

**Research to Identify the Specific Needs of Minority Ethnic
Groups Parenting Alone in Ireland**

OPEN (One Parent Exchange Network)

**Combat Poverty Agency
Working Paper Series 10/01
ISBN: 987 -1- 905485-99-4
March 2010**



This research was commissioned by OPEN to support a broader research project investigating the perspectives and experiences of people parenting alone in Ireland who are from a minority ethnic background.

The views expressed in this text are the author's own and not necessarily those of OPEN.

Abstract

This paper presents findings from research with members of minority ethnic groups, including 'new' communities and indigenous groups, who are parenting alone in Ireland. Members of the Traveller community who are parenting alone and lone parents from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, currently living in Ireland, were consulted about their experiences. Qualitative research methods were used, including in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Findings presented in this paper identify the experiences, including the challenges faced by these lone parents from minority ethnic groups, all of whom are women. The findings suggest that the challenges faced by majority ethnic lone parents, such as quality, affordable childcare, adequate housing provision and income and social supports are of equal concern to minority ethnic lone parents. However, these lone parents also experience additional challenges as a result of language barriers, legal status and racism and discrimination. All of these issues are explored in detail in this paper and recommendations for addressing each of these challenges have been formulated.

Key words

Lone Parents, Ethnic Minorities, Employment, Employment Supports, Activation, Social Welfare, One-Parent Family Payment

Disclaimer

This report was funded by the Combat Poverty Agency under its Poverty Research Initiative. The views, opinions, findings, conclusions and/or recommendations expressed here are strictly those of the author(s). They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Combat Poverty Agency, which takes no responsibility for any errors or omissions in, or for the accuracy of, the information contained in this Working Paper. It is presented to inform and stimulate wider debate among the policy community and among academics and practitioners in the field.

Acknowledgements

OPEN's heartfelt thanks first and foremost goes to all of the lone parents who participated in this research. Without their strength, honesty and kind willingness to make a contribution, this report could not have been written. Thanks to members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone who participated in the focus groups:

- The African Women's Group based in the Waterford Women's Centre in Waterford city
- The African women who use the Aister Beo Family Centre (Daughters of Charity), Blanchardstown
- The Traveller lone parents' focus group in the South West of Ireland
- The Latvian and Lithuanian lone parents' focus group in Monaghan.

Thanks also to all the lone parents who gave of their time to participate in the interviews, and who came to Ireland from:

- Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi, Cameroon, Somalia)
- Europe (Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova)
- Asia (Philippines)
- Ireland (members of the Traveller community)

Without the kind interest in and support for OPEN's work from these organisations the research would not have been possible since gaining access to these often hard-to-reach groups proved challenging from the outset. OPEN would like to thank:

- Cáirde
- Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre (ERIHC) Information and Support Unit, Waterford city
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland
- St Margaret's Traveller Community Association, Ballymun
- Teen Parent Support Programme, Galway
- Vincentian Refugee Centre, Phibsboro
- Waterford Women's Centre, Waterford city

Thanks also to the Combat Poverty Agency for funding this research under the Poverty Research Programme.

Contents

Executive Summary.....	6
Section One: Introduction	10
1.1 Background to OPEN.....	10
1.2 Research Aims and Objectives	11
1.3 Structure of the Report	13
Section Two: Methodology.....	15
2.1 Introduction.....	15
2.2 Desk-Based Research.....	16
2.3 Consultations with Lone Parents.....	18
2.4 Consultation with Organisations Representing Minority Ethnic Groups and Relevant Stakeholders...20	
2.5 Advisory Committee	21
2.6 Ethics.....	21
Section Three: Literature Review	25
3.1 Format of the Literature Review.....	25
3.2 Terminology and Definitions	26
3.3 Definitions of Legal Status	32
3.4 Policy Context	39
3.5 Relevant Irish Literature	45
3.6 Relevant International Literature.....	66
3.7 Review of Main Findings.....	73
Section Four: Analysis of Findings.....	77
4.1 Introduction.....	77
4.2 Background Information.....	78
4.3 Important Issues for All Lone Parents.....	83
4.4 Important Issues for Migrant Worker Lone Parents	90
4.5 Important Issues for Other Minority Ethnic Lone Parents	92
4.6 Important Issues for Traveller Lone Parents.....	99
4.7 Organisations supporting Minority Ethnic Groups.....	103
4.7 Organisations supporting Minority Ethnic Groups.....	103
Section Five: Recommendations & Conclusion	107
5.1 Introduction.....	107
5.2 Recommendations.....	107
5.3 Conclusion	113
Bibliography.....	115
Appendix 1	118
Appendix 2	119
Appendix 3	121
Appendix 4	122
Appendix 5	123

Executive Summary

The mission of OPEN, the National Network of local lone-parent self-help groups is to represent the diversity of interests of lone parents, particularly those living in or at risk of poverty and to promote their inclusion and progression within wider society. Informed by this mission statement and funded under the Combat Poverty Agency Poverty Research Initiative, OPEN undertook a research project which focused on identifying the needs of lone parents from minority ethnic groups in Ireland. The term minority ethnic groups, as interpreted by OPEN, encompasses indigenous Irish Travellers, black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, including, but not limited to migrant workers. This report details the findings from the research project.

Section one of the report provides background information on OPEN and identifies the aims and objectives of the research which are:

- To identify and articulate the specific experiences and perspectives of people parenting alone who come from minority ethnic backgrounds, such as indigenous Irish Travellers, black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, including but not limited to migrants.
- To locate these issues within the broader social policy context:
 - Policy on lone parents, racism, discrimination, inequality, poverty and social exclusion
- To design responses to the needs identified at policy and practice level

This was achieved by:

- Documenting the experiences and views of people parenting alone who come from minority backgrounds
- Examining the specific issues they face in accessing and benefiting from state services
- Developing a series of recommendations to address these issues, in consultation with organisations working with minority ethnic groups:
 - In relation to OPEN
 - In relation to public policy and practice

The research methods used to achieve the aims and objectives identified above are detailed in section two: methodology. Desk-based research informed the review of existing literature in the areas of ethnicity, migration, racism, gender and lone parenthood, which provided a context for OPEN's research. Qualitative research methods were chosen including semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Data gathered from interviews were supplemented by three focus groups, held around the country, targeting lone parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. The methods of data collection chosen for this research project are best suited to achieving the aims of the research, which are 'to articulate the specific perspectives and experiences of lone parents from minority ethnic communities'. Qualitative research methods allow the participants to express, in their own words, 'their perceptions or experiences in order to provide insights into their beliefs about their circumstances, rather than measurable data'.¹ Once the research got under way, OPEN gathered information from ethnically diverse groups and individual lone parents with differing legal status, living all over the country; as well as information from numerous service providers and relevant stakeholders. Positionality and ethical considerations are also discussed in detail in section two.

Section three of the report offers a comprehensive account of relevant information which will provide the context for OPEN's study and provides an analysis of existing material relating to members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland including:

- Statistical data
- Policy and legislative documents
- Academic reports
- Local, national and international research studies

Terminology used throughout the report is discussed and evaluated in section three, including concepts such as one parent family, Traveller, ethnicity, racism and gender. Statistical information on the number and make-up of minority ethnic one parent families gathered from the 2006 census and other Government sources are analysed while policy documents which shape Government responses to supporting

¹ www.cpa.ie

one parent families, integration and anti-racism are assessed. International literature relating to the feminisation of migration and experiences of black and minority ethnic (BME) lone parents in the United Kingdom are also explored.

In section four the recurring themes which emerged as significant to the minority ethnic lone parents consulted are laid out. These lone parents are indigenous Irish Travellers and black and Asian minority ethnic lone parents, including but not limited to migrant workers. Since a number of the themes identified have significance for broader categories of lone parents than minority groups alone, the themes are examined under four main headings:

- ❖ Important issues arising for all lone parents
- ❖ Important issues arising for migrant lone parents
- ❖ Important issues arising for other minority ethnic lone parents
- ❖ Important issues arising for Traveller lone parents

Important issues arising from the research which are relevant for most lone parents in Ireland, regardless of ethnicity include:

- Accessing education and employment
- Childcare
- Accommodation needs
- Poverty
- Experiences of public services

Issues identified as particularly important for migrant lone parents include:

- Poverty
- Issues relating to legal status

Important issues for other minority ethnic groups included those identified above, as well as:

- Health and wellbeing

while issues specific to Traveller lone parents include:

- Discrimination, stereotyping and stigma in relation to lone parenthood

Section four of the report provides a detailed discussion of all of the themes identified above as well as background information on the lone parents who

participated in this study. Finally the issues identified by organisations working with minority ethnic groups, including lone parents, are discussed.

OPEN recognises, and this research confirms that minority ethnic lone parents face many challenges in their position as head of a one parent family. These challenges are related to their membership of a minority group and to their legal status in Ireland. These are in addition to the many other challenges faced by all lone parents in Ireland, particularly those in or at risk of poverty. Section Five, the final section of the report makes recommendations based on these findings. The recommendations are for consideration by Government Departments, including Social and Family Affairs; Justice, Equality and Law Reform; and Environment, Heritage and Local Government; as well as Combat Poverty Agency, OPEN and other relevant stakeholders. The issues are structured to reflect the themes examined in section four, such as accommodation, childcare, accessing public services etc.

Section One: Introduction

1.1 Background to OPEN

OPEN, the national network of local lone-parent self-help groups was founded in 1994 and currently has 91 member groups. The common bond of all groups in the network is self help – lone parents recognising their own ability to deliver information and advice services and to pool their experiences to campaign for more inclusive social and economic policies and structures. OPEN's groups are made up of all types of lone parents, men and women: never married, previously married and those with partners who are institutionalised or otherwise unavailable to fulfil their parenting role.

OPEN's Mission is: to represent the diversity of interests of lone parents, particularly those living in or at risk of poverty and promote their inclusion and progression within wider society.

Objectives:

- To assist member groups to strengthen their capacity
- To campaign for policy change

Values:

Respect; Inclusion; Participation

OPEN, the national network of local lone-parent self-help groups, applied for funding in 2007 to conduct a research project under the Combat Poverty Agency Poverty Research Initiative. The research would focus on identifying the needs of lone parents from minority ethnic groups in Ireland. The term minority ethnic groups, as interpreted by OPEN, encompasses indigenous Irish Travellers, black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, including, but not limited to migrants. One of OPEN's priorities is *the influence of policy development and its implementation at local, national and European levels in order to ensure the needs of one parent families are*

adequately understood and addressed. In order to ensure that this work is fully inclusive of, and responsive to the needs of **all** one parent families in Ireland, OPEN wanted to research the specific needs of minority ethnic groups parenting alone as a matter of priority. In order to inform the drafting of the research proposal, OPEN first consulted with various organisations with remits to support and advocate on behalf of minority ethnic groups. This consultation generated the research aims and objectives which would structure the scope of the project. The aims and objectives of the research, as identified in the proposal submitted to Combat Poverty Agency, are as outlined below.

1.2 Research Aims and Objectives

Aims:

- To identify and articulate the specific experiences and perspectives of people parenting alone who come from minority ethnic backgrounds, such as indigenous Irish Travellers, black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, including but not limited to migrants
- To locate these issues within the broader social policy context:
 - Policy on lone parents, racism, discrimination, inequality, poverty and social exclusion
- To design responses to the needs identified at policy and practice level

Objectives:

- To document the experiences and views of people parenting alone who come from minority backgrounds
- To examine the specific issues they face in accessing and benefiting from state services
- To develop a series of recommendations to address these issues, in consultation with organisations working with minority ethnic groups:
 - In relation to OPEN
 - In relation to public policy and practice

Project phases:

The phases of this research project were as follows:

- A background paper was developed by a consultant to inform the drafting of a literature review which would set the context for OPEN's research.
- The fieldwork and data analysis phases of the research were conducted by a second consultant, who worked, as part of the research team, with the Head of Policy and Research in OPEN to draft the final report and develop recommendations.

In drafting this report, OPEN has engaged in extensive consultation with lone parents from minority ethnic groups, including the indigenous Traveller community; with OPEN member groups, with service providers and other relevant stakeholders representing the interests of minority ethnic groups in Ireland. At various stages during the research process input was also sought from an advisory committee.

This report locates the discussion on the specific needs of ethnic minority lone parents within the context of existing service provision and broader policy debates on poverty, social exclusion, racism and inequality. It identifies many of the challenges faced by one parent families experiencing poverty or at risk of poverty in Ireland, including ethnic minority groups, as well as highlighting the particular challenges which are specific to ethnic minority lone parents in Ireland. The report also identifies current gaps in service provision and supports required by ethnic minority lone parents to ensure greater participation and progression in the social, cultural, civic and economic fabric of life in Ireland. Finally, the report offers some recommendations to address the future needs of minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland.

The findings of this research will be submitted to the Combat Poverty Agency and will be widely circulated to the OPEN membership and all relevant stakeholders. A national seminar, hosted by OPEN, will ensure further dissemination and discussion of the research findings. OPEN will also feed recommendations generated by the research into a range of policy fora where OPEN is represented.

For further information on OPEN or to view other publications by OPEN visit

www.oneparent.ie

1.3 Structure of the Report

This report is divided into the following sections:

Section One: Introduction

Section One provides background information on OPEN, including its mission statement, key objectives and the values which underpin the work of the organisation and details the aims and objectives of this research project.

Section Two: Methodology

Section Two outlines the methods of data collection developed for this research project and implemented during the research phases. Qualitative research methods were used to document the experiences of lone parents from minority ethnic groups 'in their own words' including semi-structured interviews and facilitated focus groups; in conjunction with desk-based research.

Section Three: Literature Review

Section Three offers a contextual framework for the research which OPEN has engaged in. This section details various examples of relevant literature and previous research studies conducted nationally and internationally with minority ethnic groups, particularly those that include lone parents as a focus of research. Section Three also situates the research within the current policy context as it relates to lone parents from minority ethnic groups.

Section Four: Findings and Analysis

Section Four provides an analysis of the findings identified from the research. This section is divided into two parts. The first part of the section thematically details the issues identified as significant by lone parents during face-to-face and telephone interviews and in focus group discussions. The second part of the section analyses the information gathered from service providers and other relevant stakeholders.

Section Five: Recommendations and Conclusion

Section Five is the final section of the report. It makes recommendations for future action based on the analysis of findings in Section Four and concludes the report.

Section Two: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

OPEN engaged in pre-development work with numerous groups, organisations and statutory agencies with a remit around service provision for minority ethnic groups. This pre-development work took the form of a focus group consultation, convened to inform the drafting of the research proposal submitted to the Combat Poverty Agency (under the Poverty Research Initiative). Once the research got under way, OPEN gathered information from ethnically diverse groups and individual lone parents with differing legal status, living all over the country; as well as information from numerous service providers and relevant stakeholders. For a list of organisations consulted as part of the research see Appendix 1.

Qualitative research methods were used in this research project, including semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Data gathered from 20 interviews were supplemented by three focus groups, held around the country, targeting lone parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. The methods of data collection chosen for this research project are best suited to achieving the aims of the research, which are 'to articulate the specific perspectives and experiences of lone parents from ethnic minority communities'. Qualitative research methods allow the participants to express, in their own words, 'their perceptions or experiences in order to provide insights into their beliefs about their circumstances, rather than measurable data'.²

An advisory committee was established to direct the research, which consisted of representatives from state agencies and organisations representing immigrants, Travellers and women. The Combat Poverty Agency was consulted in relation to the work of the advisory committee. The purpose of the advisory committee was to guide the research and to support the identification of data sources and the collection of information.

² www.cpa.ie

2.2 Desk-Based Research

2.2.1 Introduction

A trawl of the literature during the initial research phase, conducted between July and August 2009, identified policy documents and existing research studies relating to minority ethnic groups from both national and international sources. Particular attention was paid to references to members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone, where available. Initial searches for relevant material to inform the drafting of the review were guided by a bibliography, compiled by a consultant to OPEN, who prepared a preliminary background paper on the subject of minority ethnic groups parenting alone.

