

# INSPIRING INTEGRATION CAIRDE BALBRIGGAN INITIATIVE



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Progress Report  
Cairde Balbriggan Initiative 'Inspiring Integration' 2012/2013

**Cairde Balbriggan Inspiring Integration initiative aims to create the space for integration and provide Balbriggan residents with practical tips and examples of integration policies that have been successfully implemented in other national contexts and which can be adapted in the area.**

# Inspiring Integration

## Cairde Balbriggan Initiative

**PROGRESS REPORT**  
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**2012/2013**

### ABOUT CAIRDE

Cairde is a Dublin City-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) working to reduce health inequalities among ethnic minorities in Ireland. The organisation is committed to supporting the participation of these communities in enhancing their own health. Cairde adopts a community development approach that enables ethnic minorities to collectively identify their health needs, build their capacity to address those needs, and influence policy necessary for bringing about social change. The organisation works from a social determinant of health model, which assumes that social, economic, environmental and cultural factors influence health and health outcomes. For minority ethnic groups, these factors include: education and training, accommodation, employment, childcare, access to and experience of health services, financial security, residency status, racism and discrimination and asylum/immigration related issues.

### CAIRDE BALBRIGGAN

Since 2010 Cairde has operated a Drop-in Centre in Balbriggan, a small town situated 30 kilometres north of Dublin city. Though small in geographical size, the town boasts of one of the highest concentrations of diverse migrant/minority ethnic populations in Ireland, many of whom are asylum seekers and people of African origin.

The Centre currently houses 17 local voluntary and statutory groups and provides individual advocacy and information to local residents. It also runs various health promotion workshops and supports new and existing community-based groups in identifying and addressing their needs.



## INSPIRING INTEGRATION INITIATIVE

Building on the achievements of the 2011 Cairde Balbriggan Initiative Integration Through Common Experience and committed to keeping integration on the agenda of local stakeholders, Cairde Balbriggan actively carried on integration work in 2012 under the theme, “*Inspiring Integration: Living and Working in Balbriggan.*” Funded by the Fingal County Council and the Office for the Promotion of Migrants Integration, this initiative aims to provide Balbriggan residents with practical tips and examples of integration policies that have been successfully implemented in other national contexts and which can be adapted in the area.



As a step towards realizing this objective, the Centre organised the following three key public gatherings in the last quarter of 2012:

- ▣ an Integration Forum – held on the 3rd of October 2012;
- ▣ an Integration Conference – held on the 6th of November 2012; which was accompanied by a wide spread promotion campaign; and
- ▣ a 2nd Integration Forum – held on the 6th of December 2012.

These engagements, among other things, provided a space for all stakeholders – including migrant groups, ethnic minorities, the native community, statutory bodies, service providers, and those working with migrants or are interested in integration to:

- ▣ meet and share ideas and challenges in their work and lives;
- ▣ discuss the potential and possibility of creating a joint and effective integration action plan relevant to living and working in Balbriggan; and
- ▣ share priority areas and discuss ways of implementing emerging proposals and/or recommendations.

To ensure an inclusive participation Cairde provided childcare assistance and refreshments. We worked closely with a group of community leaders and engaged the local media and entrepreneurs.

- In 2012, the Inspiring Integration Initiative directly engaged about 160 people.
- Promotion and engaging local and integration sector media played an important role in reaching out to the wider community and profiling the project and its aims. (Balbriggan.info, Fingal County Leader, North County Leader, Metro Eireann, social media)
- The Inspiring Integration was nominated for Mama Intercultural Awards 2012.

## Integration Forum October 3rd, 2012

Held on the 3rd of October 2012, the meeting attracted key speakers, such as *Seamus O'Leary*, Director of Integration Planning and Monitoring of The Integration Centre, who shared his experiences of setting up integration forums in the East South region and *Thywill Bankole*, an officer of the Fingal Ethnic Network (FEN), who spoke about FEN's successes and achievements.



### Participants

27 persons participated including representatives of local and agencies and organizations: Cairde, Fingal County Council, Crosscare, Integration Centre, Balbriggan Policing Forum, Balbriggan Family Centre; Schools including: Balbriggan community College, St. Teresa's Primary School, Brackens ETNS, Balrothery NS, HSCL – Balbriggan Educate Together N.S.; as well as ethnic led groups Fingal Ethnic Network, Balbriggan Women's Group, Family Mirror, Polish School 'Lokomotywa'.

