for agreeing to speak at this Conference.

The INOU is a national organisation which includes unemployed individuals and over 180 organisations. The majority of these are local community based organisations that provide a range of services to unemployed people.

Unemployed people are not a homogenous group. They are men and women; aged 64 and 19; Married, Single and Lone Parents; People with Disabilities, Travellers and Refugees, people who have recently been laid off and people who may never have had a job; people who live in rural and urban areas, people with very strong ties with family and friends and people with little or none. But while unemployed people aren't a homogenous group, it is also true that each unemployed person suffers the same basic problem – the lack of opportunity to earn their living. Of course this is true of Travellers, People with Disabilities and Refugees (and Asylum Seekers) who are unemployed, as it is for every unemployed person. Indeed unemployment is at the heart of the problems faced by these (and other) Communities of Interest. Almost 90% of Travellers are unemployed – denied the right to earn their living either in the mainstream economy or within the Traveller economy. 70% of People with Disabilities are unemployed, yet many People with Disabilities are capable of doing the same work as anyone else, for all or part of the time. Similarly, 30-40% of Refugees are unemployed and Asylum Seekers are not allowed to work. Yet exclusion from such employment confines Travellers and People with Disabilities, Refugees and Asylum Seekers as it does people who are long-term unemployed to poverty.

This is why the elimination of long-term unemployment and the achievement of a Full Employment Society is a key aim for the INOU. This vision which we seek to realise is one where unemployed people, including from the Communities of Interest who experience high levels of unemployment have access to employment with decent pay and conditions within a reasonable period of time and where no-one is long-term unemployed. This will not be achieved easily.

We are facing difficult times for unemployed people and people who will lose their job be they a Traveller, a person with a Disability or a Refugee. Unemployment has been increasing for the past two years, but the recent increases have been particularly bad– the June Live Register figures showed the largest monthly increase for 16 years. The forecasts, from the ESRI and others, while positive in the long run shows that unemployment will continue to rise sharply for the next couple of years. When 200,000 people were signing on in the 80's, this was considered a crisis. But now as we head back up to 200,000 people on the Live Register there is already worrying signs that commentators and politicians believe that this is "manageable" or are prepared to accept this as inevitable. But it's important for the INOU that the vision of a full employment society is not lost. That vision has to include people who are unemployed, often

long-term unemployed from communities of interest represented today as well as ex-Prisoners and people on a One-Parent Family Payment.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say a word about the Right to Work. For Asylum Seekers it has a very distinct meaning. The INOU believes the State has a responsibility to ensure that applications are processed within six months. If not, Asylum Seekers should have the Right to Work after that time irrespective of whether their application has been processed.

I look forward to the day when the ability and skills that Refugees and Asylum Seekers, People with Disabilities and Travellers have developed will be recognised and actively sought out by employers, including state agencies. It surely makes sound business sense in addition to compelling social and legal sense for employers to recruit People with Disabilities, Refugees and Travellers. The potential of unemployed people has been realised in many instances by people who thought they might never work again. This should be the case for other long-term unemployed people including Travellers, Refugees and People with Disabilities. The benefit to society of recognising the existing skills and abilities of these communities of interest, as well as fostering a culture that encourages the further development of this potential will be very considerable.

The state has a key role. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment should rightly be concerned that employers are acting within the range of employment law. However, current practice which excludes people who are not working in civil service jobs from a large number of civil service positions would be bad practice anywhere, but for the state itself to implement this is ludicrous.

Legislation exists to confront some of the barriers which Travellers, People with Disabilities, Refugees and Asylum Seekers experience. The anti-discrimination legislation is an important part of this. But it is only a part of what is needed. Perhaps even more fundamental is the need for attitudinal or cultural change. We are very pleased to have a range of speakers from the representative organisations in addition to members from these networks who will help generate greater awareness of these issues.

The barriers facing various communities of interest can be very different. Many of the barriers facing job-seekers with physical or intellectual disabilities for example are different from those facing refugees. Indeed the job-seeking barriers and employment difficulties faced by people with physical disabilities are different from people with mental disabilities.

However while there are significant differences, there are also similarities. One is that the qualifications and skills of people who are long-term unemployed, tend to be incomplete or outdated. Another similarity is education. Recent research by Duncan Gallie has illustrated the very strong links between unemployment and not achieving upper secondary level educational attainment. Indeed Gallie's research showed that comparative to a range of European countries this link was strongest in Ireland. Clearly then, it is essential that greater resources are made available for children who are at the greatest risk of leaving school early, for early school leavers and for long-term unemployed adults, including Travellers, Refugees and Asylum Seekers and People with Disabilities.

Clearly part of the solution is to upgrade people's work skills by following appropriate vocational training. Pursuing an active labour market policy on its own may not be sufficient, particularly as unemployment grows, but it is vital to any successful outcome for eliminating Long-Term Unemployment.

However, even within labour market programmes, very often disadvantaged groups are under-represented or 'crowded out', including in vocational training. Even where programmes are aimed at groups experiencing disadvantage, it is generally the least disadvantaged who take part. The selective behaviour of people who are in charge of training programmes can be one reason for this. Trainers can single out people with stronger profiles for example if specified job targets resulting from the training are to be achieved. There are also other difficulties. These include

- Poor previous formal learning experience
- Training may not be a priority for some groups experiencing disadvantage (eg older)
- Vocational training courses may require certain skills or qualification levels which people may not have
- Disenchantment eg from being long-term unemployed possibly or having completed training previously

An appropriate way to overcome these difficulties is to focus on the needs of different target groups including people who are long-term unemployed, Travellers, People with Disabilities and Refugees etc. This would need to include looking at: wages, prospects of getting work, comprehensive counselling etc.

Finally I am reminded of the words of the key Labour Market analyst, Ides Nicaise who wrote "I wonder is it not the case that training programmes for people who experience disadvantage lack ambition". Perhaps above all, this is the message I would like to finish with today. Unless we are ambitious in the targets we set, there is a danger that the skills, abilities and potential of people who are long-term unemployed including Travellers, People with Disabilities and Refugees and Asylum Seekers will not be realised.

The Conference is laid out so that speakers in the morning will look at the barriers to employment experienced by Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Travellers and People with Disabilities primarily from a national/overall perspective. The workshops in the afternoon will have a greater focus on a local solution based approach in areas such as how best to ensure the participation of communities of interests in the work of affiliated organisations.

I hope that delegates will find this Conference useful and enjoyable and I look forward to hearing from speakers and delegates during the day.

6. Helen Johnston: Combat Poverty Agency Perspective

Good morning everyone. First of all can I say how delighted I am to be here this morning and that the Combat Poverty Agency has been able to support this initiative. The Conference title Recognising Ability is a very positive approach to addressing many of the barriers and inequalities for various groupings and communities within our society. The focus on people with disabilities, Travellers and Refugees and Asylum Seekers is very welcome. As we are very well aware, these are some of the most marginalized people in our society - in terms of work, services, income and inclusion.