Websites with links to online publications were the main source of material included in the final review. Online print media sources such as the *Irish Times* website and Metro Éireann website were also consulted for relevant articles. Finally, theoretical literature relating to ethnicity was also sourced. The following subsections detail methods used to gather information on minority ethnic groups and lone parents, including official Government documents, state agency reports, smaller scale research conducted by NGOs, and print media articles.

2.2.2 Official Publications

A largely web-based trawl of relevant Government documents was carried out to ascertain whether members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone had been identified as a target group by official policy makers and service providers.

2.2.3 Irish Traveller Literature

There is a reasonably extensive research and academic literature on Irish Travellers dating from the 1980s, and this was searched for references to the experience of women and then for references to lone parents, particularly over the last ten to fifteen years (for comparison with the situation of 'new' minority groups in Ireland).

2.2.4 Academic Literature

Academic literature informing discussions in section 3 was sourced from the main library of University College Dublin. A tight focus was maintained on gathering up-to-date literature which advanced an understanding of ethnicity, race/racism, including State racism; as well as consideration of gender and migration issues and the particular experiences of Irish Travellers. One of the challenges for this research study, however, was the dearth of literature available which directly focuses on the intersection between ethnicity (of both indigenous minority groups such as Travellers and 'new' migrant populations) and the experiences of lone parents. It is hoped that this paper will make a contribution toward filling this gap in the literature.

2.2.5 Non-Government Organisations

The OPEN resource library and a largely web-based search for information on relevant NGOs provided access to bibliographies and publications lists which included research reports and policy documents, as well as submissions, journal articles and press releases. While there is an extensive and up-to-date catalogue of research available on minority ethnic groups with varying legal status, and their experiences in Ireland, it was important to remain focused on the literature which was most relevant to lone parents. Therefore a greater emphasis was placed on seeking out literature which focuses on minority ethnic women and on families.

2.2.6 International Literature

Literature from the United Kingdom (UK) was deemed to be potentially the most relevant, given the historical relationship of the two countries. However, there are also significant differences between the Irish and British experiences, considering the unique profile of recent immigration into Ireland. In addition, the different pace of urbanisation and industrialisation, the specific national histories regarding the changing roles of women in the family and society, two very distinct overall population/demographic profiles, and somewhat differing traditions in relation to social welfare systems all had to be considered. So the materials identified needed to be scrutinised carefully to ascertain their usefulness in relation to the Irish situation. Literature from the United States of America (US) and Canada were also identified for analysis.

2.3 Consultations with Lone Parents

2.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

During the fieldwork phase of the research a total of 20 semi-structured interviews (both face-to-face: 11 participants, and telephone: 9 participants) were carried out with lone parents from different ethnic groups with different legal status living throughout Ireland, including Dublin, Wicklow, Monaghan, Cork and Waterford. Participants included members of the Traveller community, lone parents seeking asylum, those with leave to remain as parents of children born in Ireland before January 2005, lone parents with refugee status and migrant workers from within the EU or on work permits. A small number of interviewees were drawn from the OPEN membership. However, the majority of interviewees were sourced through organisations and service providers supporting or advocating on behalf of minority ethnic groups.

Lone parents who expressed an interest in taking part in the research were contacted and offered the opportunity, whenever possible, to participate in a face-to-face interview with the researcher at a time which suited them and a location they were comfortable with. If the lone parent was content to participate in a telephone interview, a pre-arranged date and time, which suited the interviewee, was agreed. Telephone interviews were conducted, where appropriate, to reduce travel, in order to address the fixed timeframe for completion of the research. Interviews lasted between thirty minutes and one hour, fifteen minutes. For a schedule of questions used during the interviews with lone parents see the Appendices section at the back of this report (Appendix 2).

2.3.2 Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted with lone parents from minority ethnic backgrounds. The focus groups took place in Co. Kerry, Waterford city and West Dublin. The numbers of lone parents attending each focus group ranged from ten participants to four participants. The first focus group was made up of lone parents from a number of countries in Africa, who were of mixed legal status but mostly seeking asylum or given leave to remain based on the rights of their Irish Citizen children. The second focus group was made up of lone parents who were drawn from members of the Traveller community. The third focus group took place in Blanchardstown, west Dublin. The participants were African women with leave to remain based on the rights of their Irish Citizen children. During the data collection phase of the research process numerous efforts were made to contact organisations and networks representing other minority ethnic/religious groups such as those from the Muslim faith and from Asian backgrounds, particularly Filipino and Chinese groups, in order to convene another focus group with lone parents from these backgrounds, but to no avail.

The purpose of the focus group consultation was to allow participants the opportunity to talk about their experiences of lone parenthood together, as this related to their minority ethnic status. The format provided participants with an opportunity to generate a discussion about the challenges they faced and to compare other participants' experiences with their own. Focus group lasted between one hour, fifteen minutes and two hours in duration. The format used to structure the focus groups is available in the Appendices section at the back of this report (Appendix 3).

An earlier effort to organise another focus group with EU workers in Monaghan was abandoned when only two of a potential five lone parents were available to attend. Instead, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with both women, from Lithuania and Latvia respectively, with the assistance of a Russian interpreter (included in the final interview total of 20). Two of the remaining three lone parents due to attend the focus group were interviewed over the phone at a later date. An analysis of responses from the interviews and focus groups conducted with lone parents will follow in Section Four.

At the end of each interview and focus group, participants were presented with a €15 gift voucher as a token of appreciation for agreeing to take part in the research and in recognition of the time commitments this required. Participants were not informed about the gift voucher until the consultations were complete. These lone parents were also offered a contribution toward travel and childcare costs in line with OPEN policy.

2.4 Consultation with Organisations Representing Minority Ethnic Groups and Relevant Stakeholders

2.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The original research proposal drafted by OPEN in consultation with CPA required the establishment and facilitation of a fourth focus group. It was agreed among the research team in OPEN that this focus group should consist of service providers and other relevant stakeholders working with and representing minority ethnic groups, who understood the needs of minority ethnic women, particularly those who are lone parents. The aim of the consultation was to identify supports offered by such organisations and to highlight the gaps in service provision for minority ethnic groups parenting alone.

Despite OPEN's efforts to bring representatives from these organisations together on two separate occasions, the participants' heavy workloads prevented a consensus being reached for re-scheduling. Instead it was agreed that the stakeholders and service providers, 5 in total, would participate in semi-structured interviews (again either face-to-face (4 interview) or by telephone (1 interview), dependent on each participant's availability within the timeframe of the research). For the list of questions used to structure interviews with service providers and stakeholders see Appendix 4.

2.5 Advisory Committee

As a result of outcomes generated by OPEN's pre-development work prior to drafting the research proposal an advisory committee was established. The remit of the advisory committee was to:

- Contribute ideas and experience to the research
- Support the work of the researcher by providing feedback and advice
- Monitor the progress of the research and contribute to its outcomes

The organisations approached to contribute to the advisory committee represent migrants, Travellers and women. These included:

- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- National Traveller Women's Forum

The Combat Poverty Agency was also invited to contribute to the committee. Despite efforts to convene a formal meeting of the advisory committee, members did not meet collectively over the course of the research due to conflicting work schedules. However, those expressing an interest were updated informally (via email and telephone conversations) about progress made in the research.

2.6 Ethics

OPEN recognises the imbalance of power inherent in the research process between those who conduct the research and the subjects being researched and strives to limit this inequality through critical reflection on the potential for bias in the research and ensuring informed consent among participants.

2.6.1 Positionality and reflexivity of the researcher

As a researcher it is vital to recognise the influence one has on the participants involved in this research, on how the information gathered is interpreted and on how it is presented. The researcher can achieve this by engaging in critical reflection on his/her own experiences, understandings and preconceptions about ethnicity, culture, race and lone parenthood. 'As researchers we need to maintain an informed

reflexive consciousness to contextualise our own subjectivity in data interpretation and representation of experiences in the research process' (Alzbouebi, 2006:1).

Alzbouebi (2006) highlights the importance of recognising these differences and the impact on the research process. 'The challenge is not to eliminate but to document the effects of personas that influence our behaviour and positionality' (Alzbouebi, 2006:1) (See also David and Sutton, 2004). The researchers on this project were white, catholic, settled, Irish women. As women the researchers have gender in common with all of the lone parents participating in the study, and as Irish citizens they have the same rights as Irish Traveller lone parents. But otherwise, the researchers were separated from the participants by differences of class, colour, cultural/ethnic grouping, educational attainment and legal status.

As a citizen of Ireland, the researcher is more likely to take for granted the rights and entitlements bestowed on Irish citizens and is perhaps not attuned to the existence of state racism manifest in certain Government policy pertaining to Travellers or immigrants or to the racism propagated through irresponsible reporting in the media. As a settled Irish woman the researcher can have no experience of the discrimination faced by Traveller lone parents and may even be blind to it because it has been so rampant and omnipresent in the state for so long.

Having worked for an Irish lone parents organisation previously the researchers may have a better than average understanding of the challenges facing many Irish lone parents, particularly those in or at risk of poverty; this makes it more likely that the researchers would sympathise with the participants in this study. However, such knowledge might also lead to presumptions on the part of the researchers about the issues facing these groups and could limit the researchers' focus to the challenges faced by most Irish lone parents (such as poverty, childcare, housing) rather than identifying those challenges specific to minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland (such as legal status, discrimination, language difficulties).

All of these issues are likely to position the researcher as an 'outsider' (Alzbouebi, 2006) in the eyes of the participant lone parents. The immigrant lone parents may even view the researchers – white, Irish professionals – with fear or intimidation as a

result of their encounters with state officials or persons in positions of power who determine their legal status and therefore their right to stay in Ireland. Traveller lone parents may be mistrustful of a settled researcher as a result of negative encounters in the past with settled professionals in positions of power. This invariably impacts on the level of access permitted to the researchers.

2.6.2 Informed consent

Prior to commencing a consultation the OPEN research team ensured that participants were in full agreement with participation, in accordance with OPEN's core values of respect. 'The principle of informed consent is generally agreed to be the ideal mode of operation when enlisting others ... Informed consent means the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation. (David and Sutton, 2004:18). Everyone participating in the study was informed of the purpose of the research from the outset. Participants was informed of their right not to answer any questions they did not wish to answer and were given the opportunity to end their involvement, without explanation, at any time during a consultation. An interpreter was provided for participants with limited English language skills to ensure they fully understood the purpose of the research and their participation in it.

While all the lone parents were offered a contribution towards childcare and travel as a courtesy, none was aware of the gift voucher being offered until after they had participated in the consultation. The researcher also made a commitment to ensure confidentiality (and anonymity in the case of the lone parents), and this was respected throughout the consultation process and in the presentation and dissemination of research findings.

While the researchers must state their positionality for the sake of reflexivity and participants must be informed of their rights before, during and after consultation as part of the research, the methods used (outlined above) are often flawed and the system imperfect. OPEN advocates a standpoint approach to research (David and Sutton, 2004) favoured by researchers 'who work with those they consider to be disadvantaged, exploited and/or oppressed' (David and Sutton, 2004:18). This approach suggests that 'there can be no neutral position from which to conduct

research and no neutral choice as to what to study or how to study it ... in this view research is always a form of advocacy. Social research is seen as a political weapon to empower the “underdog”...’ (David and Sutton, 2004:18). This approach is directly compatible with OPEN’s mission and objective.

Lone parents who agreed to participate in this research were fully informed of their right to pass on a question they did not wish to answer or to stop the interview/focus group at any time they wished. Confidentiality was also ensured from the outset. Participants who requested to see transcripts of their interviews were provided with copies and any requested amendments to the transcripts were made before the data were included in the final report.

Section Three: Literature Review

This review of literature and desk-based research sets the context for OPEN's research study. It does so by:

- Appraising national policy which impacts on members of minority ethnic groups, who are parenting alone in Ireland, such as indigenous Irish Travellers, black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, including but not limited to migrant workers
- Evaluating existing relevant literature from Ireland and abroad in order to highlight significant findings and to identify knowledge gaps in the literature which require further research.

3.1 Format of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive account of relevant information which will give the context for OPEN's study.³ This section provides an analysis of existing material relating to members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland including:

- Statistical data
- Policy and legislative documents
- Local, national and international research studies

The following sub-section (sub-section 3.2) sets out the terminology and definitions used throughout the report.

Sub-section 3.3 presents the policy context for the research study by identifying and appraising policy documents and legislation relating to lone parents and members of minority ethnic groups, including the Green Paper proposals for supporting lone parents (2006), the National Development Plan 2007-13 and Government strategies

³ 'Lone parents from ethnic minority communities: exploring needs and responses' OPEN+, Vol.1, Issue 1. Available at www.oneparent.ie

for addressing immigration and integration as set out in Migration Nation (2008) and other strategy documents.

Section 3.4 synthesises the available literature in the Irish context by presenting relevant information under several themed headings which are significant to the experiences of members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland, such as housing, health, employment and childcare.

Section 3.5 provides an account of available literature from an international context including the US and the UK.

Section 3.6 summarises the main findings outlined in this section and identifies areas where further research is needed.

3.2 Terminology and Definitions

Before an analysis of the literature can take place, however, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the terminology used in this review, to define key terms and concepts such as ethnicity and racism, and to clearly differentiate between the various legal statuses of asylum seekers, refugees, economic migrants and other categories referenced throughout the report.

It is useful at the outset to explore some of the core terminology which will be used and to explain why these choices were made, for the purpose of this report.

3.2.1 Lone parent/One parent family

The routes to lone parenthood are many: separation, divorce, desertion, death, imprisonment of a partner or an unplanned pregnancy (www.oneparent.ie).

Below is a table detailing the numbers of lone parents raising children in Ireland based on statistics gathered from the 2006 census.

Information on Lone Parents in Ireland

Lone Mothers with Children (of any age)	162, 551	Number of children (to lone mothers)	269, 785
Lone Fathers with Children (of any age)	26, 689	Number of children (to lone fathers)	42, 018
Total	189, 240	-	311, 803

It was established from the outset that for the purpose of this research study the focus was to be on the experiences of lone parents rather than on the child(ren) of one parent families or on the non-resident parents of these children. 'Lone parent' is now the term most commonly used in Ireland in relation to official policy and provision (*Supporting Lone Parents* (2007) Department of Social and Family Affairs Green Paper) and is the preferred term of non-governmental organisations like OPEN. It describes, more accurately than terms such as 'single parent' or 'sole parent', the situation of someone who is the principal carer of a dependent child or children who does not have a partner or spouse resident with him/her, whatever the marital status or family situation might be.

It should be emphasised that, for most people, lone parenthood is not a permanent or fixed condition, but a stage in a life process; children grow up and leave home, the lone parent (re)marries or forms a new partnership, parents living apart may decide to live together, and separated refugee families may be reunited. UK figures from the late 1990s suggest that the average period of lone parenthood is comparatively short. '[H]alf of all lone parents leave lone parenthood within six years' (Rowlingson and McKay, 2002). Research conducted in Ireland suggests that among lone parents in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) only, the period of time spent in receipt of the payment did not exceed 10 years for the vast majority of recipients (85 per cent) (Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2007, Table 2.4). The duration of lone parenthood is likely to vary widely from individual to individual.

In Ireland 14 per cent (26, 689) (Census 2006) of lone parents are men, with 1,400 'non-Irish family units' headed by a lone father and just over 1,000 families describing themselves as 'mixed' Irish/ non-Irish family units' headed by a lone

father.⁴ However, there is a marked difference in the age profile of one parent families headed by mothers and those headed by lone fathers: mothers parenting alone are much more likely to be raising children under 15 years of age. This is obviously relevant to the impact of lone parent status on incomes. This pattern is true of both Irish, non-Irish and 'mixed' households. In addition; given OPEN's particular anti-poverty focus, and the profoundly female dominated gender profile of One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) recipients (98 per cent), the focus of this section is largely on female members of minority ethnic groups who are parenting alone in Ireland.