Nationalities Included: Irish, Nigerian, Polish, Sierra Leone

### Recommendations

The forum proposed a number of key recommendations for achieving positive integration in Balbriggan. The proposals arising from the meeting (reviewed by *Betsy Abu* in her presentation at the 2nd Integration Forum), included:

- *Active networking*: This would enable service providers to provide useful information to individuals on available services in Balbriggan and how to access them.
- *Proper understanding of integration*: A proper understanding of what integration means and requires would help stakeholders to devise appropriate strategies for achieving it in the town. Such an understanding should take into consideration the provision of and access to opportunities and infrastructure based on the principles of equality, diversity, interaction and social capital.
- *Promotion of interculturalism*: Interculturalism recognises that racism and various forms of discrimination are a barrier to integration. As a result, efforts should be made to actively and genuinely tackle the problem of discrimination. The creation of intercultural forums in the area can offer immense opportunity for diverse individuals to interact, exchange ideas and learn from one another. Essentially, intercultural occasions also serve as a powerful tool for breaking social barriers and for forging healthy social relationships.
- *Increased ethnic minority participation*: Members of ethnic minority communities are encouraged to participate in residence association meetings in Balbriggan. Their participation can enable them to be actively involved in the affairs of the wider community and provide them useful knowledge about its elected political representatives. Through such engagement ethnic minorities in Balbriggan can also become aware of relevant agencies, organisations and facilities in the area and how to access them.
- *Parents' participation in school affairs*: Ethnic minority parents were encouraged to participate actively in school meetings to learn about their children's school environment and activities. Also this will provide them and opportunity to forge good relationships with school staff.
- *Tackling the language barrier*: Effective use of language is important for the integration of migrants and ethnic minorities. Joint efforts are needed to address the English language needs of migrants/ethnic

minorities through *Failte Isteach* (the community project with older volunteers welcoming new migrants through conversational English classes) as well as language support teachers who provide extra language classes to students who are inadequate in the use of English. Also service providers were encouraged to create more opportunity for the delivery of free or affordable language tuition to individuals experiencing difficulty in the use of English. They should consider joint efforts, such as exchange or sharing of resources, in order to bring this effort to fruition.

- *External organisational collaboration:* Organisations in Balbriggan should collaborate with organisations in other counties in Ireland for joint integration initiatives – e.g. sharing of ideas and resources, organising collaborative activities, etc., especially during these recessionary times.
- *Representation:* An increase in the representation of ethnic minorities on boards, committees, and in the Fingal County Council was highlighted as an imperative. It was suggested that the forthcoming local elections could be used as an important platform for implementing this.
- *Support by the Fingal County Council:* Opportunities provided by the Fingal County Council should be exploited by service providers and groups working with ethnic minorities in Balbriggan. Such opportunities include community grants, set up to fund integration activities and initiatives.



FIGURE 1 DISCUSSING FUTURE OF THE FORUM

## INSPIRING INTEGRATION CONFERENCE



The Inspiring Integration Conference was a critical facet of Cairde's integration project, *Living and working in Balbriggan*. The occasion was held on the 6th of November 2012 in Balbriggan, The conference provided an opportunity for the sharing of and possible adaptation n Balbriggan models of best integration practices from various regions in Ireland and internationally. It also provided a space for service providers, decision makers, community leaders and residents to network and discuss successes and challenges they experienced in their works and lives with strategies proposed for improving their situations.

### Participants

The conference attracted about 90 participants. They were delegated from:

Local and national agencies: Balbriggan Community Policing Forum, Balbriggan Family Centre, Balbriggan Town Council, Balbriggan Youth Service, Citizen Information Centre, CrossCare Migrant Project, Fáilte Isteach, Fingal County Council, Fingal Leader Partnership, Integration Centre, Lir;

Balbriggan Medical Centre, Balbriggan Fish Farmers Market, Senior Citizens Group

Schools including: Balbriggan Community College, St. Teresa's Primary School, Brackens ETNS, Balrothery NS, HSCL – Balbriggan Educate Together N.S.;