In the time available to me today I want to do four things:

- i. Briefly outline some of the poverty issues for these communities of interest
- ii. Draw on some of the issues identified for these communities in the recent consultation exercise undertaken in the preparation of the Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion;
- iii. Set out some existing commitments; and
- iv. Identify some key issues.

i. Poverty issues for People with Disabilities, Travellers and Refugees and Asylum Seekers

It is well documented and known that unemployment is the largest single cause of poverty. From the available information and from our experience we know that unemployment and levels of poverty are much higher among the communities of interest, that is for people with disabilities, Travellers and Refugees and Asylum Seekers, than for the population as a whole.

While it is possible to make this statement it is less easy to quantify it as our data and information on these communities of interest are limited. There are various reasons for this including the lack of specific data collection exercises for these communities at a national level. To some extent this reflects their lack of status in Irish society and is an issue which many of us here today are seeking to address.

What we do know is that households headed by a person with a disability have one of the highest risks of poverty – more than half of households headed by a disabled or ill person (54%) are at risk of poverty (using 60% of median income as the poverty line). Travellers are among the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society. While data on the level of poverty among Travellers are limited, a history of racism and discrimination has exacerbated their poverty and exclusion from Irish society. The same is now true for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Asylum Seekers are prohibited from working which confines many to poverty by limiting their economic independence and impeding their effective integration into Irish society. The situation of refugees and asylum seekers is compounded by racism, including harassment and intimidation.

ii. Issues raised in Recent National Consultation on Poverty

I now want to go on to highlight some of the issues for these communities of interest which were raised in a recent consultation process undertaken by Combat Poverty and the Office for Social Inclusion in the Department of Social and Family Affairs in preparing Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 for the European Commission. The consultation process involved four regional seminars in Bundoran, Limerick, Kilkenny and Balbriggan. These regional seminars included workshops on disability issues. A national seminar was held on migrants and ethnic minority groups, including Travellers. Written submissions were also invited. The outcomes of this consultation process have been summarised in a recently published document *The Report on Consultation for National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005*.

Two key issues emerging from the consultation process which are relevant to today's conference were:

1. The need to underpin anti-poverty and social inclusion work with a rights-based approach in order to address the range of situations, experiences and identify issues among Travellers, people with disabilities and refugees and asylum seekers.
2. Participation in employment was viewed as essential in preventing poverty

In relation to specific examples, it was clearly stated that denying asylum seekers the right to work perpetuates poverty. For people with disabilities the focus was on adopting an approach that focuses on the abilities, skills, experience and rights of people with disabilities. Some suggestions here included the retention of Community Employment places for people with disabilities, the payment of a minimum wage for people in supported employment and applying the employment support scheme to the public and private sector. For Travellers the implementation of existing policies and plans was seen as presenting the main challenge. Community Employment was also seen as playing an important role for Travellers.

In the time available I have only been able to present a flavour of the issues raised in the consultation process – much more detail is available in the report itself.

iii. Existing Commitments

I now want to move on to draw your attention to the existing targets contained in the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy (or NAPS) launched last year and reiterated and elaborated upon in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion launched last week.

In relation to employment and the communities of interest which are the subject of the conference the NAPS commits to:

- Eliminate long-term unemployment by 2007;
- Reduce the level of unemployment experienced by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007; and
- Reduce the numbers of those who are consistently poor to below 2% and if possible eliminate consistent poverty. Specific attention will be paid to particular vulnerable groups.

There are targets and policy commitments in relation to people with disabilities, Travellers and Refugees and asylum seekers. While there has been some criticism of these targets and policy objectives in terms of their ambition and comprehensiveness, they are publicly stated commitments and efforts must be made to ensure they are implemented. In my view much progress would be made if these commitments were met.

iv. Key Issues

Finally, I want to outline some key issues which I believe need to be addressed if we are to make progress in removing the barriers to employment for these communities of interest and others.

1. Firstly, we need to underpin social inclusion commitments with a **rights-based approach**. A rights-based approach has the potential to remove many of the existing barriers that people in poverty experience in accessing services. A first step in this process would be to set adequate minimum standards, resource the implementation of these standards and monitor their achievement.
2. Secondly, we need to develop and fully implement **poverty proofing** or a more developed integrated proofing system. More rigorous proofing would ensure that policies and programmes are assessed for their impact on people at risk of poverty and adjusted to ensure a positive impact. Work is ongoing in developing better proofing mechanisms on a number of fronts. Combat Poverty and the Equality Authority recently published a report Poverty and Inequality which demonstrates how an equality dimension can be applied to poverty proofing. A further project is now underway to develop and pilot an integrated mechanism. The Equality Authority has developed an equality proofing template for County Development Boards, Combat Poverty is working with local authorities to develop poverty proofing at local level and the Office for Social Inclusion will be developing poverty proofing within the civil and public service. The application of these measures should ultimately ensure that the needs of people in poverty and/or experiencing discrimination and inequality are to the fore in government policy making and programmes.
3. Thirdly, we need to recognise the **multi-dimensionality** of poverty. In other words poverty and unemployment will not be addressed by employment initiatives alone. Many other initiatives and supports are required, for example in tackling educational disadvantage, in relation to language and literacy, childcare, income supports, health, housing and so on.
4. Fourthly, we need to address the **data and information deficits**. Without good data and information it is not possible to adequately identify or quantify the needs to be met and subsequently to be able to monitor the extent to which various policies and programmes are making a difference. Data collection can be improved in a number of ways - through the inclusion of the communities of interest in national data gathering exercises, through better use of administrative statistics, through special surveys of the

communities of interest and through working more closely with the communities of interest.

5. Fifthly, we need to **raise awareness** of the issues being discussed here today and the existing rights of those experiencing poverty, racism and discrimination. A key challenge here is the training of staff and management in service delivery organisations to eliminate practices that perpetuate poverty and discrimination.

v. Conclusion

In conclusion, can I thank the organisers for the invitation here today and congratulate them on raising these issues and having this discussion. I hope that the opportunity to have this exchange of information and debate will lead to greater awareness and ultimately to the removal of the barriers to employment experienced by Travellers, People with Disabilities and Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

7. Itayi Viriri: An Irish Refugee Council Perspective

I would like to thank the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed for providing the Irish Refugee Council with the opportunity to talk to you today about barriers to employment faced by Refugees in Ireland. My short presentation will briefly outline some of the main obstacles that prevent refugees in seeking and entering into gainful employment and what can be done to bring down these barriers.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me begin by emphasising that whilst refugees are accorded the same rights as Irish citizens and therefore are allowed to work, asylum seekers, apart from a one-off ministerial decision to allow those who had been in the state for more than one year up to and including the 26 July 1999, do not have the right to work and participate in labour market programmes. Therefore my presentation will concentrate on refugees (of which I am one, to dispel any later enquiries)

Soon to be published research undertaken by researchers Catherine Conlon, Joan O'Connor and Sara Parsons, commissioned by the Equality Authority shows that refugees have higher levels of unemployment than the general population in most host EU countries and that includes Ireland. Those who are fortunate enough to get some form of employment are often times underemployed, that is, they are employed in sectors way below their skill and education levels. The research, *THE LABOUR MARKET NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS, PARTICULARLY REFUGEES, IN IRELAND* noted that refugees risked being excluded from and marginalised in the labour market through both unemployment and under-employment. Throughout the report it was possible to identify obstacles to refugees' attainment of their career aspirations.