3.2.2 Ethnicity

Defining ethnicity in precise terms is a difficult task as definitions vary widely within the literature. Loosely applied the term ethnicity can imply 'commonalities of language, religion, identity, national origins and/or even skin colour' (Ratcliffe, 2004:28). Some academics argue that ethnicity is an important element of culture; one which rests on membership of a particular group.

It is arguably a major component of contemporary cultural formation and, potentially at least, about future group formations. (Ratcliffe, 2004:29)

All of the approaches agree that ethnicity has something to do with the classification of people and group relationships ... it refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive. (Eriksen, 1993:4)

There is also a consensus among certain academics (Eriksen, 1993) that ethnicity equates to social identity, which means personally identifying with a particular group, rather than possessing fixed attributes which mark a person out as belonging to that group.

Therefore ethnicity may be viewed as a fluid concept and as such is always changing. This notion will be looked at in greater detail in Section 4 of this review.

⁴ Census 2006, Table 43 (these figures include households with children over 15 years as well as under 15 years old)

Ratcliffe (2004) emphasises the importance of recognising the ‘evolutionary’⁵ nature of ethnicity as opposed to viewing it as a ‘static’ concept which never changes. Focusing on the distinct characteristics of an ethnic group or overemphasising their ‘uniqueness’ can mean that other factors which impact on an individual’s life chances, such as socio-economic status, are overlooked and opportunities to highlight commonalities of experience among various ethnic groups are lost. Nevertheless, Ratcliffe also argues that in order to ‘assess levels of inequality between various population groups’ (2004:36) it becomes necessary to measure and understand differences among and between ethnic groups.

However, opposing academics (Lentin and McVeigh, 1996) have argued that relying on definitions of ethnicity which emphasise cultural groupings or social identity underplay the dominance and political power held by majority ethnic groups. In other words, certain concepts of ethnicity have been created and exploited by majority ethnic groups to maintain control over ‘minority’ groups.

3.2.3 Irish Travellers

Travellers are a small ethnic minority group in Ireland. They have a long shared history and value system which make them a distinct group. They have their own language, customs and traditions.⁶ Irish Travellers are an example of an indigenous people. Eriksen describes the phrase ‘indigenous people’ as ‘a blanket term for ... inhabitants of a territory who are politically relatively powerless and who are only partly integrated into the dominant nation state’ (1993:13). Despite efforts on the part of members of the Traveller community and their supporters to be recognised as a distinct ethnic group (and endorsement by the UN Committee on the application of the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racism*) to date the Irish Government has not conferred this status. This is in contrast to legislation passed in the UK and in Northern Ireland which recognises Travellers’ distinct ethnicity (Race Relations Order, 1997). Irish Travellers, however, are recognised as a distinct ‘cultural’ group within Ireland, whose rights to equality and protection against

⁵ Ratcliffe, P. (2004) ‘Race’, *Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining an Inclusive Society*, Pp. 32, Open University Press, Berkshire, England.

⁶ www.paveepoint.ie

discrimination are recorded in the Incitement to Hatred Act of 1989 and further recognised under the seven grounds covered in Irish Equality legislation.⁷

Despite these measures, as O'Connell reminds us in Lentin and McVeigh (2002), Travellers experience disadvantage in all areas, from social exclusion and marginalisation, to education and literacy, to employment levels and poverty, living conditions, health status and life expectancy. Travellers are, O'Connell argues, 'a uniquely disadvantaged group: impoverished, under-educated, often despised and ostracised, they live on the margins of Irish society' (Lentin and McVeigh, 2002:49).

There needs to be an acknowledgement of the significant differences that exist between members of the Traveller community and members of other minority groups – those long established in Ireland and more recent migrants. Travellers' experiences as an indigenous minority will be invaluable to the comparison and exploration of issues and barriers around parenting alone for families from other minorities who have immigrated to Ireland. Recent relevant literature on Irish Travellers has been searched for coverage of lone parenthood and its meanings and outcomes in Traveller society and will be referenced here, where appropriate.

3.2.4 *'Race'/Racism*

Issues of 'race' and incidences of racism are regrettably part of the experiences of some members of minority ethnic groups in Ireland. So it is important to discuss these concepts here. It is suggested in certain academic literature, usually advanced within cultural studies, that 'race exists as a cultural construct, whether it has a "biological" reality or not ... race refers to the categorisation of people, while ethnicity has to do with group identification' (Eriksen, 1993:5). Race can also be defined as a symbol, for example 'any symbol which integrates a group into a substantial whole through the assertion that its members are of common origin' (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006:7). In addition, Lentin and McVeigh suggest that 'most importantly, race must be understood as a political idea. In other words "races" were invented in order to classify people into populations and thus regulate them' (2006:7).

⁷ Employment Equality Act 1998 and Equal Status Act 2000 www.equality.ie

Likewise, racism has several definitions and meanings. 'Racism ... builds on the assumption that personality is somehow linked with hereditary characteristics which differ systematically between "races"' (Eriksen, 1993:5). The Immigrant Council of Ireland defines racism along similar lines: 'Racism can be defined as the process whereby social groups categorise other groups as different or inferior, on the basis of phenotypical (skin colour, hair, features) or cultural traits.'

The Immigrant Council includes additional references in relation to how racism can be used to subjugate the group. It goes on to suggest that the oppression of such groups can occur at the level of the individual or at an institutional level:

Racism involves the use of economic, social or political power, with the purpose of legitimating the exclusion of the group so defined. Institutional and structural racism exists where laws, policies and administrative practices exclude or discriminate against particular groups, or where there are poor outcomes as a result of lack of appropriate positive discrimination measures.
(Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2004:14)

State bodies such as the Equality Authority use the definition contained in the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1996) to describe racism:

Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (Equality Authority, Year: 2)

Once again, however, certain academics assessing concepts of racism from a critical standpoint suggest that any definition which fails to recognise the role of the state in perpetuating racism is incomplete. 'The easiest tendency is to see racism in terms of individual prejudice rather than political terms ... We cannot understand racism in any given context without understanding its relationship to the state' (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006:10). This viewpoint gives rise to the concept of state racism or 'a

racism that society practises against itself, an internal racism – that of constant purification and constant social normalisation’ (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006:13).

In the Irish context the author suggests that this amounts to managing the ‘problem’ of difference (including ‘old’ racialised minorities (Travellers) and ‘new’ migrant populations) by encouraging conformity (through the creation of concepts such as integration, diversity and equality). This is all achieved by passing legislation such as the Citizenship Referendum and the Immigrant Act of 2004 in order to control rather than liberate minorities in Irish society (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006). Specifically in relation to ‘new’ migrant populations, it is suggested, the state encourages a form of ‘crisis’ racism whereby racism is presented as a new phenomenon, only in existence in Ireland in recent times because it is a problem brought to the country by immigrants. ‘Crisis racism’ blames ‘incoming others for the problems of the system, implying that getting rid of migrants will solve all the system’s health, education, employment, housing and citizenship problems’ (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006:6).

It is important to view the findings of the literature which follows, as well as the findings of this research on the experiences of minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland, in the context of the theories pertaining to ethnicity, race and racism outlined above.

3.3 Definitions of Legal Status

The term ‘minority ethnic groups’ encompasses a plethora of populations and the members of these populations may possess diverse legal statuses. A member of a minority ethnic group who is parenting alone in Ireland may occupy any one of the following categories:

- Irish citizen lone parents
- EU citizen lone parents
- Lone parents seeking asylum with their child(ren)
- Lone parents granted leave to remain, based on humanitarian grounds or based on the rights of their Irish citizen child

- Lone parents who signed up for the Irish Born Administrative Scheme (IBC/05 scheme)
- Refugee lone parents including programme refugees and convention refugees
- Lone parents from outside the EEA⁸ on work permits, working visas/authorisations or green cards
- International students
- Lone parents who have become undocumented/'irregular'/illegal immigrants

3.3.1 Irish Citizen

Members of the Traveller community and members of long-established ethnic minority groups in Ireland, such as the Irish-Jewish community (present in Ireland from the nineteenth century onward) or the Irish-Italian community, have the same rights and the same entitlement to citizenship as every other Irish citizen.

3.3.2 EU Citizens

EU citizens and their families have freedom of movement within the EU and can decide to move to Ireland without a visa or work permit (a residence card is required). They must also provide proof of employment, or if they are unemployed provide proof that they can support themselves and any dependants. A lone parent from another EU country may move to Ireland with their child(ren) in search of economic opportunities or a better life. An EU citizen parent living in Ireland with a spouse or partner from an EU country or with an Irish citizen spouse/partner may become a lone parent following the break-up of the relationship.

3.3.3 Seeking Asylum

An asylum seeker is defined as a person who seeks to be recognised as a refugee in accordance with the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention (HSE, 2008:38).

According to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 3,866 asylum applications were received in the State in 2008. This is a 3 per cent decrease on the

⁸ European Economic Area: All of the EU countries plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, as well as Switzerland.

corresponding figure of 3,985 in 2007.⁹ The number is down from a peak of 11,634 applications during the year 2002.

Year	Number of applications in that year
2002	11, 634
2007	3, 985
2008	3, 866

Asylum seekers are not permitted to work while waiting for their application to be processed; in the past, this has taken up to several years for some applicants. However, if an application is successful the individual becomes recognised as a refugee and has the right to seek employment. 'Of those who claim asylum status, almost 90 per cent are not successful in their claim' (NESC, 2006:13).

When an asylum seeker enters Ireland, he or she is accommodated in a Reception centre for a short period, before being dispersed to one of a number of Accommodation centres outside the Dublin area. This is in accordance with the Government policy of direct provision, where asylum seekers are provided with full board, i.e. accommodation, meals and an allowance of €19.10 per week (€9.60 per child).

Women seeking asylum in Ireland may find themselves parenting alone in hostel accommodation or direct provision centres.

3.3.4 Leave to Remain

People who are granted leave to remain are persons who may not meet the full conditions needed to qualify for full refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention but who, for a variety of reasons including humanitarian grounds, are nonetheless granted leave to remain in the State. Up to January 2003 qualifying conditions for being granted leave to remain included the birth of an Irish citizen child.

⁹ www.justice.ie

In some instances Irish citizen children were born to lone parents with leave to remain or became part of a one parent family as a result of marital or relationship breakdown between parents with leave to remain.

3.3.5 IBC/05 Scheme

Following the Citizenship Referendum in June 2004 the rights of parents (regardless of their own legal status) to remain in Ireland based on the citizenship of their Irish-born child (a right which had previously been enshrined in the Irish constitution) were no longer to be honoured. It has been suggested by Lentin and McVeigh that the arguments made by Government prior to the Referendum centred on 'putting the blame for over-burdened maternity hospitals on migrant mothers allegedly arriving "at the last minute" to have children-citizens in Ireland' (2006:99). These claims were not substantiated by statistics gathered from hospitals at a later date (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006; Coakley and Healy, 2007).

Many of the families affected by the outcome of the referendum faced an uncertain future, with deportation likely for those parents who did not have a strong legal case for remaining in Ireland on other grounds. As a direct result of lobbying and advocacy by the newly formed CADIC coalition (Coalition against the Deportation of Irish Children), the Irish Born Administrative Scheme was introduced in January 2005. The scheme granted individuals and families leave to remain, based on the birth of their Irish citizen child. 'Close to 17,000 people were granted permission to remain in Ireland ... under the IBC/05 scheme in 2005' (Coakley and Healy, 2007:21).

A renewal of leave to remain status based on IBC/05 is dependent on the individual becoming 'economically viable'/financially independent or engaging in education or training activities within a period of two years. This can be particularly difficult for those with IBC/05 status who are parenting alone since making alternative childcare arrangements while they attend an education or training course or go out to work can be challenging.

These and other challenges facing lone parents with IBC/05 status and other legal status are discussed later. Arrangements for renewal of IBC/05 status for 2010 have

yet to be made public. This is likely to increase feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for those currently participating in the scheme.¹⁰

Family Reunification

One of the conditions attached to IBC/05 required applicants to accept that the status 'did not confer any entitlement or legitimate expectation of family reunification' (Coakley and Healy, 2007:26). This condition caused untold upset to these families as it led them to believe, incorrectly, that they were not permitted to apply for visas/entry into the State on the basis of being family members of an Irish citizen child and their spouses/parents. The content of the application appeared to reinforce this falsehood as it stated that the status would not 'in any way give rise to any legitimate expectation on my part that any of my family members abroad will [...] be given permission to remain in the State' (Coakley and Healy, 2007:26).

However, it is important to note that family reunification has been problematic for many migrants in Ireland. No legislative provision exists for family reunification for any migrant other than refugees. (Healy and Coakley, 2007:26)

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index, published in October 2007, Ireland comes joint sixteenth place with Hungary and Luxembourg out of the 25 European Union countries in terms of family reunification policies, below the EU-25 average (Coakley and Healy, 2007).

3.3.6 Refugees

A refugee/ convention refugee is a person who fulfils the requirements of the definition of a refugee under the 1951 Geneva Convention, which defines a refugee as a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that society. (National Intercultural Health Strategy, 2008:37)

¹⁰ As of 28 August 2009 www.inis.gov.ie

A programme refugee is an individual admitted for temporary or permanent settlement under Section 3 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (Coakley and Healy, 2007:21). The twelve families (120 individuals in total) who were admitted to Ireland in 1974 following a military coup by General Augusto Pinochet in Chile a year earlier are early examples of refugees admitted by the State (Metro Éireann, May 17, 2007). Examples of other nationalities admitted into Ireland as programme refugees include Bosnian, Vietnamese and Hungarian.

Those individuals who succeed in securing refugee status have comparable rights to Irish citizens. Only an individual granted refugee status is entitled to apply for family reunification (with spouse/partner or children left behind in the country of origin).

A mother fleeing her country of origin as a result of persecution or fear may seek asylum and receive refugee status in Ireland. If her spouses/partner is dead, has been killed as a result of conflict in the country of origin or fails to secure refugee status, she may face parenting alone. Alternatively an individual with refugee status may become a lone parent after settling in Ireland.

3.3.7 Work Permits, Authorisations and Green Cards

Work permits are not required by citizens of the EEA. Any individual outside the EEA wishing to work in Ireland must secure a work permit to do so. A job offer is required to secure a work permit. The permits are issued for one year, directly to employees, for occupations such as administration, sales and management. Up to the summer of 2009 individuals were required to reapply for a work permit every year or if changing employment. As of 28 August 2009 all non-EEA persons who have held employment permits for 5 years or more consecutively and were working lawfully during that time are exempt from the requirement to hold a work permit. Permission to remain (known as stamp 4) is renewable annually but depends on whether the holder is in employment or if redundant is making efforts to seek employment and has not become an 'undue burden'¹¹ on the State. The holder of this permission is free to work in any employment and is no longer limited to his/her current employer.

¹¹ http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/New_Provisions_for_Non-EEA_workers

Permission is not long-term residence, however, and is not a guarantee of permanent status.

Work visas/authorisations and Green cards are provided to fill specialised positions in three selected professional areas. These are IT, construction (including engineering) and health (including medical doctors). Authorisations are valid for two years and may be renewed for another two. These schemes are issued 'specifically for occupations where high-level strategic skills shortages exist in this country. Holders of green cards are allowed enter the Irish labour market and to bring their spouse and dependants to live in Ireland, solely on the basis that they have a specific skill which is not available to Irish employers from within the EEA.'¹²

3.3.8 International Students

In the academic year 2006/7 there were almost 10,000 students from all over the world attending recognised courses in higher education institutions in Ireland. This does not include other educational institutions, such as private language schools.¹³ Until 2005, people from outside the EEA with student visas had considerable flexibility in taking up casual employment. Policy on this has changed; now only full-time students in courses of at least one year's duration, leading to a qualification recognised by the Minister for Education and Science, in an institution approved by the Government, are allowed to undertake casual work (i.e. 20 hours per week during term time and 40 hours a week during term holidays). If the institution is not officially recognised the student is not permitted to work.