Ethnic Led Groups: Family Mirror, Fingal Ethnic Network, Nwanmedrnto, New Communities Partnership Women Development Network;

They included residents of Balbriggan and adjoining areas of various nationalities: Congolese, Eritrean, Irish, Lithuanian, Polish, Nigerian, Sierra Leone



FIGURE 2 BRENDAN RYAN TD ADDRESSING DELEGATES

### The presentations

The conference was chaired by Christian Aid's global adviser on Gender/GBV/Power and Exclusion, *Tendai Madondo*. Speakers at the occasion included: Anne Monica Brennan, Manager of Programme Delivery for The Mentoring Partnership at the Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) in Canada; Issah Huseini, CEO of the New Communities Partnership Ireland; Natalya Pestova of the Mayo Intercultural Action; Mary Ryan, co-founder and PRO of the English Language Support Teachers' Association (ELSTA); and Mammy Mohamed, chairperson of Balbriggan Women's Development Group.

In her presentation, **Anne Monica Brennan** reflected on working in both Canada and Ireland in the field of immigrant integration. She underlined the importance of migration as a global reality and as an economic strategy, stressing the need for the acceptance of migrants in the host society. Migrants and their families put down roots in the new society, and most of them do not wish to return to their home countries. Migrants bring with them varied experiences and expertise that help in enriching the new society. This is why their integration

in the new country is crucial. Drawing on the work of her organisation, TRIEC, Ms. Brennan highlighted the need for organisations working with immigrants to play a crucial role in their integration into mainstream society. The work of TRIEC in Toronto is an example of good practice in this area. The organisation finds and implements local, practical, solutions that lead to meaningful employment for skilled immigrants in the Toronto region. In doing this, it focuses on three key areas of concern:

- making connections through convening and collaborating with partners and creating opportunities for skilled immigrants to connect to the local labour market;
- building awareness and capacity through working with key stakeholders, particularly employers as well as building their awareness and capacity to better integrate skilled immigrants into the workforce;
- and, shaping public policy by working with all levels of government (as integration measures are created at different levels of society – nationally, regionally and locally), enhancing coordination and effecting more responsive policy and programmes for skilled immigrant employment.

In 2004, TRIEC launched the “The Mentoring Partnership” initiative, aimed to help mentees (i.e. skilled newcomer professionals) to reconnect with their career. Through this programme mentees derive three key benefits, namely: increase in their awareness of the Canadian workplace and norms; increase in their knowledge and understanding of their occupation and/or sector in the Canadian context; and increase in their ability to expand their professional networks and connections in their field.

Similarly, evidence from TRIEC suggests that the mentoring programme increased mentors’ understanding of barriers faced by skilled newcomers; increased their appreciation skills and assets that newcomers bring; actively promotes case for integrating skilled newcomers among co-workers; increased mentors’ desire to hire new skilled newcomers; and raised mentors’ confidence in working effectively with recent newcomers.

TRIEC also runs bridge training programmes to complement its mentoring partnership initiative. Generally, the bridge training programmes help qualified internationally trained individuals to move quickly into the labour market in Ontario. Ms. Brennan stressed that each bridge training programme is different, but they may offer newcomers important benefits, such as: an assessment of their education and skills; clinical or workplace experience; skills training or targeted academic training programmes; preparation for a licence or certification examination; language training for their profession or trade; and individual learning plans to identify any added training newcomers may need.

Finally, Ms. Brennan noted that proper immigrant integration practice can generate diverse leadership (including immigrant representation on boards and committees) in a positive way; help in building social capital; enhance innovation and creativity; increase access to new global and domestic markets; and help employers to attract and retain the best talents.

**Issah Huseini** talked about the representation of immigrants and issues pertaining to them within the European Union (EU) and Irish contexts. He noted that the EU is not responsible for the integration of individuals in Member States. Rather, it instigates and encourages policies and their implementation within Member States. Prior to the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007 and its commencement in December 2009, integration matters were not deliberated upon at the EU Parliament. The Treaty of Lisbon introduced a new and proper legal base for promoting integration measures, which is widely considered as a good starting point for future policy developments. And for the first time, the Treaty enables the competences of the EU in this field to be shared with Member States, notably concerning the number of migrants entering a

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Member State. The Treaty of Lisbon also makes provision, in the event of a sudden inflow of nationals of third countries in a Member State, for the adoption of measures to help the Member State concerned.