I will therefore present to you some of the main barriers that refugees face when trying to access employment in Ireland. I will make occasional references to the Conlon, O'Connor and Parsons Research report and the Accommodating Diversity in Labour Market Programmes Report, both commissioned by the Equality Authority, who have been very gracious in allowing me to give you some sneak previews.

English language ability

The main barrier to employment for many refugees is their lack of proficiency in the English language. The majority of refugees, apart from those who came from former British colonies (like myself), identify their lack of English language skills as a principal barrier. Some would have arrived here without any command of English and would have been forced to start learning the language from scratch.

Language difficulties usually mean that accessing employment forces a person to rule out the possibility in the near future, of being able to practice the profession they had followed in their country of origin. While some refugees do manage to get a job without much English language proficiency, these jobs are usually in low skill areas.

Research shows that there is a need for employees for whom English is not their first language to be supported in the workplace with English language training schemes. However, some employers do not see that as a priority and therefore avoid hiring

such people in the first place. Thankfully most refugees take up English lessons as soon as they can, especially those conducted by Integrate Ireland, Language and Training, refugee support groups and other such organisations and the great progress they make is indicative of their desire to overcome this language barrier. There is a further need for continued language-support schemes while in employment.

Discrimination is another barrier for refugees...

Refugees face discrimination based on their nationality, ethnicity, colour, legal and immigrant status. Some list barriers to employment as being non-nationals, having a foreign sounding name or accent and different colour of skin to the homogenous inhabitants. Discrimination based on refugees has been linked to uncertainty of legal status. Lack of knowledge in relation to legal requirements was highlighted as a significant barrier to recruitment in the Irish context. Anecdotal evidence shows that most refugees strongly believe that some employers operate a discriminatory recruitment policy, that they are treated unfairly on the basis of their race, nationality, ethnicity or religion.

There is a strong perception amongst refugees and other ethnic minorities here, that there is a general lack of confidence in their abilities, hence in some cases they are not even afforded the opportunity to prove the employers wrong.

In the Equality Authority research, references are made to the fact that multi-national companies, (especially American) would be more inclined to hire minority ethnic groups than Irish employers. Respondents in this research highlight the lack of visibility of minority ethnic groups in the Irish workplace as an indication that discriminatory practices are at work. There is also the perception that the only jobs offered to minority ethnic groups are low paid, low skilled jobs conveying their impression of being a residual source of labour taking up positions not wanted by the indigenous workforce in a tight labour market.

In the end the sense of trying to break into a labour market where minority ethnic groups have such low visibility seems to bolster the barrier of discrimination in the eyes of refugees.

The research also reveals that African refugees, in particular, hold the view or have had experience of not being able to secure work that refugees or immigrants from other countries, particularly Eastern Europe, could. Significantly refugees and other immigrants from Eastern Europe concur with these perceptions of African refugees.

Overseas qualifications not recognised

Non-recognition of skills and qualifications is at most times a huge obstacle to refugees accessing employment in their chosen area of expertise. The prevailing feeling amongst refugees is that employers do not value their qualifications and previous work experience, no matter how experienced and qualified they are. Most well educated refugees arrive in Ireland confident that their qualifications, some of which may even be internationally respected, would be instantly verified and recognised, only to be dismayed upon the realisation that their qualifications are not recognised.

Research has shown that the majority of those who seek asylum in Ireland and those who attain refugee status will have high academic and professional qualifications. There are doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, engineers, technicians, pharmacists and other highly skilled professionals in the refugee community. We, at the IRC usually encourage such professionals to register with the relevant professionals bodies here, as soon as possible.

The Department of Justice's Interdepartmental Working Group on the Integration of Refugees in Ireland noted in its 1999 report that there was no specific co-ordinated scheme in place for assessing or recognising skills and overseas qualifications and that this could result in many refugees remaining unemployed or being underemployed. The Group proposed the establishment of a system of assessing and recognising existing skills, qualifications and the experience of refugees. This would be done by the National Qualifications Authority, Chambers of Commerce, employers groups, FÁS, the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commissions, professional organisations amongst other such relevant bodies. As far as I am aware such a system is yet to be implemented.

For those, who feel that the only way to overcome the barrier of non-recognition of their overseas qualifications is to access higher education in Ireland, another obstacle crops up. Whilst refugees are entitled to third level education, their eligibility particularly at the level of individual third level institutions is not straightforward. The fact that one must have been resident in the EU for three of the last five years, to qualify for the Free Fees scheme means that most refugees do not qualify and as a result find the cost of third level education beyond their reach. Significantly some of the refugees still encountered difficulties negotiating a free fees place with individual colleges after 3 years residency due to confusion over their legal status.

Lack of Irish work experience

As a result of that lack of recognition of their overseas qualifications, most refugees are forced to take up work that they are over-qualified for in order to gain some work experience in Ireland and make some headway in getting the jobs they trained for. The assumption is that following this period of underemployment they would then be able to move into work more suited to their capabilities. The reality, however, is that many refugees get stuck in those jobs for some time.

Lack of Irish work experience has been identified in a number of reports as one of the main barriers to employment. Almost two-thirds of respondents to Equality Authority research felt that lack of Irish work experience and Irish references was a commonly identified barrier. Most refugees were of the opinion that not having work experience impeded their chances of finding work.

One of the principal issues they highlighted was the need to have a reference from an Irish employer or sponsor accompanying a job application. Some participants gave accounts of job interviews where they were asked for references from an Irish employer, in which case most would not have had the opportunity to be employed as they are barred from doing so as asylum seekers. Refugees have noted how important it is to gain some entry to the labour market and have a reference to show to future employers.

Refugees' entitlement to work

As I mentioned earlier, refugees have more or less the same rights as Irish citizens and therefore are entitled to work in Ireland without the need of a work permit. However, research shows that lack of awareness on the part of some employers, has created yet another totally unnecessary barrier for refugees seeking employment. This has led to some refugees missing out on job opportunities simply because prospective employers could not differentiate between asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers who require work permits to work here.

Whilst immigrants into Ireland are permitted to enter into employment on the basis of a work permit, a work visa or a business visa, all of which grant varying entitlements, refugees and those granted humanitarian leave to remain do not require a work permit. All a prospective employer needs from a refugee is either their Stamp No4 Garda National Immigration Bureau registration number or in rare cases, the official letter from the Minister of Justice, indicating their refugee status.