If students are from within the EEA they must prove they have private health insurance and have sufficient funds to support themselves and any accompanying family members while studying. If students are from outside the EEA they must register with the Garda Immigration and Naturalisation Bureau (GNIB) and provide proof of private health insurance and adequate funds to prove self-sufficiency for the duration of the course.¹⁴ Students from outside the EEA are not entitled to bring dependants such as children with them to Ireland when they come to study. Nor are

¹² *Filipino Professionals 'forced out' of Irish jobs market*, Metro Éireann, January 1 2009

¹³ www.heai.ie

¹⁴ *Rights and Entitlements of Migrants in Ireland: Factsheet 3: Rights of International Students in Ireland* Immigrant Council of Ireland www.immigrantcouncil.ie

they entitled to send for their children once they are attending a course and established in Ireland.¹⁵ This policy may promote forced separation for some parents wishing to avail of educational opportunities in Ireland. Alternatively, an international student already enrolled in a course in Ireland who becomes pregnant while living here may raise the child alone.

3.3.9 Undocumented/'Irregular'/Illegal

Becoming undocumented or illegal, also referred to as 'irregular' in the literature, can occur in a number of ways. If a person's application for refugee status is turned down, that person may become undocumented. An economic migrant with a valid work permit may remain in Ireland after his/her permit has expired, thus becoming 'illegal'. International students may remain in Ireland after their visas have run out. Visitors from outside the EEA may arrive in Ireland legally, as tourists or to visit friends or relatives living and working in Ireland, and may remain in the country illegally. 'Estimates of the numbers of irregular migrants vary widely, running from 15,000 to 50,000, while others suggest even higher figures. Irregular migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation' (NESC, 2006:18). Such vulnerability could lead to trafficking for labour or for prostitution.

3.4 Policy Context

This section of the review is divided into two parts: firstly, a review of official Government policy documents impacting on ethnic minority groups and secondly, policy documents and strategies devised by Government which are relevant to women in general and lone parents in particular.

Policy pertaining to ethnic minority groups

3.4.1 National Development Plan 2007-13

One of the most comprehensive documents setting out a vision for Ireland's future growth and progress is the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013. The document provides detailed plans for the socio-economic development of Ireland over a number of years (currently 2007-13). The plan recognises the importance of

¹⁵ Coakley, L. and C. Healy (eds.) *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (2007) Integrating Ireland, CADIC.

social inclusion measures in addressing inequalities in Irish society. These measures are intended to enhance the lives of new minority ethnic groups in Ireland, as well as addressing the needs of majority groups, particularly those experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation, and of indigenous groups.

Social inclusion policy and measures must therefore address, not only whatever inequalities and divisions exist within our native Irish population, but also those contained in an Irish society which will be fundamentally and irrevocably multicultural by nature. (NDP 2007-13:266)

As with other Government documents in recent years¹⁶ the National Development Plan acknowledges the importance of coordinating strategies across all departments and agencies, taking a ‘whole of Government approach’.¹⁷

A new dimension in our planning which focuses on integrating our immigrant population is required. The current positive impact of immigrants on a growing Irish economy is acknowledged. There is an ongoing commitment to serving the continuing social, cultural and economic aspirations of our immigrant population.¹⁸

3.4.2 National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2008-10

Policy objectives in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2008-2010 build on commitments in the NDP by identifying key areas and services which will focus on integration.

The strategic focus is not only on channels of entry and access to services but on measures generally required to achieve integration ... through facilitating participation in employment, ensuring protection of employment rights, facilitating access to services at national and local level, particularly education and training, income support, health, care services, housing and accommodation, administration of justice, and, where necessary, language training. (NAPS Inclusion 2008-10:18)

¹⁶ *Migration Nation* (2008) www.integration.ie

¹⁷ *Migration Nation* (2008) www.integration.ie

¹⁸ National Development Plan 2007-13, pp. 266

3.4.3 Integration Policy

To further the objective of adopting mainstream service provision as an approach to successful integration (and to address the commitment made in the Programme for Government 2007-12), the Office of the Minister for Integration was established in June 2007. The office is responsible for developing and co-ordinating integration policy across other Government Departments, agencies and services. In 2008 the office published *Migration Nation*, a statement on integration strategy and diversity management. Once again the emphasis in the document is on the commitment made by Government to mainstream service provision as a means to encouraging integration.

The rationale for adopting such an approach is captured in the following quote, taken from *Migration Nation* (2008):

Incorporating integration into every aspect of Government planning prevents it from becoming a 'migrants only' issue. (2008:15)

Migration Nation (2008) is a statement of the Government's approach to integration policy for the immediate future. It is not an integration strategy in, and of, itself. The document does not provide objectives, targets or deliverables in relation to achieving integration through mainstream service provision across Government departments. However, it does state that in relation to furthering social inclusion goals 'social inclusion programmes must specify integration objectives, programmes, funding and monitoring arrangements' (2008:16).

In addition to this a number of national and local strategies relating to some of the areas of mainstream service identified as significant to integration have also been developed, including:

- Action Strategy to Support Integrated Workplaces
- Intercultural Education Strategy
- HSE National Intercultural Health Strategy

- Local Authority Integration Plans/Anti-Racism and Diversity Plans (ARDs)

Action Strategy to Support Integrated Workplaces

This is a strategy for employers and businesses. It is a social partner initiative organised by representatives of ICTU, IBEC, the Small Firms Association, the Construction Industry Federation, Chambers Ireland, the Office of the Minister for Integration and the Equality Authority.

Intercultural Education Strategy

This is a strategy for intercultural education in primary and post-primary institutions. It will be ready for publication by the end of 2009.

HSE National Intercultural Health Strategy

This document is comprehensive in scope and detailed in its analysis of the health needs of various minority ethnic groups, including indigenous people, and of how ethnicity, culture, religion and legal status can impact on an individual's opportunities to access health services. The Intercultural Health Strategy also recognises the intersections of ethnicity, gender and lone parenthood and the implications these have on health status and accessing health-related services. The contents of the document will be discussed in greater detail in later sub-sections of the review.

Anti-Racism and Diversity/Integration Plans

These local strategies have been devised by a small number of local authorities around the country. The aim of the strategies is to promote greater integration of minority ethnic groups into every aspect of the work of the local authorities. The strategies were devised as part of a National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR) which ran between 2005 and 2008.

National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR) 2005-2008

The aim of the plan is to 'provide strategic guidance to combat racism and to develop a more inclusive, intercultural society in Ireland, based on a commitment to inclusion

by design and based on policies that promote interaction, equality of opportunity, understanding and respect.’¹⁹

It was a four-year programme designed to provide strategic direction towards the achievement of a more interculturally inclusive society in Ireland. Under the Plan, support was provided towards the development of a number of national and local strategies promoting greater integration in the workplace, the police service, the health service, the education system, the arts and local authorities.

Policy pertaining to ethnicity, diversity, integration and anti-racism is one half of the equation. In order to develop a comprehensive picture of the policy context within which debates can take place on the issues facing members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone, policy documents pertaining to women in general and lone parents in particular must be identified.

Finally, the Immigration, Protection and Residence Bill (2008) is currently being amended, based on feedback from public consultation and party debates. Once the amendments have been finalised and the bill has passed into law the legislation will inevitably have implications for all minority ethnic groups from ‘new’ migrant populations resident in Ireland and those wishing to come to Ireland in the future, including migrants parenting alone.

3.4.4 Policy Pertaining to Women and particularly Lone Parents

The main documents of importance in relation to women and lone parents are:

- *National Women’s Strategy 2007-16*
- Government discussion document *Proposals for Supporting Lone parents* (2006)

National Women’s Strategy

The 10-year National Women’s Strategy links with commitments around women and lone parents prioritised in national framework documents such as the National Development Plan and other Government documents such as *Proposals for*

¹⁹ www.integration.ie

Supporting Lone Parents (2006). The strategy recognises the importance of reducing poverty and social deprivation for women and sets targets and objectives in relation to improving the socio-economic situation of women, particularly women at risk of poverty, such as lone parents.

Routes out of poverty are identified and include:

- Access to employment
- Access to quality, affordable childcare places
- Access to appropriate health care

The strength of the strategy is the number of concrete deliverables it identifies and the departments it lists for cross-departmental/interagency co-operation.

Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents

This discussion document was developed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs in 2006 and proposed changes to the rules governing the One Parent Family payment (OPFP) as well as changes to the way in which payments are administered and changes to the duration of payments. The document identified retrograde aspects of existing policy which have since been addressed, including removal of the cohabitation rule for lone parents in receipt of OPFP and other proposals for promoting active engagement among lone parents with welfare and related services instead of passive receipt of payment as has been the norm. These 'activation' policies have yet to be introduced. OPEN highlighted a number of concerns in relation to the proposals at the time, including concerns about age-related unemployment and poverty traps if the proposals were to be implemented as they are currently formulated.²⁰

The Government Proposals for Lone Parents, were they to be implemented, would impact on the lives of members of any ethnic minority group parenting alone, who are legally resident in the state and in receipt of the One Parent Family payment (OPFP).

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of the proposals see OPEN's submission at www.oneparent.ie/policy

While there is no dedicated policy document specifically relating to ethnic minority groups parenting alone, each of the policy documents identified above highlights issues affecting ethnic minority groups or lone parents or both.

3.5 Relevant Irish Literature

3.5.1 Introduction

This sub-section presents information gathered from Irish sources. These include:

- Statistical data on minority ethnic groups and specifically on minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland, such as indigenous Irish Travellers, black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, including but not limited to migrants
- Relevant research studies from academia, Government agencies and non-Government organisations in Ireland.

3.5.2 Statistical Data

In order to build a profile of members of minority ethnic groups who are parenting alone in Ireland it is useful to first draw on available statistics. The data presented in this section of the review are taken from two sources:

- CSO Census 2006
- Other sources, e.g. Government and NGO websites

The information is divided into statistics on minority groups in general, followed by statistics on members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone.

General Statistical Information on Minority Ethnic Groups

Migrants:

Foreign nationals resident in the State increased by 87 per cent over the four-year period from 2002-2006, which equates to 420,000 individuals living in Ireland by 2006. These people came to Ireland from all over the world, from 188 different countries. The top ten nationalities were:

- ✓ UK
- ✓ Polish
- ✓ Lithuanian
- ✓ Nigerian
- ✓ Latvian
- ✓ USA
- ✓ Chinese
- ✓ German
- ✓ Filipino
- ✓ French²¹

Public Services

Over 133,000 PPS (personal public service) numbers went to non-Irish nationals in 2004. This increased to over 190,000 in 2005 and to 231,000 in 2006 but decreased to approx. 218,000 in 2007 and approx. 156,000 in 2008 (a decrease of 28 per cent from 2007).

Employment

A total of 13,567 work permits was issued to non-EEA citizens in 2008, which constitutes a 43 per cent decrease on the figure for 2007 (down from 23,604). Of these, 8,481 were new permits and 5,086 were renewals. Members of EEA countries do not require a work permit to take up employment in Ireland. The top 7 countries in 2008 for issued work permits were: India (3,334), Philippines (2,210), USA (867), South Africa (752), China (661), Brazil (601) and Malaysia (549).

In 2008 the largest number of work permits was issued to the Service Industry sector but the number had fallen by 42 per cent from 2007. The next highest sector for issued work permits was the Medical and Nursing sector.

There were 54,455 foreign nationals on the Live Register (unemployed) in December 2008. Foreign nationals represented 18.7 per cent of all persons on the Live Register in December 2008.

Travellers

There are less than 25,000 Travellers in Ireland (22,345 according to Census 2006 figures), made up of more than 7,691 families (National Intercultural Health

²¹ www.integration.ie

Strategy, 2007-12:49), which constitutes approximately 0.5 per cent of the population of the state as a whole.

Among the Traveller community only 13.8 per cent (over the age of 15 years) are in employment compared to a national average of 57.2 per cent among the settled community. Traveller women are less likely to be employed than men (11 per cent of women compared to 16.9 per cent of men) (Peelo, et al, 2008).

Statistical Information on Minority Groups Parenting Alone

The following information on members of minority groups parenting alone has been generated from an analysis of CSO Census 2006 data²² (see Table 1, Appendix 5 at end of document). For the first time in an Irish census an 'ethnicity and cultural background' question was introduced to the 2006 questionnaire. Table 1, Appendix 5, illustrates the responses to the 'ethnicity and cultural background' question with those of the 'nationality' question as they relate specifically to lone parents.

Table 1, Appendix 5 (drawn from the Census of 2006), presents the nationality of lone parents in terms of broad categories as follows:

- Irish
- EU
- Other
- Multiple Nationalities/No Nationality

Before discussing the contents of Table 1, Appendix 5, it is important to identify the difficulties that a question about highly contentious and complex notions such as 'ethnicity and cultural background' can raise.

The nationality question in the census required the name of the country to which each individual and family member is a citizen, while the 'ethnicity and cultural background' question required the respondents of the self-completion questionnaire

²² For the purposes of this report the table has been relabelled table 1 as it is examined in isolation here but it appears as table 4 in a suite of 1-5 in the census 2006 figures on lone parents www.cso.ie

to categorise themselves and their family members under one of the following headings:

White

- Irish including Irish Traveller
- Any other white background

Black or Black Irish

- African
- Any other black background

Asian or Asian Irish

- Chinese
- Any other Asian background

Other

- Mixed background

It is likely that the ethnicity and cultural background question in the 2006 Irish census was adapted by the Central Statistics Office from the 'ethnic group' question in the British census of population conducted in 2001 or 2005. While the British question offers a separate category for people who identify their 'cultural background' as Chinese and another for 'Asian or Asian-British' including Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other, and the 'White' category consists of British, Irish and 'other' options (and without a white Irish Traveller option), the British and Irish questions are very similar in format, design and construction (Ratcliffe, 2004:36). In his analysis of the 'ethnicity' question in the 2001 British census of population, Ratcliffe suggests, 'whatever the question does measure, it certainly is not ethnicity. "White" is clearly a pseudo-"racial" term based on phenotype (skin colour). The key points are that assumed skin pigmentation takes priority over self-defined ethnicity' (2004:36).

We see the same rationale applied in the 'ethnicity and cultural background question of the Irish census of population 2006. One of the most obvious examples of this comes from the inclusion of Irish Traveller in the same 'white' category as the Irish ethnic majority or settled Irish (as demonstrated in Table 1, Appendix 5). By combining the numbers of Irish majority lone parents with the numbers of Irish Travellers (171, 082) in Table 1, rather than distinguishing between the two, a valuable opportunity to gather some much-needed statistics on Traveller lone

parents is lost. Irish Travellers are not considered a distinct ethnic group by the State. However, given that the question is framed in terms of both ethnicity and 'cultural background' (Travellers are recognised as a distinct cultural group) it would be both important in terms of recognition of the distinctiveness of the Traveller community as group and very useful in terms of gauging numbers (to inform future policy formation and service provision) to separate out the Traveller lone parent responses.

The category Black or Black-Irish is severely limited in the information it can provide as it groups individuals (3, 452 lone parents) from vastly diverse countries, regions, cultures, religions, traditions and languages together based on skin colour or because they were born or can trace their lineage to the same continent. This is also true for the 'Asian or Asian-Irish' category since members of Chinese communities (varied and numerous in themselves) share the category with 'any other Asian background' which therefore might include lone parents from, for example, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Malaysia. Such broad categories cannot be considered an accurate reflection of the rich ethnicity of minority groups resident in Ireland.

In terms of comparison with majority ethnic Irish citizen lone parents, it is interesting to note that most members of minority groups parenting alone have between one and two children. This is also true of members of the majority population parenting alone. For example, of the 6, 513 lone parents who were citizens of other EU countries and described themselves as coming from 'any other white background', some 5, 700 of these had one (3, 946) or two (1, 756) children (see Appendix 5, Table 1).