Mr. Huseini mentioned some important instruments introduced by the EU for promoting the integration of third country nationals in Member States. They are:

A network of national contact points on integration, which allows exchanges of information and experience between EU States with the purpose of finding successful solutions for integration and keeping national policy coherent with EU initiatives;

The European Integration Forum, a platform for dialogue involving all stakeholders active in the field of integration. The Forum is driven by the European Economic and Social Council;

The [European Web Site on Integration](#), which is the main focal point for direct exchanges of information, documentation and on-line data collection, and for community-building activities between the main stakeholders in integration in Europe;

A [Handbook on Integration](#) for policy-makers and practitioners, compiled with a view to structuring the exchanges of information on which EU States can draw when developing policy measures for more successful integration;

The [European Integration Fund](#) for the integration of third-country nationals 2007-2013, which supports the efforts of EU States to enable non-EU nationals to integrate into European society. The Fund primarily targets action supporting the integration of new arrivals, especially those from non-EU countries. It also supports measures to build up the capacity of EU States to develop, implement, monitor and generally evaluate integration strategies, policies and measures, and for exchanges of information and best practice, as well as cooperation in and between EU States; and

The Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at the Local Level, which is the instrument that really empowers immigrant participation and consultation at the local level of society.

Mr. Huseini stressed the importance of creating effective intercultural and immigrant participation strategies in Ireland. Currently, Ireland, he noted, practices only a partial representation of immigrants in various facets of society. According to him, “the mainstream media always sees immigrants from the point of view of victims rather than as experts that can contribute meaningfully to policy making.” This kind of mindset, he observed, can inspire the institutional exclusion of immigrants from policy making bodies. He cited an example with the Active Citizenship Taskforce set up in 2007 by the Irish government, which had no single immigrant representative, even though the issues deliberated upon by the body fundamentally affected immigrant populations in Ireland. “We should be consulted not only on immigrant issues, but also on national matters, as they affect us too”, Mr. Huseini stressed.

**Natalya Pestova** addressed the perspectives of integration in the rural context of County Mayo and the role of Mayo Intercultural Action (MIA) in creating a ‘welcoming culture’ in the current uneasy recessionary times. As a support, information providing, advocacy and capacity building organisation for asylum seekers, refugees, migrants and their families, MIA functions through: building alliances with statutory and voluntary sector bodies, locally, regionally and nationally; linking local to national bodies; and linking with training and services providers available in Mayo, among others.

Drawing on her organisation’s experience, Ms. Pestova highlighted the challenges faced by organisations working with migrants in the new Ireland. Among these are:

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- the neglect of migrants' needs – local statutory sector is getting less engaged in structures for the promotion of integration;
- harsh economic environment – changed public perception about migrants and feelings of hostility towards migrant communities have constituted a significant barrier to integration;
- the integration of asylum seekers is a much harder task to achieve, due to the nature of institutional structures; apathy of residents; lack of services and training opportunities in rural area; and minimal funding.
- racism, discrimination and gender-based issues are a critical challenge for integration;
- lack of core funding and unsustainable project-based funding can result in the loss of initial strategic direction and staff security;
- in the rural context of Mayo – there is the challenge of isolation, marginalisation, lack of public transport, long distances, absence of specialised services;
- the challenge of building alliances and links with national organisations;
- the challenge of mentoring and supporting volunteers;
- and dealing with media; combating stereotypes and myths.

**Mary Ryan's** paper highlighted the need for linguistic and cultural enrichment in Irish schools. She described integration as the process of “creating a shifting ground” that will culminate in a common ground “through a process of cultural mediation.” She stressed that this, however, “requires both host and new communities to embrace rights and responsibilities.” Ms. Ryan underlined the aim of the current Irish Intercultural Education Strategy (IES) 2010 – 2015, which is that “all students experience an education that ‘respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and conducted in a spirit of partnership.’” In essence, intercultural education, she contended, requires that migrant languages and cultures be represented in Irish schools. The IES also requires that all education providers be ‘assisted with ensuring that inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment become the norm.’ Ms. Ryan challenged the myth that immigrant students/pupils should be discouraged from speaking their Mother Tongue because it will slow down their English language acquisition and academic development. Drawing on ideas by experts in the field,