We at the Irish Refugee Council are happy to receive enquiries from prospective employers as to the entitlements of refugee job applicants and whether they are allowed to work and we commend employers who do so. But not many do. I recall one case where a refugee was on the verge of securing gainful employment. Since the employer wanted clarification as to the refugee's status, the refugee produced his Stamp No4 GNIB card. But since the card is clearly marked at the back that this is not an identity card, the employer declined to use it as an identification document. The employer then asked the refugee to get a letter from the Department of Justice ascertaining his refugee status and whether he was allowed to work without a work permit. The refugee did that but was duly informed by immigration officials that his Stamp No4 registration card was enough to verify his status. He went back to the employer, who still was not satisfied. The matter was only resolved when the employer called the Departments of Justice and Enterprise, Trade and Employment. All that would have been avoided had the employer had the right information as to what refugee status entailed.

Unfamiliar Job Search Culture

Most refugees are not familiar with the job-search culture in Ireland. It means that they have to learn how to approach job-seeking the Irish way, suggesting the need for refugees to adapt to Irish norms. A planned system of support to familiarise refugees with the Irish labour market system and job-seeking culture has been called for and this could be done through FAS labour market programmes, educating immigrants from diverse backgrounds on the job market practises of the indigenous population.

However, there is always the danger that the onus would always be placed on the refugee to adapt to employment or job search conditions here. Which is fair enough, but employers and indigenous employees also need to be sensitised to cultural practices of refugees and other minority ethnic groups in relation to their job-seeking and work culture.

Information Issues

Refugees have also expressed general difficulties accessing information. There is a great need for more information about refugees status and entitlements in Ireland to be disseminated and the Irish Refugee Council is constantly working on providing

information to various refugee support groups and also correcting the general misconceptions about refugee rights and entitlements usually bandied about in the media.

An appropriate format for providing information for those with low levels of English and/or literacy difficulties in either English, their own language or both and in a culturally appropriate way needs to be addressed.

Another particular need is in relation to third level institutions' understanding of the status of refugees and related entitlements regarding support with fees and grants.

Lack of Childcare Provision

The lack of childcare provision is seen as another barrier to employment for refugees. Studies show that in relation to accessing education and training refugees, perhaps like most other parents nowadays, could not participate in job related training without adequate childcare provision. This issue still arose in instances where women spoke of being unable to participate in education or training because of difficulties finding a childcare place even in situations where they had secured course places that included a childcare allowance.

The current economic climate & general lack of employment opportunities

It is unfortunate these days that virtually every other week there is an announcement of job losses and company closures. The Celtic Tiger is certainly not what it was some few years ago and this has further diminished the already meagre opportunities that refugees had of getting jobs for which they trained.

Eligibility for Labour Market Supports

There are a number of labour market supports which require one to have been unemployed for a certain period of time. These include the Revenue Job Assist or Back to Work Allowance schemes. The current policy requires that people who are eligible for this scheme must have been claiming Unemployment Benefit or Unemployment Assistance for one year or more. This requirement means that the scheme is unavailable to recently recognised refugees in Ireland, despite the fact that they usually would have been unemployed – having been denied the right to work – for a number of years, in some instances.

Prior to recognition, that is during the time that the individual's claim for asylum is being determined, s/he is denied the right to work, and is forced to rely on support from the State. Asylum seekers are accommodated in full board 'direct provision' hostels, and given €19.10 per week.

Denying access to incentive schemes for the unemployed is a further barrier, and can result in increased dependency on the State, which most refugees, contrary to popular belief, are not too keen on. The Irish Refugee Council has written to the relevant authorities to have this policy reviewed so that refugees can also access labour market support schemes with a time qualifying period time spent on supplementary welfare or in direct provision taken into account.

Local Employment Services have also been called upon to provide more services suited to refugee needs and provide specific training and resources for LES staff directly working with immigrant and minority ethnic groups.

Already an increasing number of refugees have turned to FAS skills training as this presented them with their best opportunity to acquire Irish based skills or qualifications. FAS training enables refugees already with third level education to achieve an Irish qualification commensurate with, or in a small number of cases, higher than those they held on arrival. However the extent to which refugee-specific measures were in place determined the success of participants through this process. Vocational education was more likely to offer those with Diploma or higher level qualifications a route to acquiring Irish-based qualifications to a level similar to those held on arrival. However education courses and supports for education were less familiar to the group and also less accessible.

Ethnic Diversity and the Limitations of Employment Policies

It has been argued that discrimination in the workplace and labour market inequality go beyond being just an employment policy issue. Instead inequality in the labour market mirrors inequality throughout society and the effects of wider societal attitudes on the labour market.

Research conducted in 2000, highlighted various ways in which the attitudes abroad in Irish society contributed to the exclusion and marginalisation of minority ethnic groups within the labour market.

Even though more still needs to be done, it is gratifying to see that different initiatives are already operating on the ground. These include the annual Anti-Racism Workplace week, a joint initiative between the Equality Authority, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Construction Industry Federation.

Also commendable are the Anti-Racist measures undertaken by the Trade Union movement which include:

- delivering anti-racism training in the workplace initially targeting shop stewards and officials across all Trade Unions registered with ICTU.
- A one-year course jointly run by the ICTU and Dublin City University Business School that deals with issues of equality and diversity in the workplace.
- The ICTU's Anti-Racism Indicative Action Plan 2001-2003, which I hope will be extended beyond 2003.

CONCLUSION

The Irish Refugee Council is one of the National Anti-Poverty networks and works closely with bodies such as the Equality Authority, the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, Integrating Ireland and other NGOs. These are vital partners in the process of creating wider societal attitudes that will challenge the exclusion and marginalisation of minority ethnic groups in the Irish labour market. The IRC and other bodies have called upon the government to do more in promoting the employment of non-nationals within Ireland, and to implement new legislation on equal opportunities.

There is also great need for change in Irish attitudes where foreigners coming to work here were concerned and to increase education and awareness amongst the Irish population of other races and cultures settling in Ireland.

With so many reports and references made to blatant racism or ignorance on the part of employers, IBEC and the Trade Unions need to take firm action to nip this in the bud before it is too late.

I would like to commend the INOU for providing this platform and for working tirelessly on behalf of the unemployed, combating unemployment and generating understanding of issues that cause people to be out of work in the first place and the barriers they face.

8. Thomas McCann: An Irish Traveller Movement Perspective

First of all I would like to thank the INOU for inviting me to give an input to this conference and we hope that the contribution we make to the conference will help in removing the barriers that prevent disadvantaged groups and individuals from accessing employment.

I have a very short time to present to you a picture of the barriers that prevent Travellers from accessing employment but also in this presentation I am going to be looking at work and self employment in order to understand historically how Travellers made a living and how Culture played a crucial part in this.

History

Travellers traditionally were self employed. This took the form of tin-smithing, Seasonal labouring and Horse dealing. These forms of employment were only some of the ways that Travellers made a living. These forms of economic activity were carried out in rural areas and were mainly services that were provided to the settled community apart from fairs and markets which were also important times for people to meet each other as well as sell their wares. Traveller's culture and way of life facilitated these forms of economic activity such as nomadism. When all the repairs and services were done in one area, Travellers would move on to another area and would usually be known by the local people in that area. For example certain Traveller names are associated with certain parts of the country.