The third largest category of minority lone parents described in Table 1 is 'African' with 'Other' nationalities, i.e. outside the EU (3, 452). These figures reflect the percentage breakdown of foreign nationals resident in Ireland in general, i.e. the largest numbers coming from the UK, Poland and Lithuania (EU), with the next largest category coming from Nigeria (Other).

3.5.3 Relevant research studies from Ireland

As identified in Section 3 a number of research studies from Ireland was identified during the trawl of literature, which while not specifically focused on the experiences of lone parents from minority ethnic groups, identified issues of relevance and importance to members of minority ethnic groups, both indigenous and new to Ireland, some of whom are parenting alone in Ireland. These issues recurred throughout a number of Irish texts and so this section is structured thematically to address them. It is important to note that issues identified in the literature as significant for members of ethnic minority groups parenting alone are also issues for ethnic majority Irish lone parents, including OPEN's member groups. These issues are discussed below. However, emphasis is placed on highlighting the areas that are specifically and uniquely relevant to the experiences of minority ethnic groups parenting alone. The themes are as follows:

- Accommodation
- Employment
- Education and training
- Childcare
- Family reunification
- Health and well-being
- Racism and discrimination
- Gender

Accommodation

For many minority lone parents accommodation was a significant issue in their lives and those of their children. For lone parents seeking asylum, conditions in many reception centres and direct provision centres are less than ideal. The majority are not equipped with self-catering facilities which can create dependence on the provider in terms of meeting basic needs such as meals. The National Intercultural Strategy 2007-12 suggests that this may lead to loss of skills among residents and could even result in difficulties running a household at a later stage when they leave direct provision.

Members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone who have refugee status, IBC 05 status or those on work permits are likely to be in low-paid employment or may be unemployed and in receipt of social welfare payments. Single income households, such as one parent families are at greater risk of poverty²³ and are therefore more likely to occupy the lower end of the rental market if they are living in private sector accommodation. The quality of such accommodation may be poor, inadequate or inappropriate for the family's needs. Coakley and Healy highlight the importance of quality accommodation for members of new communities:

The desire to secure suitable accommodation ranks very highly in immigrants' hierarchies of need. This is especially so for people with dependent family members. (2007:71)

Majority ethnic Irish lone parents in or at risk of poverty, many of whom are in receipt of rent supplement payment, have similar desires and motivations.²⁴ However, Coakley and Healy (2007) found that many individuals who were successful in their asylum application found it difficult to source private rented accommodation and felt under pressure to move out of the direct provision centres, sometimes settling for rented accommodation which was unsuitable for their family's needs.

Immigrants clearly constitute a vulnerable group in the housing market in general. These difficulties are exacerbated by the need to compete against other groups in a buoyant and expensive market and interface with often resistant private landlords. The price of rents is prohibitive (Coakley and Healy, 2007:72).

Many of the individuals (IBC 05 status) in the Coakley and Healy (2007) study believed renting was made more difficult because of racism in the lettings sector and among landlords but also because of a perceived reluctance on the part of landlords to accept the rent supplement payment. Therefore it could be argued that ethnic minority immigrant lone parents in receipt of social welfare payments such as the One Parent Family payment (OPFP) and supplementary welfare allowances such as

²³ www.oneparent.ie

²⁴ See *Open Door? Lone Parents and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)*, OPEN www.oneparent.ie

rent supplement may experience double discrimination, making it harder to secure suitable private rented accommodation for their families.

Irish Travellers and Traveller organisations²⁵ also identify accommodation as a priority concern for the Traveller community, although to date no research has been carried out specifically with Traveller lone parents in relation to their housing and accommodation needs.

A major concern for Traveller families is access to basic services such as water, sanitation, and waste collection.

*Census 2006 indicates that 5,489 [Travellers] lived in temporary accommodation ... Four out of 10 Travellers who responded to the Census question lived in temporary accommodation.*²⁶

The number of families living on unauthorised sites or by the side of the road increased by 40 ... from 589 to 629 [in 2006]. Living in such conditions is characterised by the absence of electricity, running water, toilet facilities and refuse collection. (National Intercultural Strategy, 2007-12:49)

Without access to basic services and facilities Traveller lone parents and their families are likely to experience related health problems (as identified in detail in the National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12), with further impact on participation in education, employment and the wider community.

Employment

People seeking asylum within the Irish system are not permitted to engage in paid employment. Instead they are paid an allowance each week and their accommodation and meals are provided. The current system creates dependence among recipients and can lead to loss of dignity and self-respect. This is likely to have a considerable impact on the recipient's mental health, particularly if time spent

²⁵ Such as the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) www.itmtrav.ie

²⁶ *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12*, p. 42, HSE

in direct provision and out of employment is considerable. This is identified as an issue for consideration in the National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12:

It appears that prolonged length of stay of people within the direct provision system may have a direct negative effect on overall wellbeing. Lack of entitlement to work, when this restriction extends over a long period, may further compound mental health, with boredom, depression, sense of isolation and loss of self esteem commonly reported symptoms. (National Intercultural Strategy 2007-12:42)

Issues of health and wellbeing are discussed further in section 5.3.6.

Conversely among lone parents with IBC 05 status, renewal of this status is dependent on the recipient securing employment or attending education or training courses. In their 2007 report Coakley and Healy identify the concerns which such a requirement generates, particularly in relation to those with IBC 05 status who are parenting alone:

The Department of Justice has indicated that it is aware of 'the unique obstacles lone parents face in trying to get a job or take further education or training, with regard to the renewing of status, and expressed that the Department did not wish to refuse a renewal on the basis that a single parent who is the primary carer of a child, or children, was unable to obtain a job or access education or training. Notwithstanding, these obstacles emerged from this research as a central concern for people with IBC/05 status, and, for many families, were a direct result of the family reunification policies [attached to IBC 05 status]²⁷ (Coakley and Healy, 2007:28).

This refers to the fact that IBC 05 status holders agreed to waive any expectation that they might be reunited with other family members remaining in their country of origin such as spouses or other dependent children.

²⁷ Coakley, L. and C. Healy (2007) *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, Pp. 28, Integrating Ireland, CADIC. See also http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/images/3124_lookingforwardlookingback.pdf

*The renewable nature of the status causes uncertainty. The requirement to engage in waged labour is implicated here, most particularly for parents who are parenting alone not by choice, operating as geographically separated single parents in this country, on foot of their status.*²⁸

Despite this, however, it is important to note that the opportunity to work was welcomed by participants in this study as a positive entitlement. The freedom to earn their own living was particularly attractive to participants as it facilitates an improvement in their material circumstances and that of their families. However, participating in the workforce was also considered important for adding to feelings of self-reliance and self-respect. Parents believed engaging in paid employment also has the added bonus of demonstrating their intrinsic worth and 'value' to members of Irish society.²⁹ Other benefits identified in Irish research include the opportunities which work provides to meet new people, make friends and broaden social circles.

*Many stated that through work they felt accepted and that this enabled them to meet people and form bonds and friendships.*³⁰

Looking Forward, Looking Back (2007) also makes a final observation in relation to the requirement to engage in work for those with IBC 05 status, particularly those parenting alone:

*While the freedom to engage in waged work clearly constitutes a strong benefit in general, an absolute requirement to do so in order to validate status can cause hardship in its own right. This is especially the case for people who, by virtue of their status, are effectively operating as single parents without access to the support of a partner or to the social support networks that they were used to in their country of origin.*³¹

²⁸ Coakley, L. and C. Healy (2007) *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, p. 6, Integrating Ireland, CADIC. See also http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/images/3124_lookingforwardlookingback.pdf

²⁹ Coakley, L. and C. Healy, *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (2007)

³⁰ *Enabling Equality: Migrant Women in Rural Ireland* (2008), p. 29, MRCI

³¹ Coakley L. and C. Heal, *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (2007), p. 60, Integrating Ireland, CADIC

The above point is just as relevant in relation to *Government proposals to Support Lone Parents* (2006) in receipt of social welfare payments such as OPFP, through 'activation' measures. If implemented these employment measures would impact on a wider cohort of minority ethnic lone parents, including refugees, EU citizens out of the workforce and Travellers, as well as the ethnic majority Irish lone parents in receipt of these payments.

Holders of work visas, work authorisations or green cards are entitled to have their spouses and dependent children accompany them to Ireland. If the dependent spouse becomes a lone parent while in Ireland, as a result of marital breakdown or death, the spouse's status is uncertain since automatic provision of an independent visa is by no means a given. Although spouses of permit holders are entitled to work while in Ireland, confusion around this entitlement persists, as identified in the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) report *Enabling Equality: Migrant Women in Rural Ireland* (2008):

Marital breakdown was also a feature of migrant women's experiences. This is particularly salient if immigration status is tied to that of the husband/partner (since the introduction of the Employment Permit Act 2006 spouses of permit holders may work but take-up has been slow due to difficulties accessing employment and lack of awareness of the scheme).³²

The recent downturn in the Irish economy and a global recession has created new employment issues for minority groups on work permits. Work permits are issued to non-EEA employees working in low skilled but essential jobs which often entail irregular working hours, e.g. a care assistant position in a nursing home. Recent times have seen significant numbers of work permit holders made redundant. Until August 2009 work permit holders had just three months to find new employment. Given complicating factors such as childcare arrangements and financial responsibilities to family members in the country of origin, these rules placed lone parents on work permits under considerable strain. However, in part due to campaigns organised by migrant organisations such as the MRCI, new rules have

³² *Enabling Equality: Migrant Women in Rural Ireland* (2008), p. 7, MRCI

been introduced which allow permit holders 6 months to find employment. Unfortunately, given the current depressed labour market, securing a new job in six months still may not be possible for work permit holders, particularly those with the added responsibilities of parenting alone.

Accessing employment opportunities may be hindered further for minority ethnic lone parents from 'new' migrant populations due to unwillingness on the part of prospective employers to recognise foreign qualifications, work experience or references gained outside of Ireland.³³ This point was reiterated in a July 2009 study part-funded by the Office of the Minister for Integration entitled *Issues and Challenges in the Recruitment and Selection of Immigrant Workers in Ireland*.

Members of the Traveller community also face barriers when attempting to access mainstream employment outside of the 'Traveller economy'. Travellers' experience of educational disadvantage and historically low literacy levels prevent many Traveller lone parents from accessing employment opportunities. As with all lone parents in receipt of social welfare supports, including ethnic majority Irish lone parents, Traveller participation in employment initiatives, particularly in the short term, should not jeopardise entitlement to secondary benefits³⁴ and the medical card in particular (Peelo et al, 2008). This argument is made by the Equality Authority (2008) in a case study report on positive actions for supporting Travellers to enter mainstream employment.

As outlined in sub-section 4, Government Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents³⁵ to move from welfare to work through a process of activation will also impact on members of minority groups parenting alone in Ireland, who will require a range of supports including access to childcare and education and training opportunities, if these measures are to be successful (see next sub-section below).

³³ Coakley, L. and C. Healy (2007) *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, Integrating Ireland, CADIC.

³⁴ For a detailed discussion on making work pay for lone parents see *Out of the Traps* (2006) www.oneparent.ie

³⁵ To view OPEN's written response to these Government proposals including age related poverty and unemployment traps go to www.oneparent.ie/policy

Education and Training

Education and training opportunities provide members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone with essential skills as well as recognised qualifications needed to (re)enter the Irish labour market. Several Irish studies³⁶ identify the importance of providing language supports to members of 'new' communities in Ireland, not just as a means of securing employment but also to assist with integration into Irish society. In a study conducted by the Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway language barriers were not only identified as an obstacle to accessing employment but also as an obstacle to accessing other educational opportunities:

Some felt that when they were more comfortable with English they would be able to return to education ... Others who were in education felt that they were finding a course harder and taking a long time to complete because they could not fully understand English due to differences in dialect. (Child and Family Research Centre)

The Department of Education estimates that funding of approximately €10m was spent on English language classes (ESOL) which caters for approximately 13,000 students.³⁷ However, not all minority ethnic groups immigrating to Ireland require language supports. For example, Filipino lone parents will come to Ireland with fluent English as it is spoken as a first language in the Philippines. Also, citizens of many African countries, e.g. South Africa, recognise English as an official language.

However, as identified in Section 5.3.2 above, many minority ethnic lone parents from 'new' communities may decide to up-skill or study for Irish qualifications in order to secure employment. As part-time courses are likely to suit lone parents, particularly those with small children, costs involved in returning to education, particularly higher education, may prove prohibitive.

In addition, the benefits of lifelong learning opportunities, especially in informal and non-formal adult education settings, are significant, particularly as a means of

³⁶ MRCI (2008), *On Speaking Terms: Introductory and Language Programmes for Migrants in Ireland* (2007) Immigrant Council of Ireland, National Women's Strategy 2007-16.

³⁷ www.integration.ie

generating social networks and supports among and between minority ethnic migrants and ethnic majority Irish citizens, and particularly in rurally isolated areas, are identified in the MRCI report *Enabling Equality* (2008). These vital supports are often missed by minority migrant lone parents when they leave their country of origin. Such interaction can help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness (e.g. among dependent spouses of work visa/permit holders) which is important for good mental health (see section on health and well being below).

Childcare

Childcare is one of the most pressing issues for lone parents from ethnic minority and ethnic majority groups alike in Ireland. Access to good quality, affordable childcare opens up opportunities to participate in educational and training courses and part-time or full-time employment.

It is also important to state that childcare is a major concern for Irish women and specifically for marginalised Irish women. However, for migrant women experiences are often compounded by isolation, language barriers, difficulties in accessing the labour market and rights and entitlements associated with immigration status. (MRCI, 2008:38)

Access to childcare for lone parents in reception centres and direct provision centres is limited. Provision is not responsive to the needs of minority ethnic lone parents awaiting a decision on their asylum application.³⁸

If activation initiatives or any other 'welfare to work' initiatives are to succeed, greater numbers of affordable, quality childcare places are needed by all lone parents resident in Ireland, as current costs for most private childcare is prohibitive, and the number of subsidised places are too few to meet demand. It is also important that culturally appropriate childcare is made available for Travellers and 'new' migrant populations and members of minority faith groups.³⁹ Such childcare programmes and services 'reflect the fact that children are members of distinct cultural groups,

³⁸ Integrating Ireland www.integratingireland.ie

³⁹ Coakley L. and C. Healy (2007), www.itmtrav.ie

each with its own system of beliefs, values and traditions' (First Nations Early Learning and Childcare Action Plan, 2005:2)

Many lone parents from minority ethnic groups outside of Ireland traditionally rely on extended family to help with childcare and to provide support and respite. However, many of these lone parents do not have any family members living in Ireland whom they can call on.⁴⁰ This difficulty may be exacerbated by issues such as the language barrier for members of minority groups whose first language is not English.

Family reunification

Members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone hold diverse legal statuses within the state, from Irish citizen to irregular/undocumented individuals. Some of these lone parents (excluding members of the Traveller community) have left family behind, including spouses/partners and dependent children in their country of origin. While EU citizens have freedom of movement within the EU including Ireland and have the right to reside in Ireland with their spouses and dependents (as do work visa/green card holders), policy and legislation which governs family reunification for non-EEA members, particularly refugees and IBC 05 recipients, works against family formation and in many instances forcibly creates one parent families by keeping spouses/partners apart.

The acceptance of the fundamental importance of the family in Irish society provides a basis for a right to family reunification. Persons who are legally resident in Ireland are permitted to apply for family reunification in respect of dependent family members. While the rights of EU nationals are guaranteed in this respect, policies in regard of people from outside the EU accession states are governed by the immigration status of individual applicants. There are restrictions on family reunification rights for most migrants outside the EEA.⁴¹

Health and Well-Being

Health is made up of a number of components including good physical and mental health. Minority ethnic lone parents may experience difficulties with their health, not

⁴⁰ This may also be equally true of an ethnic majority Irish lone parent living a significant geographical distance away from family members.