Ryan argued, instead, that “bilingualism is an asset [both] to the individual and the school community and should be encouraged.” She added that one other way to recognise and value the identity of students is “to ensure that the languages, images, posters, notices, etc., on the school walls reflect the demographic composition of the school.” To facilitate this, noted Ms. Ryan, there should be an audit of languages spoken in the school and the number of heritage countries in the school at the beginning of each academic year. In

addition to this, there should also be a linguistic proofing of the school or any building in it. She also stressed the need to create appropriate support mechanisms that would enable immigrant parents and guardians to access “information regarding the Irish Educational System, thus empowering them to play an active role in their children’s schooling and ensuring that there is equity in the provision of their children’s needs within classrooms and schools.”

**Mammy Mohamed** shared her personal experience of living in Balbriggan since three years ago with her husband and child. Her testimony provided useful understanding about the difficulty new migrants face with adaptation and the crucial role played by organisations working with them in helping them to overcome this challenge and their subsequent integration into mainstream life. Ms. Mohamed is a striking story of integration. She was able to integrate in spite of her lack of proficiency in the use of the English language coupled with other challenges and shortcomings.

Her experience of living in Balbriggan is varied, consisting of “the good and the not-so-good.” As a member of the Balbriggan community, integration to her means “belonging, [to] have confidence to go out and meet people, discuss your community without noticing people staring at you or making funny faces or worrying about you being accepted.” She recalled her initial experience upon arriving in the town, stating: The human geography made me panic, because the host community lives in one section of the town and the new community lives in other parts ... The only places that we meet are the supermarkets, and to have a chat in supermarkets is difficult, because people want to be in and out as soon as they can.” She also grappled with the disaffection and unfriendliness of individuals towards her:

*“THE OTHER ISSUE FOR ME WAS WHEN YOU MEET PEOPLE ON THE ROAD AND SAY HELLO, THEY WILL LOOK AT YOU AND SAY NOTHING; WHEN YOUR CHILD WANTS TO PLAY WITH THEIR CHILD THEY PULL THEIR CHILD AWAY. I WAS WORRIED BECAUSE WHERE I CAME FROM, IF A STRANGER SAYS HELLO TO YOU, YOUR FIRST REACTION IS TO STOP AND BE NICE TO THAT STRANGER BECAUSE YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE YOU WILL MEET AGAIN AND YOU ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN RECOGNISED AS A FELLOW HUMAN BEING. THE ONLY TIME THAT SOMEBODY WILL NOT RESPOND WHEN YOU SAY HELLO IS WHEN YOU ARE AT WAR.”*

That initial experience made her feel disillusioned, unwanted and isolated: “I said to myself, how can I live here? Will I make new friends? How can I join groups and make a difference in my community when the people I knew are my husband and his friends? I had no information, all I had were rumours, the types that will isolate you, make you feel depressed and lonely. I was scared, not happy” Then on a certain day, she met someone who introduced her to Cairde, an encounter that changed her life quite positively. She recalled:

*I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK ALL THE QUESTIONS, AND BEFORE YOU KNEW IT I STARTED ATTENDING ENGLISH CLASSES, JOINED GROUPS AND STARTED ATTENDING PUBLIC MEETINGS IN THE BALBRIGGAN TOWN HALL. THEN I GOT INVOLVED IN MY COMMUNITY, THE FEAR I HAD INITIALLY VANISHED. I BECAME A MORE CONFIDENT PERSON. I HAVE MET PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES, I KNOW WHERE TO GET INFORMATION AND I AM IN A HAPPY PLACE RIGHT NOW. I HAVE PUT ALL PREJUDICE AWAY AND BE TRUE TO MYSELF AND CONTINUE WORKING TOWARDS MY VALUES, DREAMS AND GOALS THAT I HAVE SET. FOR ME, YESTERDAY IS HISTORY, TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY AND TODAY IS A GIFT. THAT IS WHY WE CALL IT THE PRESENT. LIFE IS NOT A RACE BUT A JOURNEY TO SAVOUR EACH STEP OF THE WAY. I AM ENJOYING EVERY PROCESS IN MY LIFE EVEN WITH THE CHALLENGES THAT IT BRINGS. MY ADVICE TODAY IS THAT YOU GO OUT THERE, MEET PEOPLE, ASK QUESTIONS, SEEK INFORMATION AND DO WHAT YOU ARE CAPABLE OF, SO THAT BALBRIGGAN CAN BE A BETTER INTEGRATED TOWN FOR US AND FOR OUR CHILDREN.*