The types of work Travellers were engaged in was low cost and labour intensive. This meant that it was easy to get started; these types of employment were very flexible and accommodated the Traveller culture and way of life. For example when there was a funeral or a wedding families could be together for a period of time maybe in different parts of the country, so traditionally economic activity and employment were very much part of Traveller culture and facilitated Traveller's way of life. Travellers were neither dependent on the state nor on the wider labour market for employment.

Industrialization

When Industrialization reached Ireland in the 50's it had a huge impact on the whole economy and on how people lived. Most of these effects were on the whole positive effects, but for the Traveller community it was a devastating blow and one which we have not recovered from. A lot of Traveller families could no longer survive in rural areas as they had no longer any way of making a living so they had to move to the outskirts of bigger cities and tried to find ways of making a living. Some of these ways were tarmac, chimney cleaning, scrap collecting, buying and selling, but there were no Travellers employed in the wider labour market. There was no way you would get an interview. The only places that Travellers were sometimes employed were on the building sites and this was only when they were short of people or if they thought they could pay lower wages. To add to this situation most Travellers at the time were poorly educated and were now living in larger numbers in appalling conditions without basic facilities.

Travellers were discriminated against openly both by the state and by individuals; schools would not admit Traveller children, shops would not serve Travellers; public

transport could refuse to take you; if you did have a dispute with a settled person more than likely you would be arrested even if you were in the right; eviction and discrimination were every day realities for most Travellers. This situation that I am describing seems like it belongs to a different era but it continues to this very day.

Present position

The position of Travellers at the present moment is one of exclusion, discrimination and the continual denial that Travellers have a right to a cultural identity with shared values and traditions. How do these issues contribute to the barriers that Travellers experience when they want to work in terms of self employment, of becoming employed in the wider labour market? In terms of self employment it has and continues to be made more and more difficult for Travellers to make a living, through the introduction of legislation, for example the casual trading act and trading licenses for markets, the control of horses act, the lack of space for people to carry on any type of economic activity, and also the media image of traders and that these people are not Travellers but some other group of people that should not be given any resources and should be evicted and moved on and especially should not be allowed to earn a living. So now we are in the situation where most Travellers are not in a position to be self employed, who are educationally disadvantaged and when they do look for a job if the employer finds out that they are a Traveller they have no hope of getting the job and this situation has been shown to be fact again and again. In cases where people were employed and it was later discovered that they were a Traveller they were let go, so in order to be considered for a job you have to hide your Identity and keep it hidden. Is this possible if you have given your address, past history of employment and past history of schooling? If there is a family crisis and you need to be contacted at work, how do you develop close friends at work, if there are jokes about Travellers, or stories in the papers and people are talking about Travellers the shame and frustration that Travellers who are employed can feel is enormous and can be very damaging to the person, and so a lot of Travellers feel that it is not worth going through this, and so a lot of Travellers are on the dole and becoming more and more dependent on the state to provide employment mainly through training schemes and employment schemes. Usually these schemes do not progress Travellers on to employment for numerous reasons.

What needs to happen

If the situation of Travellers is to improve a number of things need to happen. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment need to set up a working group to look at what are the barriers that prevent Travellers accessing the wider labour market and develop strategies that will improve this situation. This group needs to have the representation of Traveller organizations and relevant departments and agencies. Traveller organizations have been calling for this move for a number of years but yet the department have not moved on this. Training on discrimination and on Traveller culture should be provided to both employers and providers of training and employment services. There has to be a strategy put in place for Travellers to access mainstream training and education to facilitate Traveller participation in the labour force. Cultural factors are a significant factor in the low participation rates of Travellers in the labour force and this issue needs to be addressed and guidelines developed both in the workplace and with other service providers. There are groups and Organizations who are in a position to help with this process. There are also many other elements that need to be addressed in order to facilitate Travellers participation in the wider labour market, for instance better accommodation and a network of Transient sites throughout the country. Local authorities also need to

facilitate Travellers to participate in economic activities by how they implement local by-laws and ensure that Travellers are not prevented from making a living. All of these proposals and many more are what Traveller groups have been calling for since the launch of the recommendations of the Taskforce on the Travelling community and although some of the recommendations have been implemented one of the areas that has not been addressed is the whole area of employment. If Travellers are going to be accommodated in the wider labour market and share in the economic benefits of society these issues need to be addressed.

9. Peter Flood, An IBEC Perspective

Over the past decade Ireland has experienced fundamental and far-reaching economic and social progress unmatched by any other country in the developed world.

Consistent poverty fell from 15.1% in 1994 to 6.2% in 2000. Unemployment, including long-term unemployment, has fallen significantly. The labour market has expanded rapidly, with 1.8 million at work now as opposed to 1.4 million in 1996. Major advances have been made in integrating the tax and social welfare systems to improve the incentive to work. Our equality legislation is now the most comprehensive in the EU.

Nonetheless, outstanding issues include some persistent long-term unemployment, the exclusion of a number of marginalized groups within Irish society including people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers and Travellers.

Despite the prosperity of recent years, significant investment is needed across a variety of areas, ranging from housing and health through to education and childcare. IBEC has repeatedly stated that such social infrastructure should be given as high a priority as that given to the improvement of physical infrastructure such as roads and public transport. Indeed, in many cases they are interdependent. It is increasingly clear that in order to achieve a more balanced regional development, people must be encouraged to live outside Dublin and other main cities. It will be necessary to ensure that there is a good quality of life and appropriate services throughout the country to attract them to live elsewhere.

IBEC believes that one of the best ways to tackle social and economic exclusion and equality is through promoting economic growth and higher employment in the market economy. Much needed social improvements will have to be paid for through further economic development. Recent developments at a European level suggest that there is a growing awareness of the link between social and economic goals and that creating and sustaining the best possible conditions for economic growth is the best way to develop improved standards of living, good quality social services and support for those most in need.

Creating a society that provides equality of opportunity with full economic and social participation is essential. The key components in making that vision a reality are education and human resource development. We face considerable challenges in these areas. The industrial profile of the Irish economy is changing but the skill profile of our human resources is not keeping pace with this change. This is a major challenge for an economy that is attempting to reposition itself towards the higher skill and higher value-added employment.

IBEC is actively involved in a number of projects to improve the social inclusion and equality.

- We have also worked closely with the Equality Authority on a number of equality projects including developing guidelines for equal opportunities in the workplace and anti-racism in the workplace week.

- We are also working with ICTU on the Workway project which involves the establishment of a number of regional networks to identify job opportunities for people with disabilities

We also believe that Ireland needs to develop an approach to immigration that ensures that it is as successful in attracting skilled human capital as it has been in attracting foreign investment. There is considerable room for improvement in immigration policy and its implementation. The current approach is not sensitive to the important competitive contribution immigration can make to the economy and society in general, nor to the benefits of having a more diverse society.

The Irish childcare system remains seriously underdeveloped, unaffordable and fragmented both in terms of quality and of service levels. Childcare is a key element of social infrastructure without which families, and women in particular, have difficulty in participating in the labour market.