⁴¹ National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12, p. 45, HSE

experienced by the majority population, as a result of legal status or living and working conditions.

Physical Health

Individuals seeking asylum who are accommodated in direct provision centres do not have access to financial resources or equipment in order to prepare their own meals. Instead meals are prepared by service providers within the direct provision centres. In some instances culturally inappropriate meals are prepared or food is provided which is high in fat or calories without variety or choice. This, coupled with a sedentary lifestyle associated with the asylum process, means lone parents and others within the system may experience health problems associated with diet. These issues are identified in the National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12:

Self-catering facilities do not exist in direct provision settings. Here, the issue of food poverty is especially relevant. Food poverty may be defined in a number of ways, from a nutritional, social exclusion and/or a food security perspective. Food poverty is the inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet and the related impacts on health, culture and social participation. Issues relating to food poverty among asylum seekers living in direct provision have been reported ... highlighting issues of concern for nutritional status and health and well-being, particularly with weight gain, high calorie intake from protein and fats, limited food choice and overall food poverty. The Institute of Public Health has also expressed concerns around the implications for physical and mental well-being of this situation. (p.42)

Among pregnant and post-partum women living in direct provision accommodation the restricted diet and set meal times does not always fit with their needs (Kennedy, 2002). Other issues affecting new mothers living in direct provision accommodation include inadequate bathing facilities (shower cubicles rather than baths in which to bathe their newborns); limited access to clean bed linen, increasing risk of infection; having to share beds with their babies and no access to pain relief following a caesarian section (Kennedy, 2002).

For members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone and living in accommodation at the lower end of the private rental market, issues such as dampness and cold can

lead to illness while MRCI (2008) suggests language barriers and lack of access to health-related medical information in languages other than English means some lone parents avoid Irish doctors and other medical staff.

Many undocumented workers or those who have become illegal/irregular are employed in the agricultural sector. Some work with harsh chemicals, for example mushroom pickers, which can cause illness over extended periods of time.⁴² However, fear due to their illegal status prevents many from seeking medical help. The life expectancy of Travellers is much lower than the average among the settled population. In Census 2006 'only 3 per cent of Travellers were aged over 65 years compared to 11 per cent of the settled population.'⁴³ Traveller women had a life expectancy twelve years lower than women from the settled population.

Mental Health

Among those seeking asylum, physical health and mental health may be affected by their experiences prior to arrival in Ireland. 'Between 10-35 per cent of those seeking refuge in European countries have suffered torture in their premigratory state.'⁴⁴ These experiences, while physically damaging, can also lead to depression and post-traumatic stress, with the experience of anxiety, boredom, and frustration added by life in detention centres. Once again these issues are dealt with in the National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12:

*It is accepted that many asylum seekers and refugees may suffer from a significant burden of mental health problems, including depression, psychological disturbances and/or post-traumatic stress syndrome. Many of these problems develop and/or increase after arrival due to post-arrival stresses. Their mental health is adversely affected by social isolation, pre- and post-arrival trauma, culture shock, language barriers and fear of deportation coupled with a lack of understanding about services, poverty and poor housing.*⁴⁵

⁴² For example irregular menstruation

⁴³ *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12*, p. 47, HSE

⁴⁴ *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12*, p. 42, HSE

⁴⁵ *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12*, p. 42, HSE

The anxiety and stress associated with being the primary caregiver of a child or children and the challenges associated with parenting alone are likely to take a toll on mental health also.

Well-being is considered a combination of physical and mental health in addition to other less quantifiable elements such as a sense of security and fulfilment. The National Women's Strategy 2007-16 provides a definition of well-being which emphasises, in addition to physical and mental health, the importance of family and close relationships in achieving a sense of well-being, as well as the role of security:

*A sense of personal wellbeing is normally achieved through a combination of good physical and mental health; access to health and social services, where required; a sense of fulfilment, through employment, family and relationships and usually enhanced by a good work-life balance; wellbeing for most people is also underpinned by a sense of security and protection.*⁴⁶

The implications of Government policy and legislation for the lives of asylum seekers, refugees, IBC 05 recipients and work permit holders, in relation to family reunification, is in stark contrast to and wholly contradicts the principles of well-being identified in the National Women's Strategy. Many minority ethnic lone parents resident in Ireland have also left children behind in their country of origin.

*Parents financially support their children still resident in their country of origin, but inevitably experience a lack of personal and parental control over their children's lives, which causes much distress.*⁴⁷

Being denied the opportunity to reunite with their spouses/partners, children and other dependents impacts negatively on the mental health and well-being of lone parents with leave to remain/refugee status.

Racism and Discrimination

⁴⁶ National Women's Strategy 2007-16, p. 65

⁴⁷ Coakley, L. and C. Healy (2007) *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, p. 51, Integrating Ireland, CADIC

Racism and discrimination were identified in the literature as issues which warranted attention. The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) conducted a survey among members of the Traveller community to identify levels of discrimination against Travellers in a range of services including hospitality industry and commercial businesses; 70.8 per cent of those surveyed believed they had been asked to leave a pub because they were Travellers; almost 47 per cent attributed some difficulties with booking a hotel, such as being asked to leave or cancel, to being a Traveller; 60 per cent of respondents said they had been embarrassed or 'made a show of' in a shop, usually due to being asked to leave or being ignored while other customers were served before them.⁴⁸

In both the Coakley and Healy (2007) report and the MRCI (2008) report participants in the research identified examples of behaviour directed at them by Irish citizens which could be described as racism. Interestingly, members of different ethnic groups (usually distinguishable by skin colour) experienced different levels of discrimination or racist behaviour:

Experiences of racism and discrimination impacted differently for participants and were often dependent on nationality and ethnic background. For example, one out of ten European women experienced overt racism, while four out of seven Asian women experienced racism in one form or another ...

In relation to employment opportunities, a new study commissioned by the Equality Authority and conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) provides 'direct evidence of discrimination using a field experiment that investigates discrimination in recruitment on the basis of ethnic and national origin'.⁴⁹ In the field experiments two individuals who had identical qualifications and experience, but 'different' names, applied for the same jobs. The ESRI tested for discrimination against 3 minority groups: Africans, Asians and Europeans (Germans), using distinctive names to signal ethnic or national origin.

⁴⁸ <http://www.itmtrav.com/equality.html>
⁴⁹ www.equality.ie

It was found that candidates with Irish names were over twice as likely to be invited to interview for advertised jobs as candidates with identifiably non-Irish names, even though both submitted equivalent CVs. Strong discrimination was found against minority candidates across the occupations tested (lower administration, lower accountancy and retail sales). However, levels of discrimination between minority candidates were not significantly different. Given that the report also identifies discrimination in terms of gender, female lone parents from minority ethnic groups face significant challenges in relation to accessing meaningful and worthwhile employment opportunities:

Summarising the results of field experiments on the basis of gender, some patterns emerge. First, women are more likely to be discriminated against in higher status/more senior positions.⁵⁰

This is supported by further data included in the National Women's Strategy 2007-16:

The employment rate for women is still far lower than for men and the employment rates for lone parents, the majority of whom are women, are also low. It is estimated that there is a gender pay gap of some 11 per cent between women and men working in Ireland at present.⁵¹

Lentin and McVeigh (2006) suggest that the main instigator of racism and discrimination against minority groups, whether 'old' racialised groups such as Travellers or 'new' migrant populations, is the Irish state, which perpetuates a form of 'crisis' racism which blames minority groups, particularly 'new' migrants, for the inadequacies and weaknesses in the system (in relation to housing, healthcare, education, crime and the welfare system).

⁵⁰ McGinnity, F., J. Nelson, P. Lunn and E. Quinn (2009) *Discrimination in Recruitment: Evidence from a Field Experiment*, p. 11, Equality Authority, Equality Research Series

⁵¹ National Women's Strategy 2007-16, p. 27

Gender

Given the gender bias in the numbers parenting alone in Ireland (85 per cent of lone parents are women) and of the numbers in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) (98 per cent are women) and therefore more likely to be in or at risk of poverty, and considering the significant numbers of lone parents from minority ethnic backgrounds, it is necessary to reflect on the gendered dimension of parenting alone in Ireland.

As mentioned earlier in this section, it has been argued that the 'gendered bodies of migrant women' (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006:98), particularly pregnant women, were used by the Irish Government at the time of the Citizenship Referendum to persuade Irish people to change the constitution to protect against an 'influx' of these 'producers of future generations of racially undesirable others' (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006:100). In other words, the portrayal by the State of minority ethnic groups is not only racist but also gendered. Lentin and McVeigh argue that traditional concepts of 'good' women (chaste or married) and 'bad' women (unmarried mothers), which were applied equally to Irish Traveller women, have been repackaged to position 'sexually active "Irish" and "non-national" women alike as a danger to themselves, to men and to "the nation", and as subverting traditional constructions of Irishness' (2006:104). This suggests that the racist and gendered approach taken by the State is not limited to 'new' migrant populations only.

Women from minority ethnic backgrounds living in direct provision centres may face the threat of violence, harassment, physical or sexual assault from men (strangers or otherwise) sharing cramped living conditions (National Intercultural Health Strategy 2007-12; Kennedy, 2002). Migrant women experiencing domestic violence may feel unable to leave the site of abuse if their legal status in Ireland is tied up with their spouse's (MRCI, 2008). Many migrant women on work permits have taken over from Irish women in addressing what Lentin and McVeigh refer to as the 'care deficit':

The entry of women into paid labour in Ireland has been enabled by the services, domestic and others, rendered by female migrant workers from the poor world ... when Irish women no longer perform domestic caring and

emotional services ... transfer of the 'domestic burden' from (Irish) women to (poor world) women (2006:104).

These migrant women may alleviate the expense of, or act as a substitute for, the childcare system in Ireland by providing childminding services for little money or may provide eldercare or cleaning services to Irish women who could not remain in the labour force without this support (Lentin and McVeigh, 2006). The trend toward greater numbers of women (a significant number of whom may be/become lone parents at some point in their lives) migrating from their country of origin to work elsewhere in the world is referred to as the feminisation of migration and is discussed in further detail below.

The following section of the review details relevant literature in an international context.

3.6 Relevant International Literature

3.6.1 Introduction

This section of the review highlights studies from an international context, mainly from the United Kingdom, which are of relevance to research topic of minority ethnic groups parenting alone. Firstly, international literature on the 'feminisation' of migration is assessed for its contribution to understanding the impact of migration on women as spouses/partners (separated by geographical distance), as absent mothers parenting remotely, and as lone parents raising children in a foreign country. Secondly, the literature raises issues of importance for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) lone parents in the United Kingdom and so provides opportunities for comparison with issues identified as significant in the Irish literature by minority ethnic lone parents living in Ireland. Finally this section puts forward lessons identified in the literature from other countries which could provide valuable insights for developing good practice in the Irish context in the future.

3.6.2 The 'Feminisation' of Migration

This conceptual term does not refer to an abrupt increase in the numbers of women taking the decision to migrate to another part of the world (since the percentage of women migrating has only risen by 2 per cent in forty years, from 47 per cent in the

1960s to 49 per cent in 2007)⁵² but rather refers to ‘the fact that more women are migrating independently in search of jobs, rather than as “family dependants” travelling with their husbands or joining them abroad’.⁵³

This is certainly true for the Irish situation as identified in the literature in section 5. These women may leave behind husbands/partners (who may be unemployed or underemployed) and/or children, in order to travel to where they know they can make money to financially support their families (often in care roles which are in increasing demand in developed countries):

*They may spend years without seeing the children they left back home and be unable to save money for their old age because they are expected to remit a huge portion of their income to their families. And they will be blamed by others – and blame themselves – for ‘abandoning’ the children they left in the care of fathers or female relatives.*⁵⁴

These experiences are echoed in the Irish literature also: ‘Parents financially support their children still resident in their country of origin, but inevitably experience a lack of personal and parental control over their children’s lives, which causes much distress.’⁵⁵

This experience of parenting from a distance, traditionally endured by the male head of household, is now increasingly a concern for migrant women. If those women also have children in Ireland, creating transnational families,⁵⁶ current regulatory practices on the part of the Irish Government, namely restrictions on family reunification for residents coming from countries outside the EEA, actively create situations of family separation and lone parenthood. Migrant women (for example work permit holders) whose marriages break down as a result of prolonged separation and whose

⁵² *The Feminisation of Migration* (2007), p. 2, Working Paper 1, Gender, Remittances and Development Series, UN INSTRAW (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women)

⁵³ *The Feminisation of Migration* (2007), p. 2, Working Paper 1, Gender, Remittances and Development Series, UN INSTRAW (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women)

⁵⁴ *The Feminisation of Migration* (2007), p. 2

⁵⁵ Coakley, L. and C. Healy (2007) *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, p. 51

⁵⁶ Coakley, L. and C. Healy (2007)

children are given permission from the host country to join them, may also find themselves parenting alone. These women may face many challenges. For example, taking a gender perspective on the feminisation of migration, the UN INSTRAW working paper also suggests that: 'Women migrants ... experience the double jeopardy of being both female and foreign, and correspondingly experience more intense discrimination than their male counterparts.'

If the difficulties inherent in parenting alone are added to this 'double jeopardy', migrant women may face additional discrimination.

3.6.3 Relevant Literature from the UK

A number of themes which were identified in the Irish literature as significant for minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland, also arose for minority groups parenting alone in the UK (referred to in the literature as black and minority ethnic groups or BME).

Childcare

The Day Care Trust, a national childcare charity in the UK has conducted research into the childcare needs of minority ethnic groups, including those parenting alone. 'Black and minority ethnic (BME) families in Britain face a number of disadvantages including higher rates of unemployment and an increased likelihood of living in low-income households' (Listening to Black and Minority Ethnic Families About Childcare, 2007).

Given rates of consistent poverty among one parent families,⁵⁷ it is even more likely to be the case if the black and minority ethnic family is headed by a lone parent. The Day Care Trust study focuses on migrants recently arrived to the UK and so may offer insights comparable to the experiences of many of the minority ethnic groups recently resident in Ireland: 'As BME families who have recently arrived in England are at a particular risk of disadvantage, many of the parents consulted for this research are new migrants.'

⁵⁷ See www.oneparent.ie

As in the Irish literature, childcare was identified as important for BME lone parents and, similar to the Irish situation, BME lone parents needed encouragement to trust their children to strangers, albeit professionals. In the British literature English language classes were also identified as important so recommendations from the Day Care Trust report suggest: 'Appropriate ways of engaging new migrant families with childcare settings, and of increasing their confidence in childcare, may be through services tailored to the parents' interests, such as English lessons while the child is cared for.'

Similarly, the cost of childcare is prohibitive for many: 'for some BME parents in low or no income households, even heavily subsidised childcare costs can pose a barrier.'

As with the Irish literature, it is recognised that culturally appropriate childcare, which is sensitive and inclusive in its delivery must be made available to BME lone parents, if take up is to be encouraged.

Culturally appropriate childcare refers to programmes of care which:

- support home language learning, when the child's home language is other than English
- incorporate elements of the child's home culture into the day-to-day experiences of the children in child care
- adopt approaches to learning consistent with the children's home culture and that culture's approaches to learning
- support children's learning about their own culture and about other cultures in ways that both affirm children's own cultures and show tolerance and appreciation for children and adults of other cultures.⁵⁸

The Day Care Trust report details the importance of such provision to BME participants:

Some BME parents felt very strongly that their culture should be represented at the childcare setting and that they could only feel comfortable leaving their children in childcare if there was a childcare worker of the same ethnicity. For some parents whose first language was not English, cultural representation

⁵⁸ 'Developing culturally appropriate Quality Rating and Improvement Systems' www.buildinitiative.org

*was not as important as simply being able to communicate with at least one worker at the setting. Others felt strongly that English should be the spoken language at the setting and that it should be ethnically mixed.*⁵⁹

In relation to childcare as a route to securing employment and training opportunities for parents, the need for a flexible and responsive service was deemed to be especially important for lone parents of all groups:

A lack of flexible hours of childcare provision, evening, night-time and weekend provision, and suitable, affordable places mean that many BME parents, especially lone parents, are restricted to training and jobs that fit the hours that childcare is available.