## Ideas from the roundtables

The discussions centred around the experience of integration and how migrant integration experience can be improved. Discussants described integration as a two-way process that requires interactions and mutual understanding between the native community and immigrants. The current economic recession, it was noted, has negatively affected opportunities for social interactions within the Balbriggan community. Before the recession, people were visiting the Town Square for social interactions, particularly in the summer months. But regrettably, most of that is gone now. Participation in community relationship is voluntary, but it entails individual commitment.

It was noted that migrants are poorly represented in various aspects of Irish life. One male participant from the native community, for instance, stated that the farmers fisheries market organise events regularly but representation from new communities in such events is limited, which in turn limits opportunities for them and the native community to learn from each other. "We can do all we can, but if the other person is not willing to integrate, the results will never change. The glass is half empty and the other person's contribution is important to fill it", he observed.

Some discussants observed that while some members of the migrant community complain about integration, they have to make efforts to integrate into the local community. One individual, for instance, made the following observations about their personal experience of living in Balbriggan, the lack of important social amenities there, and the need for individual efforts towards integration in the town:

*BALBRIGGAN IS A SMALL TOWN WITH NO SOCIAL AMENITIES, YET WE FIND IT DIFFICULT TO MEET OTHER PEOPLE. WHEN I FIRST CAME TO BALBRIGGAN I HAD DIFFICULTIES. ENGLISH IS NOT MY FIRST LANGUAGE BUT I LEARNT AND IMPROVED MY LANGUAGE TO HELP ME INTEGRATE. I HAVE TWO YOUNG ADULT CHILDREN WHO CANNOT SOCIALISE IN BALBRIGGAN, SO THEY HAVE TO GO TO DUBLIN TO MEET OTHER YOUNGER PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE SAME INTEREST LIKE THEM. I LIKE TO SWIM OR GO TO THE POOL, BUT IN BALBRIGGAN THERE ARE NO SUCH FACILITIES HERE, SO WE SPEND A LOT OF TIME IN OUR HOUSES OR OUT OF THE TOWN.*

Similarly, it was pointed out that members of the local community are reluctant to interact with or reach out to the migrant community. Some attributed this attitude to negative assumptions about migrants, such as the notion that migrants have come to steal jobs or take what belongs to the local people; the tendency to see certain migrants as inferior to the Irish; and the fear that migrant values pose a threat to Irish culture. Some participants from the migrant community complained that even when they try to reach out to and interact with the local people, the locals usually keep them at arms length. One individual commented, for instance: "I tried many times to invite my Irish neighbours to our activities. They did not come. African people are very friendly. The Irish are very difficult. People don't talk."

The importance of sports and intercultural activities as vehicles for integration was also emphasised in the discussions. Sports and intercultural activities break social and ethnic barriers and provide good opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds and identities to interact in very friendly ways and also understand one another's cultural values. One participant stated, for instance: "I used to live in Limerick and we had sporting events and a food festival and the reactions were very good. We had food and other cultural identifying things we used in attracting members from different communities and the results were very good."

However, while sports play an important role in integration, the participation of migrants was called to question. It was observed, for instance, that the O'Dwyer Sporting Association, which is concerned with rugby and the GAA, has invested resources in scouting for local talents within the migrant community. But the main problem is the lack of commitment of migrant parents to work with the scouts, in order to help their children participate in these sports locally. Even the educational community is willing to involve young migrants in

sporting activities, but migrant themselves have to seize the opportunity and get involved, with parents being present at the sports venues to keep an eye on their children.