Without a strong enterprise policy which delivers a competitive economy, Ireland will be unable to address the many social policy challenges we face. IBEC believes that a renewed sense of drive and energy is required to create a more prosperous society that can achieve better standards of living and improved quality of life for all. The days when social and economic objectives were perceived as competing with rather than complementing each other should be consigned to the past.

Tackling social and economic exclusion in a sustainable and effective way requires developing policies and programmes that

- i. Reflect value for money
- ii. Are targeted at those most in need
- iii. Focus on moving people from a dependency culture towards a culture which empowers them to take responsibility for their own circumstances

10. Open Panel Discussion

10.1 John Dolan, Disability Federation of Ireland welcomed this Conference. John said there was a need to unravel structured exclusion in a range of areas including education and transport faced by Travellers, People with Disabilities and Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

10.2 Ruth Bailey, Dublin Aids Alliance said that in relation to Refugees everyday straight-forward issues can become very difficult. Ruth gave an example of how a Refugee who was entitled to take-up a Community Employment (CE) place was told it was necessary to possess a work permit when that wasn't the case and was unable to open a bank account which delayed him starting on CE for 6 months.

10.3 Itayi Viriri, Irish Refugee Council, said that the IRC were in the process of making submissions on this matter.

10.4 Noel Lynch, Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative said he wasn't clear on the differences between the status of a refugee and an asylum seeker. Itayi Viriri, Irish Refugee Council outlined the differences.

10.5 Anna Wall, Finglas Cabra Partnership said there was a strong need for support for people in local employment and similar centres. Anna said it was difficult to know when to take a case on someone's behalf as it could be very difficult to prove even where it is fairly obvious that a person has been discriminated against.

10.6 Niall Crowley, Equality Authority advised that there are a range of strategies available including taking a case. Niall acknowledged that it is very difficult to do so before recruitment. Niall said that the Equality Authority's policy is to take strategic cases which the Authority can win and use as a means of changing existing practice.

10.7 Kenny McAdams, Disability Action proposed that the INOU, ICTU, IBEC and other organisations could draw up a suitable code of practice to overcome barriers to employment faced by people with disabilities, Travellers and Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Kenny said that, in particular the literacy difficulties faced by the communities of interest need to be addressed.

10.8 Mary Fanning, Exchange House advised that in relation to a previous issue about opening bank accounts, a recent committee has been set up to draw up a document with the Irish Council of Civil Liberties and the Central Bank which will be used as a guideline for banks.

10.9 John Stewart, INOU raised the issue of access to employment within the public sector. John said that the operation of the Common Recruitment Pool effectively confined the vast majority of administrative posts within the local authority, health board and VEC sectors solely to people already employed within those sectors and that unemployed people and other groups were being denied access to these jobs. John concluded by outlining the evident irony in the State having a role in promote good employment practices and procedures, while at the same time operating practices which appear to completely contradict this.

10.10 Niall Crowley, Equality Authority said that this was an area that had not arisen for the Authority at this stage and was not a current priority for the Equality Authority.

10.11 Lisa Murphy, Fingal Centre for the Unemployed said that employment agencies demonstrated very little understanding of the issues faced by people with intellectual difficulties and added that there is a need to highlight awareness of these issues.

10.12 Thomas McCann, Irish Travellers Movement said that one of the difficulties in relation to discrimination to Travellers is that employers won't interview Travellers in the first place.

11. Workshops

11.1 Key Points from the Workshop discussion

- Rights Based Approach
 1. There was general agreement from Workshop that the rights based approach has appeared to have had greater impetus in the North.
 2. One of the reasons given by Workshop participants for greater impetus in the North was that there is a Constitution in the South.
 3. A number of Workshop participants suggested a need for rights based training and discussions.

- Lobbying and Campaigning
 1. A key element of successful campaigning which was outlined at the workshop was the need to be specific about the campaign objective(s). This included the suggestion that although the campaign may have one objective, or several that could be short, mid- or long-term, it was useful to focus on particular achievable objectives (which could be stepping stones to a more ambitious longer term goal).
 2. A number of workshop participants suggested that it was very important to build alliances with other organisations. Depending on the campaign this could include local community organisations, national non-government organisations, trade unions, Partnerships and others.
 3. Utilising the media, in particular local radio and newspapers in order to achieve campaign objectives was seen as being very useful by more than one workshop participant. Media coverage was also seen as a useful way of influencing local (and national) politicians.
 4. A Workshop participant said that asking friends, family and other concerned individuals and groups to lobby local politicians including at their constituency clinics was very useful to get their campaigning issue across to politicians.

11.2 Workshop 2: Why the participation and involvement of communities of interest is necessary for the effective design and delivery of services

11.2.1 Workshop Input: Brid O'Brien, Pavee Point

Context

Discrimination is a reality in Irish society. Yet it is a reality that many people will not acknowledge and dismiss as mere political correctness. I am fascinated at the speed at which the backlash against equality has taken hold: given the fact that we are still struggling to get most of the issues facing Travellers, disabled people, refugees and asylum seekers on the table. What has been particularly difficult is to get people to realise the structural nature of the issues we must address and the subsequent policy and practice changes that are required to realise inclusion.

It is interesting to note that most of the issues facing unemployed people and communities struggling with socio-economic exclusion could be described as equality issues. However, it is unusual for this to happen. Often inequality is seen as something affecting 'the other' rather than 'ourselves' in a particular neighbourhood or town.

Inequality exists because there are assumptions made by the policy makers and practitioners that there is a 'norm' into which we all fit. However, given the diversity within Irish society there is no one norm into which we all fit. Policies and practices which ignore this reality have resulted in the inefficient and ineffective use of resources.

Much local and community development has arisen as a response to ill-fitting policies and practices that were not addressing local needs. However, it is important to ensure that such work does not fall into the same trap itself ie what has worked for a 'geographical' community may not be transferable to communities of interest. The reasons for this can be both visible and invisible: often hard to name, harder to acknowledge and hardest of all to work on.

So why include communities of interest?

- Working on diverse issues promotes flexible thinking and constant reviewing of service design and delivery to see if it is meeting all of the needs that are presenting. This in turn creates an awareness that one size does not fit all and that different experiences offer new learning potential that can be transferred right across the work of an organisation.
- It encourages people to focus on the core principles which underpin existing work and which should inform work that seeks to promote equality and realise social inclusion.
- It facilitates greater awareness of the issue of discrimination and the reality that affects more groups and individuals than Irish society is willing to acknowledge. Exclusion is not cost free and it is not in society's long-term interest to fail to address these issues pro-actively. This is as true at the local level as it is at the national.

- The tools developed to address inequality are transferable across a range of issues and should support more strategic and systematic responses to social and economic exclusion issues in general.
- Solidarity between the geographical communities and communities of interest is essential. Again there can be difficult dynamics here as those with the greater power have the greater responsibility to address the issues. However, in the interlinking threads of inequality and exclusion many of those with power may see themselves as powerless.

Practical steps for innovatory practice...