The issues about childcare raised in relation to BME lone parents in the UK are just as pertinent for members of ethnic minority groups parenting alone in Ireland.

Social Welfare Supports and Services – New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP)

In a report commissioned by the department of work and pensions in the UK BME lone parents were interviewed about their experiences and opinions of the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) initiative. This initiative aims to support lone parents to source employment and prepare for interview while also requiring that the participant cooperate with the child support agency in providing information on the child's non-resident parent (NRP). Take-up of the NDLP initiative among BME lone parents was considerably lower than among majority ethnic lone parents. The research study found:

*They [non-English speakers] often had very limited understanding of the services offered by the NDLP programme, and communications received from the Child Support Agency. Those that had recently started living in the UK also had problems understanding the welfare state and the associated services offered.*⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Day Care Trust (2007) *Listening to Black and Minority Ethnic Parents about Childcare*

⁶⁰ Pettigrew, N. (2003) *Experiences of Lone Parents from Minority Ethnic Communities*, p. 2,

Department of Work and Pensions, Research report No. 187, www.dwp.gov.uk

This is comparable to the experiences of some minority ethnic lone parents who are migrants to Ireland, whereby fear regarding their legal status, confusion about tax and contributions made and lack of information on their entitlements to social welfare supports means many lone parents fail to engage with services or draw down entitlements.⁶¹

Amongst the non-English speakers and those lone parents with limited English skills, there was often a complete lack of, or very limited, awareness of the programme. Written communications had not been understood and lone parents were confused as to the nature of the programme. This was a major factor as to why non-English speakers did not attend the initial NDLP interview. (Pettigrew, 2003:2)

These lessons should be borne in mind by Irish service providers and the Irish Government if proposals on activation or any other 'welfare to work' initiative are implemented or if changes to eligibility criteria or conditions governing the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) are introduced in the future. Members of minority ethnic groups, particularly those with little or no English, who are parenting alone in Ireland will require additional supports and will benefit from innovative approaches to engagement, particularly in relation to information provision.

In terms of learning from good practice, BME participants in the research reported positive experiences with their Personal Adviser (PA) – individual case worker – when the staff member showed kindness, sympathy and patience. Participants felt that the ethnicity and gender of the PA was less important than these characteristics: 'The ethnicity and gender of the Personal Adviser (PA) was perceived as unimportant by both black and Asian lone parents, as the advisers had shown understanding and sensitivity to the needs of the lone parent' (Pettigrew, 2003:3). This is corroborated by Irish research which identified that cultural differences between staff and customer were easily overcome using a dedicated case worker

⁶¹ See MRCI (2008) *Migrant Women in Rural Ireland*

approach to service provision.(Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, undated:159)

Employment

The role of the New Deal for Lone Parents initiative is to support lone parents to access employment opportunities. However, among some BME lone parents it was thought to be inappropriate for a mother to work outside the home:

Those Asian lone parents that had stopped working when they had married believed it had not been culturally acceptable for them to work. Even with the father gone, there was a perception, especially from those from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi community, that it was still not culturally acceptable within their community to be seen to be working.

A number of practical barriers to employment were identified by the interviewees including lack of, or outdated, skills and qualifications, a lack of work experience in the UK, an inability to speak English, travel costs involved in commuting to work or lack of suitable transport, and the limited availability of flexible and suitable jobs in the local area. Participants identified other barriers to their employment as a lack of confidence, particularly with regard to interview skills and speaking English and a perception that it was not financially viable to work. These barriers are also listed by participants in the Irish literature (Coakley and Healy, 2007; MRCI, 2008).

Racism and Discrimination

In general, lone parents participating in the department of work and pensions study did not believe they had experienced any racism on behalf of employers, but rather, they felt that it was their status as a lone parent which affected their prospects of getting work. While these research findings cannot be corroborated within an Irish context, the recent Equality Authority study on discrimination in recruitment (referenced in section 5) would contradict the findings of this British study.

The following section of the review summarises the main findings from the literature in the Irish context, an international (mainly British) context and the relevant policy context.

3.7 Review of Main Findings

3.7.1 Introduction

This final section of the review offers a synopsis of the main findings from the literature, both from an Irish and an international context, as well as from official Government publications informing the policy context for members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland. This section concludes the review and is followed by a detailed bibliography and appendices.

3.7.2 Main Findings

The main findings from the literature review are summarised here as follows:

- Policy context
- Irish literature
- International literature

Policy context

There is currently no dedicated policy provision for members of minority ethnic groups parenting alone. However, official documents which are relevant to lone parents from minority ethnic groups and their families are detailed in section 4. These include statements and strategies which inform integration policy such as *Migration Nation* (2008) a statement on integration from the Minister of State for Integration. The *National Women's Strategy 2007-12* and *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* (2006) detail the Governments plans for supporting women in or at risk of poverty, including lone parents, and for supporting lone parents in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP) and other income supports into employment.

Irish Literature

Section 5 provided general background statistics on minority ethnic groups resident in Ireland and offered an analysis of statistics gathered from the 2006 census of population which categorised lone parents by nationality and ethnic/cultural background. The validity of the ethnicity categories chosen is also questioned. Issues pertinent to the lives of indigenous minority groups and the lives of migrants

who are parenting alone, as identified in the Irish literature, can be categorised under the following themes:

- **Accommodation:** Overcrowding in some reception centres and limited access to the lower end of the private rental market due to prohibitive costs and discrimination on the part of some landlords were discussed. The insufficient number of serviced halting sites for Travellers was also raised.
- **Employment:** Engagement in employment or education and training opportunities is a condition of renewal of IBC 05 status which proves particularly problematic for lone parents who hold this status, especially those with young children and where access to childcare is limited or prohibitive due to cost. Other difficulties pertaining to employment and legal status were also discussed, such as the vulnerable position of work permit holders if made redundant. The educational disadvantage experienced by many members of the Traveller community which impedes progression to employment was also discussed.
- **Education and Training:** The English language support needs of minority ethnic lone parents whose first language is not English was emphasised, while the importance of education and training initiatives for all lone parents, including those from minority ethnic groups, was reiterated as vital if Government proposals for activation are to succeed.
- **Childcare:** As for all lone parents the need for increased funding for quality, affordable childcare places in supporting lone parents from minority ethnic groups to progress to employment and educational opportunities cannot be over-emphasised. The need for culturally sensitive and appropriate childcare provision for both Travellers and migrants was also advocated.
- **Family Reunification:** Legislation governing rights to family reunification for non-EEA nationals legally resident in Ireland forcibly creates situations of lone parenthood and family breakdown and leads to increased stress and anxiety

for many lone parents with refugee, IBC 05 and work permit status living in Ireland.

- **Health and Well-being:** Food poverty perpetuated by some reception and direct provision centres leads to dietary related health problems for lone parents and their families who are seeking asylum in Ireland. Mental health problems are common among a percentage of those seeking asylum as a result of torture and extreme stress, resulting in conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Conditions inherent in the asylum process exacerbate these and can lead to extreme loneliness, isolation and depression. Legislation governing family reunification actively works against the promotion of well-being among non-EEA citizens resident in Ireland, some of whom are parenting alone.
- **Racism and Discrimination:** Much of the literature identified racism and discrimination experienced by members of minority ethnic groups, including women and lone parents. Travellers experience racism when attempting to access services, particularly in the hospitality sector. Incidents of racism and discrimination are not spread evenly across minority ethnic groups, with those with a perceptibly 'different' skin colour likely to experience more incidents of racism.

International Literature

This section of the review identifies literature relating to ethnic minority groups parenting alone as documented in international contexts. Difficulties experienced by these groups are compared to the findings of Irish literature and useful lessons for future policy formation are also highlighted.

3.7.3 Conclusion

While immigration to Ireland is a relatively recent phenomenon, there has always been an indigenous minority group in Ireland. The literature relating to the experiences of Travellers is significant. However, literature focusing on Traveller lone parents is lacking. There is an impressive catalogue of literature on minority groups

or 'new' migrants, but fewer which focus exclusively on the experiences of immigrant women and fewer still which identify the challenges faced by minority ethnic women parenting alone. Among the literature reviewed here it is possible to identify themes which have been flagged as significant by minority ethnic groups parenting alone and by service providers and policy makers working with or on behalf of these groups. While many of the challenges are shared with ethnic majority Irish lone parents, others are unique, based on the complex interaction of culture, ethnicity and legal status. It is hoped that this review of available literature pertinent to the topic will add to the discussion on how best to promote the inclusion and progression of minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland.

Section Four: Analysis of Findings

4.1 Introduction

This section details the recurring themes which emerged as significant to the minority ethnic lone parents consulted as part of this research. These lone parents are indigenous Irish Travellers and black and Asian minority ethnic lone parents, including but not limited to migrant workers. Since a number of the themes identified have significance for broader categories of lone parents than minority groups alone, the themes are examined under four main headings:

- ❖ Important issues arising for all lone parents
- ❖ Important issues arising for migrant lone parents
- ❖ Important issues arising for other minority ethnic lone parents
- ❖ Important issues arising for Traveller lone parents

The issues raised by the service providers and advocacy groups consulted, who represent the needs of minority groups in Ireland, are also discussed at the end of the section.

4.2 offers background information on all of the lone parents who participated in the research including details on:

- ❖ ethnicity
- ❖ legal status
- ❖ number of children in each family
- ❖ whether or not all their children are living with them
- ❖ why they chose to come to Ireland⁶²

The issues which arose as significant to the lives of these minority ethnic lone parents are examined in 4.3. These issues include:

⁶² Question not posed to Traveller participants

- Education, training and the labour market
- Poverty
- Issues relating to legal status
- Childcare
- Accommodation needs
- Experiences of public services
- Attitudes to lone parenthood: discrimination, stereotyping and stigma
- Health and well-being

It should be noted that the issues identified are not mutually exclusive. Neither should they be viewed in isolation but rather as overlapping and interconnected. The lone parents who contributed to this research come from ethnically diverse backgrounds, with differing legal status, which has shaped their attitude towards and experiences of parenting alone in Ireland. These factors may also determine the challenges they face, the specific needs they have and the supports they require, which can be different for each individual. Despite this, some commonalities of experience have been identified among each of the minority groups consulted.

It is also important to note that while many of these issues are unique to minority ethnic lone parents, such as legal status, other issues which emerged as important are equally significant for all lone parents in Ireland, particularly those in or at risk of poverty; for example, childcare and accommodation needs. Each of the commonalities are detailed in this section as they apply to all lone parents, migrant worker lone parents, other groups of minority ethnic lone parents and Traveller lone parents.

4.2 Background Information

All of the lone parents who participated in OPEN's research were women. While no decision was made to preclude lone fathers from the research, the vast majority of one parent families in Ireland are headed by women (162, 551 families out of a total of 189, 240 families, according to CSO figures for census 2006). Similarly, the majority of Social Welfare recipients claiming the One Parent Family Payment

(OPFP) are women (98 per cent). Therefore the existing gender bias toward women as the most likely head of one parent family households in Ireland is similarly reflected in this study.

4.2.1 Ethnicity of Lone Parents

Minority ethnic lone parents from the continents of Africa, Europe and Asia, as well as members of the indigenous Traveller population were consulted as part of this research. The majority of African lone parents originated from Nigeria. The remaining African lone parents who participated in the research came from:

- ❖ Ghana
- ❖ Malawi
- ❖ Cameroon
- ❖ Somalia

European participants came from the Eastern countries of:

- ❖ Moldova
- ❖ Lithuania
- ❖ Latvia

The Asian lone parents consulted came from the Philippines. The remaining participants were indigenous Irish Travellers.

4.2.2 Legal Status of Lone Parents

The varying legal status of minority lone parents consulted included:

- ❖ Seeking asylum
- ❖ Leave to remain based on the rights of the Irish citizen child
- ❖ Refugee
- ❖ Work permit holder
- ❖ Irish citizen

The majority of lone parents who participated in the research had leave to remain, based on the rights of their Irish citizen child(ren), or had made applications under the asylum process. A small number of lone parents were refugees or work permit

holders. Traveller lone parents have the same legal status as other Irish citizens but are not legally recognised as having distinct ethnic status under Irish law.

4.2.3 Number of Children in each Family

Each of the lone parents participating in semi-structured in-depth interviews was asked as part of the interview schedule how many children they had and if all their children were living with them at that time. Just under half of all the lone parents interviewed had one child. A quarter of interviewees had two children, while just over a quarter had three or more children. Three-quarters of these lone parents had all of their children living with them, including all of the Traveller lone parents. Initially, a small number of interviewees did not have any of their children living with them for a period spanning a number of years, but were eventually reunited with them. The remaining lone parents were living with some of their children while their other children lived in the country of origin with husbands, grandparents or other older siblings.

4.2.4 Why Come to Ireland?

With the exception of lone parents from the Traveller population participants were asked why they decided to come to Ireland. Popular responses included:

- ❖ *Reasons of personal safety and security*
- ❖ *The pursuit of a better life*
- ❖ *The desire to work and earn some money*
- ❖ *A change of scenery*

Other less common responses included:

- ❖ *Difficulties with family at home*
- ❖ *Political reasons*
- ❖ *Family or friends living in Ireland*

Lone parents participating in this research come from a variety of countries and have diverse legal statuses. The largest ethnic group of lone parents consulted was Nigerian. The majority, in terms of legal status, were asylum seekers and those with leave to remain based on the rights of an Irish citizen child. Most of the lone parents

had either one or two children. The majority had all their children living with them. Reasons for coming to Ireland were varied but most common was a desire to improve their circumstances through work and increased earnings or to find greater security and safety.

The following table gives a detailed breakdown of the participants' background information:

Number	Ethnic Group	Legal Status	Nationality	Interview/ Focus Group	Area Living
1.	Asian	Work Permit holder	Filipino	Interview	Bray
2.	Asian	Work Permit holder	Filipino	Interview	Bray
3.	White European	IBC*	Moldovan	Interview	Dublin
4.	White European	EU citizen	Lithuanian	Interview	Monaghan
5.	White European	EU citizen	Lithuanian	Interview	Monaghan
6.	White European	EU citizen	Latvian	Interview	Monaghan
7.	White European	EU citizen	Latvian	Interview	Monaghan
8.	Traveller	Irish citizen	Irish	Interview	Dublin
9.	Traveller	Irish citizen	Irish	Interview	Dublin
10.	Traveller	Irish citizen	Irish	Focus Group	Kerry
11.	Traveller	Irish citizen	Irish	Focus Group	Kerry
12.	Traveller	Irish citizen	Irish	Focus Group	Kerry
13.	Traveller	Irish citizen	Irish	Focus Group	Kerry
14.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Nigerian	Interview	Waterford city
15.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Interview	Waterford city
16.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Ghanaian	Interview	Waterford city
17.	Black African	Refugee	Nigerian	Interview	Waterford city

18.	Black African	Refugee	Nigerian	Interview	Dublin
19.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Focus Group	Waterford city
20.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Focus Group	Waterford city
21.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Ghanaian	Focus Group	Waterford city
22.	Black African	Seeking Asylum	Malawian	Focus Group	Waterford city
23.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Malawian	Focus Group	Waterford city
24.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Cameroon	Focus Group	Waterford city
25.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Cameroon	Focus Group	Waterford city
26.	Black African	Seeking Asylum	Somali	Focus Group	Waterford city
27.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Nigerian	Focus Group	Waterford city
28.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Nigerian	Focus Group	Waterford city
29.	Black African	Seeking asylum	Nigerian	Focus group	Waterford city
30.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Focus Group	Blanchardstown
31.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Focus Group	Blanchardstown
32.	Black African	Refugee	Nigerian	Focus Group	Blanchardstown
33.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Focus Group	Blanchardstown
34.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Interview	Dublin
35.	Black African	Refugee	Nigerian	Interview	Dublin
36.	Black African	IBC	Nigerian	Interview	Dublin
37.	White European	EU citizen	Latvian	Interview	Dublin
38.	White European	EU citizen	Latvian	Interview	Dublin

*IBC = Leave to remain based on the rights of an Irish born child

The remainder of this section details the themes which emerged as significant for the lone parents participating in the research.