Participants acknowledged that sports bodies have been active in encouraging migrant participation in sports within the area. For example, over the last 8 years local sports clubs in Balbriggan have been trying to integrate migrant children and also help them become familiar with both local scouting teams and other children involved in various sports activities. This is why in a local basketball team in Balbriggan about 80% of members are children born to migrant parents. But while these children make good use of opportunities for interacting and making friends with one another through sports, their parents do not. Their parents are always reluctant to forge relationships with other parents. It was thus suggested that parents should learn from their children regarding making friends. Unlike their parents, children are bold and have no prior assumptions about being different.

Participants also cited language difficulties and domestic abuse/gender-based violence as critical issues affecting members of the migrant communities and their integration. They mentioned the lack of supports for addressing the problem of language. For example, there are limited training opportunities in the use of language and policy makers do not acknowledge language diversity, which is why this issue is not reflected in policies or in services provision. In terms of domestic violence, participants observed that while cases abuse are growing, especially with the current economic recession seriously affecting migrant families, there are no structures in place in Ireland to adequately tackle the problem.

Mentoring was mentioned as a very good way of integrating migrants and works well in Toronto. But in Ireland it seems not to be working well. Achieving a meaningful mentoring practice in Ireland is going to take long, because of the harsh economic conditions here. In Canada it has been successful because they target skilled and educated people. Also there are more job opportunities there than in Ireland, and all that is required is to match the right professional with the right job. Again, mentoring can work better in a more multicultural society like than Ireland, where cultural stereotypes and racial barriers are still very strong.

Some participants from the African immigrant community felt that the Garda was not responding to their calls at all. Others felt that Garda did not respond as quickly as they did with indigenous people.

## Recommendations by Discussants

- Organisations working with migrants and ethnic minority led groups should work together to create a vision statement – a Social Charter for Immigrants. Organisations working on regional and national basis and various community groups should collaborate on this charter by promoting it among policy makers and services providers so that they would be committed to mainstream issues affecting migrants;
- An action plan for Balbriggan should be created. Local communities in the area should agree on issues people want to focus on to improve life and living condition in Balbriggan;
- A safe space should be created for people to come together to speak up about issues affecting them and the local Balbriggan community;
- Ethnic minority parents should be engaged in decision making and their capacity built through various support



mechanisms, such as language, training, work placements, etc;

- A model of bilingual support should be developed. This can be managed by a resource worker who can support ethnic minority families by encouraging the bilingual development of their children through national education networks;
- The issue of migrant participation in employment and entrepreneurship should be researched and models of best practice determined;
- Efforts should be made by relevant stakeholders to build/support the participation of ethnic minorities in local elections;
- All relevant stakeholders should tap into available resources and learn from existent practices in other national contexts, such as the mentoring programme in Canada;
- Organisations can play a leading role. Through partnership they can collectively tackle problems facing integration in Balbriggan;
- Migrants should participate actively and be represented at different levels of society – nationally, regionally and locally. They should be represented on boards, committees, the GAA, GARDA, local authority integration forums, and so on.
- Language diversity should be encouraged both in schools and at home. Migrant parents can lose touch with their children if the children speak only English and not their native language. Parents should teach their native language to their children and encourage them to speak it at home. This will not affect their ability to communicate effectively in English outside the home.
- Also migrants can integrate better if encouraged to learn English and the existing Irish culture. This will help them to interact/socialise better, become employed as well as build social capital.
- The Balbriggan Integration Forum can imitate the Waterford Integration Forum's approach, by creating a research informed strategy for integration within the community. This kind of initiative can help in raising awareness about people and groups within the community, increase knowledge about existing services and the benefits of cultural diversity.
- Immigrant parents can do more to find out what is available to them in the town.
- Schools are finding it challenging to engage immigrant parents in their activities and consultations, regardless of publicity. They want immigrant parents to have an input and to participate in school events.
- In Denmark people have to attend integration courses. The same can be done in Ireland, with proper mechanisms put in place.
- The Canadian experience seem to be very good, an evidence of good practice that we in Ireland should learn from.
- Organisations like Cairde should advertise their services more widely and reach out to more number of people.

## Balbriggan Integration Forum December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2012, the meeting addressed a number of key issues, namely: the necessity of a joint integration action plan; the implementation of emerging recommendations and/or proposals; and the identification of shared priority areas. There were also presentations by Betsy Abu, Cairde; Louise Edmonds and Mick Dunne, both of the Fingal County Council (FCC).