- Engage with local Travellers: talk through the issues and the possible responses with them. The role of the local Traveller Group can be crucial as they act as a bridge/liaison between other service providers and the community.
- Disseminate information in places that people are comfortable with and at times when it's more likely to reach them.
- Be realistic:
 - Remember that if people don't know you, they may not distinguish between you and the system;
 - It may be your issue but those you initially contact may be too busy with other equally important issues to re-act as you would like;
 - It takes time - saying the door is open to day will not result in a queue tomorrow!
 - Once you open the door it must stay open!
- Think it through: in particular make sure all of your colleagues are aware of these developments as one bad experience could undermine a lot of work.
- But as usual don't let what could go wrong put you off initiating responses: try; evaluate; re-try.
- Spell it all out so that everyone involved knows what to expect and what is expected of them.

Putting it more formally...

- The development and implementation of such essential tools as equal status policies and codes of practice. What is the purpose or value of such tools? Well they:
 - Can be used to raise awareness within each organisation;
 - Spell out for all employees what the organisation's stance is on equality and discrimination;
 - Provide a framework for people to deal with issues of discrimination and inequality where they arise;
 - Provide support for staff members who wish to address these issues as they would have the strength of the organisation behind them;
 - Should identify key personnel to focus redress;

- Are important tools for the organisation in monitoring progress on this issue as staff and management have base documents against which to measure the organisation's work.
- The provision of training in equality and anti-poverty issues so that staff and volunteers understand why these issues must be explicitly named and addressed. A focus on attitudes and awareness raising and their relationship with the context and structures which underpin attitudes should be part of this work;
- Working on equality issues should change current work practices and underlying policies. As a consequence and where appropriate they should be included as an integral part of performance monitoring/evaluation. This would give weight to these issues in the daily work routine and acknowledge people's work in this area.
- Targeted and integrated actions should be provided. Targeting could be used to support the development of infrastructure which facilitates the involvement of communities of interest. Integration must be based on the principles of equality and diversity. There should be clear links between these two approaches so that the learning arising is used to inform the development of more effective policies and practices.
- Positive action could be part of this work and is particularly important to counteract the damaging effects that internalising inequitable and discriminatory experiences does to individuals and groups.
- Mainstreaming is an important part of this work and especially in moving equality issues forward beyond the rhetoric. To this end new actions and measures should be equality proofed: to ensure that they do not contribute to inequality and do not exclude communities of interest.
- The active engagement of all the key players on equality and social inclusion issues both within their own work and through joint work to realise social inclusion. This should include the participation of communities of interest in the decision-making processes that impact on their lives.
- The dissemination of accessible information to enhance the participation of communities of interest in socio-economic development and inclusion measures.
- Equality will only be realised if there is a broad commitment in an organisation to its principles and subsequent practice. It is important therefore that someone with status in the organisation takes on a leading role to ensure that good policies are in place and that they are used to ensure that services are more accessible.

11.2.2 Key Points from the Workshop Discussion

1. There was a strong sense from a number of Workshop participants that the participation and involvement of Travellers, People with Disabilities, Refugees and Asylum Seekers was necessary for effectively delivering services.
2. Some workshop participants who work as frontline information providers outlined recent cases which involved dealing with queries from people from different communities of interest.
3. Referrals/links to specialist and representative Traveller, Disability and Refugee organisations was suggested by Workshop participants as a useful way to involve different communities of interest. One such example was a Centre for the Unemployed that provided computer training for Refugees and Asylum Seekers as a result of contact with a local specialist organisation.
4. Similarly, involving people from communities of interest in the work of the organisation was seen as significant. One such example is of a community organisation that availed of the services of a local Refugee volunteer in the organisation to put up posters in a language common to a number of Refugees and Asylum Seekers living locally. This has been effective in bringing Refugees and Asylum Seekers to the Centre.
5. Training for staff in service providing organisations, in particular front-line information officers to increase their awareness of barriers faced by particular communities of interest. This training could include highlighting issues of discrimination and pro-active engagement in addressing equality
6. Carrying out research into the local needs of particular communities of interest. One such example was where a local organisation conducted research into employment progression barriers experienced by supported employment participants in their area.
7. Looking at how local organisations communicate in posters, booklets etc was highlighted as an area which could be usefully enhanced. The use for instance of large print, audio and simple language in a local organisation's publications, notices etc can be important.
8. Similarly, the use of multi-lingual information on entitlements, job opportunities and volunteering opportunities for Refugees and Asylum seekers was seen as important.

Suggestions for further work

1. A Workshop Participant suggested that it would be useful if successful outreach strategies could be compiled and disseminated to organisations providing information services in relation to the participation and involvement of different communities of interest particularly Travellers, People with Disabilities, Refugees and Asylum Seekers
2. A Participant also suggested that it might be useful for the INOU to highlight

the services provided by INOU affiliated organisations to communities of interest (and these could be made available to the organisations.)

11.3 Workshop 3: Practical Solutions to Overcoming Information and Institutional Barriers

11.3.1 Workshop Input: Maureen Dunne, The Challenge Programme, Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed

The Challenge Programme was specifically designed to support local people who

- Are on a disability payment and
- Want to explore the possibilities of returning to work or education

The Programme hoped to assist people move beyond their sense of discouragement and take the first steps towards basic education, training or employment. It also aimed to look at the extent to which the needs of the participants could be met within the locality.

The Programme ran for 4 weeks. The following is a list of the objectives:

The Individual

- To develop potential skills and knowledge
- To address difficulties and needs
- To assist in how participants wished to proceed

Information & Services

- Provide information on Social Welfare payments and other entitlements
- Build awareness of, including presentations from people working in, local organisations such as the Local Employment Service, Citizens Information Centre, Money Advice and Budgeting Service
- Similarly, create links with local Adult Education Colleges

Specific Skills

- Creative writing and spelling
- Computer classes

Social & Cultural

- Visits to local and national venues
- Local history
- Meet new people

Recruitment and Attendance

- 312 letters were sent out
- 51 people expressed interest in finding out more about the programme
- 47 attended one of the information sessions
- 37 people signed up for the programme
- 18 people attended the Finglas Challenge Programme in May 2003
- 18 people attended the Ballymun Challenge Programme in July 2003

Success

The Programme participants used some of the following terms to describe the Programme; voluntary, focused on potential, active process, a fresh start, a treasure hunt, flexible and enjoyable

Summary of Progression

- Active Participants 60%
- Participants pursuing goals 23%
- Participants who are unwell etc at the moment 11%
- Participants who do not wish to proceed at the moment 6%
- Participants who were unable to find what best suits them 6%
- In addition, 11 Participants completed the e-Skills course

Challenges

- Absence of an entitlement based support system
- Lack of
 - accessible transport
 - ISL Interpreters
 - essential accessories for using a wheelchair
- Not all local public offices are accessible
- Poor uptake on some benefits – Mobility Allowance, Fears around losing Medical Card
- Special Schools
- Dublin Corporation Rent
- Level of ongoing support needed varies greatly
- It was important to shift the focus to Potential
- Extremely proactive approach (appointment keeping & disappearing at the moment of success, unpredictable disabilities, qualified people)
- Importance of pooling all our resources

