Introduction

The Immigrant Council of Ireland (hereafter ICI) was established by Sr Stanislaus Kennedy in 2001. The ICI is an independent non-governmental human rights organisation and independent law centre. It provides advice and support on a wide range of immigration issues through its Information and Support Service and specialist advice through its Legal Services. In area of integration, the ICI focuses on family reunification, second generation, educational integration, citizenship, diversity and anti-racism. Two important principles underpin the ICI’s work; that immigration is a permanent and positive reality and individuals’ human rights must be respected, protected and upheld. In the past decade the ICI has served the needs of more than 50,000 people and lobbied for reforms to Ireland’s approach to immigration and integration.

Children of Migrant Background in Ireland – A Statistical Overview

The latest figures from the 2011 census reveal that 1/8 people between 0-19 years of age in Ireland are from an ethnic and/or migrant background [159,424] and this rises to 1/7 children under the age of 14 [143,441]. Thus, despite a return to net emigration, the proportion of young people from a migrant and/or ethnic background has remained steady from the 2006 census. The 2010 Quarterly National Household Survey [QNHS] suggests that while 2009 was the first year since 1995 that the numbers of people leaving Ireland was greater than those arriving, this drop seems to be largely due to a decrease in those immigrating [from 109,500 in 2007 to 30,800 in 2010], rather than as large an increase in those emigrating [from 42,200 in 2007 to 65,300 in 2010]. Moreover, while the increase in population between 2006 and 2011 is largely due to natural growth, this also includes an average annual inflow of 23,730 people. In terms of children under the age of 14, the QNHS 2010 data also reveals that even with slowing immigration, there remains a net inflow of children under the age of

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1 Excluding Irish traveler population
14. While this has reduced since 2008, it was still five times higher in 2009 than emigration rates and three times higher in 2010. Furthermore, a report published by the Economic and Social Research Institute in June 2012 highlights the fact that ‘almost 25% of births in 2010 were to mothers born outside Ireland. In 2004, the year this information was first collected, just 16% of births were to mothers born outside Ireland.\(^3\)

Thus, while there seems to be less inward migration, a substantial number of migrants see Ireland as their home and have settled. Family based migration is likely to continue in the short to medium term through family reunification and even with high levels of unemployment, there are still shortages of workers in areas like information technologies and it is likely that some form of economic migration is/will take place due to skill shortages. Moreover, as people develop social networks, inter-marry and establish families further emigration plans or a return to one’s country of origin becomes more remote in relation to the time spent in one’s new society. This seems to be particularly true for adult migrants to Ireland who tend to be in the family building stage of life.\(^4\)

**Children in the Front Line of Integration**

Within the Irish context, children are to the forefront of integration for several key reasons; Children in multi-cultural schools interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds and are somewhat forging their own paths, as a lack of established migrant pathways and networks do not provide them with a conventional route to follow. This is the first generation of people from diverse backgrounds growing up together, notwithstanding the pre-migration diversity in Ireland which has tended to be overlooked. Therefore these children’s attitudes, experiences and interactions will form the foundation for the future, both for themselves and for the communities in which they grow up.

Hence the project of integration in Ireland can only be said to be a success or failure in relation to the experiences of the second generation and beyond. Certainly, the failure of multicultural, integrationist and assimilation programmes internationally and the rise of ethnic tensions has largely been blamed on two factors: unreformed social policy measures which block the aspirations

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of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation to access citizenship, higher education; and the labour market and persistent racism at both the institutional and interactional level \textsuperscript{5}

**Racial Bullying in Schools**

Research on racism and bullying of migrant origin children in Ireland is now 10 years old. This growing body of work has produced remarkably consistent results across contexts and age groups which can be bluntly collated as\textsuperscript{6}

- Children from visible minority groups experience greater levels of bullying in schools.
- Children with English as a second language experience higher than average levels of bullying from their peers.
- Children use racially motivated slurs and names to marginalise and shame migrant young people.
- Racial bullying takes place out of view of teachers and authority figures.
- Adults seriously underestimate the extent of racial bullying and its short and long term impacts on children.
- Teachers do not feel equipped or capable of addressing racial bullying in their schools.

Further to this though, research within the Irish context is also at pains emphasise the more covert forms of bullying and exclusion which many migrant young people contend with:

- A tendency for separateness within children’s interactions, through which children from migrant backgrounds and the established community do not play together or form friendships, has been noted in all research.
- Negative attitudes towards migrant children’s countries of origin has been found to be widespread.
- Migrant children’s full or partial identification as ‘Irish’ is undermined by their peers and by adults, as ‘what’ and ‘who’ can constitute an ‘Irish’ identity has not been problematized or expanded within society in general or within the education system in particular.


\textsuperscript{6} Please see additional reading list attached
However, one of the greatest barriers to tackling racial bullying is the reluctance of adults and authorities to acknowledge its existence and prevalence, as there remains an opinion that bullying happens to all children and therefore the experiences of migrant children are not unique or distinct. Therefore not only is racial bullying not being tackled, but there is a risk of developing a culture of victim blaming in which reports of racial bullying fall on deaf ears, as they are presumed to be overstatements from the victims themselves. A powerful example of this is the situation many young migrant boys may find themselves in. Recent research in north-inner city Dublin\(^7\) has highlighted that migrant origin boys experience both overt and covert forms of racially bullying through their participation in sports. A high prevalence of racist name calling and physical violence was recorded, as well as subtle processes of emasculation, in which migrant origin boys were disproportionately shamed and undermined by their peers. However, many boys felt they could not report these incidents to their teachers as the believed boys must be ‘tough’ and reporting these incidences would be a sign of weakness. When teachers were aware of bullying incidents though, they also showed a tendency to dismiss this behaviour as simply ‘boys that will be boys’. Therefore the particular racial motivations of these behaviours remained unacknowledged and the boys who reported these incidents were somewhat dismissed and advised to develop a ‘thicker skin’.

Thus, at present it seems that children and young people from as young as seven years of age are taking on the burden of integration through an expectation that they should absorb pain. Therefore without significant and innovative policy reform the current approach to integration within the education system seems to at least partially rely on children’s capacities for resilience, which in effect requires young children to remain unaffected, altruistic and deal with racial bullying in isolation. In light of this at least four policy reforms need to be urgently implemented.

**Policy Recommendations**

- Teacher training should include core compulsory modules on diversity, integration, racism and interculturalism.
- All teachers should be provided with the opportunity to build capacity in relation to issues of racial bullying and be given the tools to recognise and deal with it effectively.

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\(^7\) Curry, Gilligan, Garratt, Scholtz (2011) *Where to from here? Inter-ethnic Relations among Children in Ireland*. Dublin: Liffey Press
• Anti-Bullying policy at the level of each school and nationally should explicitly include racial bullying. The enforcement of anti-bullying policy needs to be tightened up. Victims of racial bullying in schools should be supported.
• Organisations working with victims of racism should be resourced and supported.
• Perpetrators of racial bullying in the school context should be supported to overcoming the underpinnings of their behaviour. Intervention should also extend to parents if there is evidence their behaviour stems from their experiences and learning outside the school.
• The curriculum needs to be reformed to reflect and celebrate Ireland’s full ethnic and linguistic diversity.

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Garratt, L (2011) The Body, Masculinities and Racism; Social relations between migrant and dominant group boys in three inner city primary schools in Dublin. Dublin: Trinity College Dublin


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