### Participants

The conference attracted about 50 participants. They were delegated from:

Local and national agencies: Balbriggan Community Policing Forum, Balbriggan Town Council, Cairde, Citizen Information Centre, Fáilte Isteach, Fingal County Council, Fingal Leader Partnership, Senior Citizens Group

Schools including: Brackens ETNS, HSCL – Balbriggan Educate Together N.S.; County Fingal Adult Education

Ethnic Led Groups: Family Mirror, Fingal Ethnic Network, Nwanmedrnto, New Communities Partnership Women Development Network;

They included residents of Balbriggan and adjoining areas of various nationalities: Eritrean, Irish, Lithuanian, Polish, Nigerian, Sierra Leone

### Presentations

Ms. Edmonds spoke about the importance of collaboration and the support of the Fingal County Council towards achieving integration in Balbriggan. The highlights of her address are as follows:

- By working together all stakeholders “can make things happen”;
- Such collaboration CAN include shared facilities, resources and ideas;
- The FCC will continue to provide necessary assistance towards the implementation of Cairde’s projects in the area;
- The FCC will become more strategic, focusing more on the needs of the Balbriggan community;
- Although achieving these objectives can be challenging, given current cutbacks in integration funds, all stakeholders can still make meaningful progress by building on what they have at the moment.

Mick Dunne spoke about the creation of new facilities in Balbriggan by the FCC. The highlights of his address are as follows:

- The biggest thing happening in the area in the past few months is the construction of 3 new community centres located near 3 schools. The centres will be opening for public use very soon.
- The centres will share facilities with the designated schools.
- In the next 6 months lots of sports and entertainment activities will be taking place in the centres, in particular the one in Flemington.
- The centres are also equipped with meeting rooms.
- The building of the centres is the biggest infrastructural change in Balbriggan since the past 40-50 years.

Suggestions by participants: The FCC should consider constructing a swimming pool and a rugby facility in some of the centres.

## Group discussions

The discussions centred around the creation of a joint action plan and identifying key priority areas. Ideas and suggestions that emerged from the discussions are as follows:

### Joint Action Plan:

- Occasions for cultural exchange should be created
- More literacy classes for adults and English language support (especially for new communities and ethnic minorities, including school going children) should be provided.
- The massive and untapped resources brought by new communities can be harnessed for the benefit of the Balbriggan community.
- Irish entrepreneurs and ethnic communities can forge new relationships and explore and exploit new opportunities for business collaborations.
- New communities and ethnic minorities should avail of opportunities for increased participation in existing associations relating to sports, leisure and entertainment, for example.
- Opportunities should be explored for shared foreign language skills and exchange of foreign language tuition.
- Occasions for social interactions such as youth cafes at the community centres should be created. Short term spaces should be provided at the centres which groups and individuals can rent for events, meetings, various other activities, etc.
- Intercultural nights for community groups to showcase their cultures can be established.
- A local community radio can be established to provide information and for sharing of ideas, etc.



**Priority areas:**

The Forum identified and generally agreed on the following 3 priority areas. Suggestions include:

***Business and employment***

- generating business ideas, such as importing ethnic products into Ireland and Balbriggan;
- mentoring programme by local businesses, such as the Canadian experience, which can help people get in touch with and be abreast of situations within their industry;
- collaborations with local companies to import/export and distribute products from/in other countries;
- create a business club; and
- provide employment support services, e.g. CV preparation, interviews skills, job search, and job application writing.

***Integration, radio station and socialisation***

- providing integration courses;
- providing international music skills;
- encouraging ethnic minorities to make themselves available for social and cultural exchanges and interactions;
- organising intercultural coffee mornings, where people can share values, food, information, etc;
- sending out information leaflets to schools about intercultural events;
- advertising for local businesses, clubs, associations, etc;
- establishing a local community radio that can showcase a variety of ethnic programmes, music, etc.

***English language/literacy***

- provision of beginners English language and literacy classes;
- provide spaces for such classes and other necessary logistics; individuals can make voluntary financial contributions, such as 2 EUR, towards offsetting costs;
- voluntary language classes by speakers of other languages, e.g. French German, Italian, Russian, Polish, Arabic, Swahili, etc. Some volunteer foreign language tutors were identified during the meeting.

or more information contact:

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