11.3.2 Key Points from Workshop Discussion

Potential Solutions: Some Workshop Examples
A workshop participant stressed the importance of visiting/outreach to Communities of Interest.
In Dundalk, a local community based organisation avails of the voluntary expertise of Nigerian refugees to act as interpreters for other refugees who speak a Nigerian dialect.
An organisation which works with Refugees assists in overcoming work gaps in CV's and job applications. The organisation works with Refugees to write letters explaining what has happened in the time period of that work gap.
There was a strong sense from workshop participants that word of mouth was important and a number of workshop participants referred to this in terms of being successful
Building links with employers was also stressed at the workshop, particularly by an organisation working with people with disabilities. In particular Employment Support Programmes were advocated.
One organisation introduced a pilot project which is currently in operation whereby a video phone and interpreter are available to assist in information queries for particular communities of interest.
A Workshop participant detailed the situation in the UK where it is possible to phone a speaker of a dialect (from 100 to choose from).
A Workshop participant spoke about the usefulness of networking with organisations to ensure referrals to appropriate sources, offices etc. A Centre for the Unemployed for instance has provided computer training for refugees and asylum seekers as a result of contact with specialist organisations
An audit was carried out by people with disabilities in Swords about accessibility of local businesses, shops, offices etc. Certificates were issued to premises which were disability accessible. Suggestions for how premises which weren't accessible could be improved were made to the others.
The Workshop also suggested Mentoring as a key area where people from Communities of Interest are mentors for others.
Awareness training for Front line information providers in Centres for the Unemployed, Resource Centres, CIC's etc was suggested at the workshop. There was a sense that while training will be insufficient on its own it would be a very useful intervention.

12. The Next Steps

12.1 June Tinsley, INOU advised that the Conference was the first of three related activities the INOU were currently undertaking in relation to the barriers to employment faced by Travellers, People with Disabilities and Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The other two activities will focus on a potential training module around the welfare to work issues relating to the module and an INOU Briefing Paper outlining the barriers to employment faced by the different listed communities of interest and potential local solutions to these barriers.

12.2 The Briefing Paper will outline some of the barriers to employment faced by communities of interest as well as potential areas that may increase the involvement of Travellers, People with Disabilities and Refugees and Asylum Seekers in accessing and designing services provided by INOU affiliated, and other organisations.

13. Concluding Remarks

13.1 Ann Fergus, the Conference Chairperson thanked the Speakers, the Workshop inputters, facilitators and rapporteurs, Combat Poverty Agency for funding the Conference, the delegates and INOU staff. Ann said, in concluding the Conference that it is important that delegates shouldn't let the fear of making mistakes stop them from trying and doing more. Ann said that a lesson from the Conference was that it is all too easy for those who experience the greatest disadvantage to be forgotten.

Conference Attendees

Name	Organisation
Rotimi Adebari	INOUE National Executive Committee (NEC)
Ruth Bailey	Dublin Aids Alliance
Judy Bamford	Citizens Information National Call Centre
Catherine Barnes	Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative
Paul Billings	INOUE NEC
Mervyn Bourne	Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative
Michael Bowden	Ballymun Job Centre
Lisa Butcher	Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative
Mark Butler	Westmeath Equal
Paula Cantwell	Ballymun Unempl. & Welfare Rights
Frank Cardiff	Wicklow Working Together
Pamela Carney	CEMS
Thomas Clogher	Canal LES
Noreen Colgan	Co-Operation Fingal
Jill Collins	Connolly ICES
Delia Colohan	INOUE NEC
Eric Conroy	INOUE Staff
Caroline Creamer	Dublin Employment Pact
Fionnuala Crennan	Enable Ireland
Niall Crowley	Equality Authority
Leanne Curtis	Disability Employment Network
Elizabeth Davidson	Pavee Point
Beryl Delamere	Wicklow Working Together
John Dolan	Disability Federation of Ireland
Cepta Dowling	Northside Partnership
Liz Dunne	Wicklow Working Together
Maureen Dunne	Challenge Programme
Mary Fanning	Exchange House
Bernadette Farrell	Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative
John Farrell	INOUE Staff
Ann Fergus	INOUE NEC
Bernie Fitzgerald	Larkin Centre
Peter Flood	IBEC
Anne Gale	Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment
Martina Giblin	Leitrim Partnership
Anne Gibney	INOUE Staff
Nuala Ni Ghabhann	Exchange House
Des Graham	Donnycarney Unemployment Action Group
Cliona Grant	Baldoyle Forum
Gwen Gunning	Clondalkin CIC
Genevieve Halkett	Centre for Education and Integration of Migrants
Siobhan Hammond	Baldoyle Forum
Margaret Hanlon	Baldoyle Forum
Mark Harding	Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed
Bernadette Hayes	Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed
Caitriona Horgan	Avondhu Development Group

Karl Hyden	Avondhu Development Group
Fiona Johnston	Equality Authority
Helen Johnston	Combat Poverty Agency
Tony Jordan	INOUEC
Mary Keogh	Forum of People with Disabilities
Fran Keyes	
Ray Leonard	Canal LES
Patrick Love	North Leitrim Men's Group
Esther Lynch	ICTU
Noel Lynch	Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative
Kenny McAdams	Disability Action
Thomas McCann	Irish Traveller Movement
Aidan McCarthy	INOUEC Staff
Anne McCloskey	INOUEC NEC
Maurice McConnell	Le Cheile
Ann McEwan	Walkinstown Association
Valerie McFarlane	Longford Community Resources
Richard McGhee	INOUEC NEC
Adele McKenna	Comhairle
Rita McQuillan	Drogheda Resource Centre
Ann Middleburgh	INOUEC Staff
Ian Mullins	Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative
Nick Mulloy	Centre for Education and Integration of Migrants
Amanda Murphy	Fingal ICTU Centre for the Unemployed
Catherine Murphy	Connect Employment
Marie Murphy	Disability Network
Patrick Nevin	Pavee Point
Jeff Nilsen	
Niamh O'Murray Regan	Citizens Information National Call Centre
Brid O'Brien	Pavee Point
Natacha O'Brien	Pavee Point
Frances O'Donoghue	INOUEC Staff
Alan Petrie	Dublin South Supported Employment Initiative
Mary Quinn	Drogheda Resource Centre
Martina Reddington	West Limerick Resources
Tracey Reddy	SPLTU, Tallaght
Aine Rooney	Ballymun Unempl. & Welfare Rights
Musbau Adefolami Sarumi	Galway People's Resource Centre
Alex Scannell	Northside LESN
Sara Slattery	Ballymun Local Employment Centre
Kathryn Smith	Ballymun Local Employment Centre
John Stewart	INOUEC Staff
Carol Thornton	INOUEC Staff
Uzoma	St. Vincent de Paul
Anna Wall	Finglas Cabra Partnership
Michael Wall	Larkin Centre
Claire Walsh	PAUL Partnership
Maria Walsh	INOUEC Staff
Eilish Anne Woods	Tralee Jobs Club
Itayi Viriri	Irish Refugee Council
Julie Wray	Crumlin CIC