4.3 Important Issues for All Lone Parents

This subsection details the issues identified by the lone parent participants consulted for this research which have relevance for the vast majority of people parenting alone in Ireland, regardless of ethnic status. These issues are examined thematically, as outlined above.

4.3.1 Participation in Education, Training and the Labour Market

Most of the lone parents consulted were participating in some form of education or training or had been involved previously. The level of involvement in adult learning among minority ethnic lone parents consulted reflects the broader trend generally of high participation rates in education and training among lone parents in Ireland.⁶³ Almost all of the participants were doing so on a part-time basis. Part-time engagement in education and training was identified as preferable; this is also the case among Irish majority lone parents. The range of educational courses attended by the participants in this research is extensive and diverse. Examples of these are listed below:

- ❖ FETAC Level 5 Childcare
- ❖ European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL)
- ❖ Leaving Certificate Applied
- ❖ Literacy
- ❖ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- ❖ Certificate in Community Development
- ❖ Degree in Health and Social Care
- ❖ Masters Degree in Conflict Resolution

The costs associated with engaging in education were identified as an obstacle to participation. The cost of involvement in education can include tuition fees, registration and administration fees and associated expenses such as course materials and travel.

The majority of lone parents participating in education or training were also in employment, mostly in a part-time capacity. This is also true of many ethnic majority

⁶³ One Family Research, Press Release November 2008

Irish lone parents. The following issues relating to employment opportunities raised by minority ethnic lone parents consulted are also relevant to members of the ethnic majority in Ireland and all lone parents.

Work Life Balance

Most of the women consulted admitted to finding it difficult, stressful or frustrating trying to 'balance work and study'⁶⁴ or 'juggle work and home life on my own'.⁶⁵

Respondents identified finding the time and energy to study while also working and having sole responsibility for caring for their children as a definite challenge. 'I find it difficult to motivate myself.'⁶⁶

Supports

Other lone parents acknowledged the support of an understanding employer or faculty staff within the educational institutions they attended as crucial support in achieving this balance. 'The staff members at WIT (Waterford Institute of Technology) are very supportive of mature students. They understand and are very encouraging.'⁶⁷

4.3.2 Poverty

Poverty and the risk of poverty emerged as a pervasive theme among those consulted, which also underpins other issues detailed in this section, such as *health* and *accommodation needs*. Households headed by lone parents are three times more likely to experience poverty than two parent families. Therefore the following issues raised by minority lone parents are also relevant to the majority of lone parents living in Ireland.

Income Poverty

Examples of income poverty were common among the lone parents consulted. A number of the lone parents interviewed for this research were getting by on very small sums of money but as a result were 'struggling financially and getting loans from friends' (Interview Number 14: Lithuanian lone parent) leading to indebtedness.

⁶⁴ Interview 5: Moldovan lone parent

⁶⁵ Interview 2: Nigerian lone parent

⁶⁶ Interview 2: Nigerian lone parent

⁶⁷ Interview 4: Nigerian lone parent

'I am always borrowing from family to make ends meet' (Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parent).

Other forms of poverty described included fuel poverty. While the cost of accommodation is a major concern for many lone parents, other costs associated with housing are also a source of worry, particularly the cost of heating their accommodation. The following quote from a Nigerian lone parent reflects the experiences of many Irish lone parents also.⁶⁸ 'I move my bed and my children's bed into the living room during the winter months, to reduce the number of rooms which need to be heated and to conserve heat. For me, it is just too expensive to heat all the rooms in the apartment' (Interview Number 10: Nigerian lone parent).

4.3.3 Childcare

As with the majority of lone parents in Ireland, childcare was identified as a significant issue for all the categories of minority lone parents who participated in this research. The issues relating to childcare are as follows:

- ❖ Prohibitive costs
- ❖ Supply
- ❖ Transport

Prohibitive Costs

The biggest difficulty in relation to childcare (crèche facilities and child minders) is the expense, which most lone parents found prohibitive. The cost of childcare was identified as a barrier to participation in education and training and full-time participation in the labour market. For most lone parents, particularly those on a low wage, the cost of childcare consumes a disproportionate amount of their income.

I work in a shop, part-time. I earn €8.65 per hour and I pay the babysitter €6 per hour, so really I work for €2.65 per hour! It is very expensive. I like working though because I enjoy the break from the children. I can just relax and do the job and not think about anything. (Interview Number 13: Latvian lone parent)

⁶⁸ See Open Door? (2008) available on www.oneparent.ie

Supply

Many providers, particularly those offering quality, affordable childcare, have long waiting lists. 'And with crèches starting to close down everywhere, things can only get worse' (Interview Number 7: Nigerian lone parent). A number of the lone parents participating in education courses recognised the tremendous need for childcare facilities to be provided within or adjacent to all centres of learning. 'I studied English and computers in the Catherine McCauley centre. I was only able to do it because the centre had a crèche on site' (Interview Number 5: Moldovan lone parent). Other participants recognised the need for affordable public run childcare facilities rather than overreliance on expensive private crèches (Focus Group 3: Nigerian lone parent)

Transport

When children reach school-going age transport can also become a problem. If a lone parent works in the afternoons, just getting his/her child(ren) from school to the childcare provider can be extremely difficult. A number of the lone parents consulted suggested afterschool programmes or homework clubs as one possible solution to this difficulty. 'An after-school programme would be good. Then I wouldn't have to worry about my son when I'm at work' (Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parent).

Most of the ethnic minority lone parents who participated in the research relied on informal child minding among friends, including other lone parents, when it was needed and on an ad hoc basis.

4.3.4 Accommodation Needs

The vast majority of minority ethnic lone parents participating in the research were living in private rented accommodation; a few of whom were participating in the Rental Accommodation Scheme. The remainder was living in social housing, usually having moved from the private rented sector. Once again this echoes trends among the broader Irish population of families headed by lone parents. Paying rent and the costs associated with housing, e.g. heating, were the most pressing expenses and the greatest financial concern in these lone parent's lives; closely followed by childcare costs. The majority of issues which arose in relation to 'accommodation

needs' reflect the challenges faced by the broader lone parent population in Ireland, particularly those on low incomes, living in or at risk of poverty.

Private Rented Accommodation

Rent Supplement

Some of the research participants living in the private rented sector were in receipt of Rent Supplement. This was generally considered to be insufficient to cover the cost of renting which had to be supplemented from other sources of income.

Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was reviewed positively by the small number of lone parents who were participating on the scheme. Due to the improved standards in accommodation and the considerable reduction in rent, the scheme was described by one participant as 'a gift. It is much more affordable' (Interview Number 5: Moldovan lone parent). Other lone parents expressed an interest in participating in the Rental Accommodation Scheme but were ineligible as they were working and no longer received Rent Supplement.

Private Rented Accommodation Standards

Many of the lone parents consulted had positive things to say about the standard of their rented accommodation and indeed about the landlord or letting agent, 'My landlord is a reasonable person and the accommodation is of a high standard' (Interview Number 11: Nigerian lone parent); poor quality, run-down accommodation was reported by numerous lone parents. This raises concerns about sub-standard conditions in the private rented sector. Many lone parents reported sharing bedrooms with their children, including teenagers of the opposite sex, because larger accommodation was too expensive for them to afford. Cold and damp conditions were common. 'There is a hole in the roof which leaks when it rains and we do not have access to a washing machine' (Interview 6: Filipino lone parent). Other rented accommodation, specifically apartment complexes, offered no outdoor green space for play or recreation.

Social Housing Waiting List

All of the Traveller lone parents and those renting in the private sector were registered on the waiting list for social housing with their local city/county councils. It was generally acknowledged and accepted that waiting lists were long and most did not expect an offer of housing sooner than two to three years after being placed on the list. Some women had been on the list for five, six and seven years.

4.3.5 Experiences of Public Services

The following issues were raised by minority ethnic lone parents in relation to accessing public services in Ireland:

- ❖ Customer service
- ❖ Bureaucracy
- ❖ Processing times

The services most commonly referenced were:

- ❖ Department of Social and Family Affairs & local Social Welfare Offices
- ❖ Health Service Executive Local Health Centres
- ❖ City/County Council Social Housing Section

A number of issues raised by minority ethnic lone parents in relation to public services have been identified by Irish ethnic majority service users in the past. As such, these issues are relevant to all lone parents.

Bureaucracy

Procedures in local social welfare offices were described as very bureaucratic: 'There is too much paper work' (Interview 4: Nigerian Lone Parent).

Processing Times

Some lone parents spoke of long waiting times for processing applications for payments. A number of Traveller women and EU migrant workers explained of great

difficulties with both the Department and local offices when it came to processing their applications for the One Parent Family Payment or Child Benefit. These women had to wait many weeks, and in some cases months, for a decision, with very little money to live on in the meantime; or they were refused the payments without satisfactory explanation as to why. Many lone parents consulted by OPEN for other research projects have described bureaucratic practices and lengthy processing times when dealing with the Department of Social and Family Affairs in the past.

Customer Service

Social Welfare staff have been described by research participants as unhelpful and very suspicious of people's circumstances 'They have asked friends of mine where they got the money for their car. People need a car to get to work and to get around' (Interview Number 4: Nigerian lone parent).

However, there were some suggestions that customer service among social welfare staff is improving in comparison with previous years. 'Years ago, any contact with the social welfare office was a very bad experience. But this summer I was sick so I claimed illness benefit. I went to the social welfare office where I am now living. They treated me really well – in that they were professional and friendly. I had anticipated being treated badly' (Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parent).

Finally, it was suggested that the Department should engage more with lone parents in relation to their needs. 'Don't just make assumptions, especially about us not wanting to work' (Interview 2: Nigerian lone parent). Instead, it was recommended that all lone parents be supported to enhance their skills through training, education and work experience.

Health Service Executive

Inconsistencies in how guidelines have been applied by Community Welfare Officers have caused confusion and frustration among many lone parents consulted, both as part of this research with minority ethnic groups and previous research conducted by OPEN, with the broader lone parent population.⁶⁹ 'To have help with oil for heating

⁶⁹ See www.oneparent.ie

and other big purchases would make things easier but the CWO in one area will give money for oil; here she won't' (Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parent).

4.4 Important Issues for Migrant Worker Lone Parents

4.4.1 Issues Relating to Legal Status

Additional Expenses Unique to Work Permit Holders

Non-EEA members, including work permit holders, are required to register at the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) when they move to Ireland. Work permit holders are then issued with a GNIB card, costing €150, which must be renewed every year. In addition to paying for a GNIB card, work permit holders are required to purchase their own entry visa at €100 and another entry visa for every child they bring with them to Ireland. Work permits, which cost €1,500, are to be paid for by employers. However, lone parents consulted by OPEN were aware, anecdotally, that some employers recoup the cost of the permit from the employee's salary, which is illegal but not necessarily uncommon. Many work permit holders are in a vulnerable position to refuse, if their employer insists they pay for the permit. 'The work permit is our lifeline. It dictates our lives, our children's lives and the lives of our families back home.'⁷⁰

A valid work permit is also needed as proof of the individual's habitual residence in Ireland which is required in order to secure eligibility for a number of social welfare entitlements, including child benefit.

Documentation	Cost
Work Permit	€1,500
GNIB Card	€150
Entry Visa	€100
Entry Visa for each additional child	€100

As outlined above, the costs associated with working in Ireland for those who require permits, are considerable, particularly for lone parents on one income.

4.4.2 Accommodation

⁷⁰ Interview 6: Filipino lone parent

Tax Relief on Rent

Migrant lone parents on work permits were paying out approximately half their salary on rent which they describe as a 'big financial strain' (Interviews 6 & 7: Filipino lone parents). Neither landlord was registered with the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) so the women cannot apply for tax relief and they are too fearful of being evicted to confront their landlords about this.

4.4.3 Attitudes to Lone Parenthood: Discrimination, Stereotyping and Stigma

Participants in this research were asked their opinion on how lone parents are viewed in Ireland. The response was positive overall. They all agreed that the experience of lone parenthood was 'better' than the same experience in their home country. Ireland was described as less conservative than the countries they had emigrated from; where becoming a lone parent would make someone 'an outcast' (Interview Number 1: Nigerian lone parent). 'It is a big deal to raise a child alone. It is shameful.' (Interview Number 5: Moldovan lone parent).

The members of 'new' minority groups consulted did not believe they were treated any differently because they were lone parents. 'I feel like an equal here' (Interview Number 5: Moldovan lone parent). Similarly, these lone parents believed Irish society allowed married couples the freedom to separate if their marriage was no longer happy. In their countries of origin, married people tended to stay together for the sake of the children, even if they were unhappy. The social welfare supports which lone parents receive were also highlighted as a positive. Finally, a greater sense of freedom described one lone parent's experience in Ireland. 'Coming here to Ireland is liberation for us' (Interview Number 6: Filipino lone parent).

4.4.4 Education, Training and the Labour Market

A number of lone parents consulted were critical of their employers and the working conditions they experienced. While such difficulties may occur among Irish ethnic majority lone parents in employment, uncertain legal status, lack of support networks and language barriers may place lone parents from specific minority groups in a more vulnerable position than other lone parents in Ireland regarding their experiences of the labour market.

Working Conditions

A Lithuanian lone parent became entangled in a dispute with her then employer for wages which had not been paid to her in full. She could not effectively advocate on her own behalf as she did not speak any English. She was eventually fully remunerated when SIPTU intervened. Some lone parents interviewed, who were work permit holders, suggested that in many instances workers from countries other than Ireland are treated less favourably than their Irish counterparts in relation to basic salary, incremental pay increases, weekend work and over-time. Many workers are reluctant to raise these issues with their employer for fear of losing their jobs and their work permits.

4.4.5 Poverty

Poverty issues which are more specific to groups of minority lone parents were also raised. Income poverty can result from conditions relating to social welfare payments. A lone parent on a work permit changed job and received a small increase in her salary; as a result her entitlement to Social Welfare was dramatically reduced. This lone parent lost her entitlement to the One Parent Family Payment and her entitlement to Family Income Supplement (FIS) was reduced. Similar examples are common among all categories of lone parents in receipt of a social welfare payment; however, minority ethnic lone parents may perceive greater dangers or repercussions as a result of their ethnic or legal status.

In this particular example the woman's employer offered to pay the increase in cash so that her social welfare payments would not be affected but she feared detection by the authorities and worried she might be sent home if this was found out. She cannot stop working completely as she would lose her work permit.

4.5 Important Issues for Other Minority Ethnic Lone Parents

4.5.1 Issues Relating to Legal Status

The following category details the specific challenges facing other minority ethnic lone parents which relate particularly to their legal status. These challenges are not

encountered by ethnic majority Irish lone parents. Many of the asylum-seeking lone parents consulted spoke of the highly specific challenges they faced as a result of their uncertain legal status and their unique living situation.

Before identifying these challenges it is necessary to point out that most of the women consulted expressed feelings of gratitude and humility at having the opportunity to seek asylum in Ireland and to make an application to remain here. While many elements of the Irish culture were alien to these women at first, most had grown to think of Ireland as home and were grateful for the feelings of security which time spent in Ireland had nurtured. While most were critical of their experiences as asylum seekers, many were at pains to commend the efforts of Irish authorities as doing their best. 'I appreciate what I have been given.'⁷¹ These lone parents also remarked on the kindness, friendliness and 'hospitality'⁷² of the Irish people in general.

Issues relating to asylum seekers' legal status included:

- ❖ right to work
- ❖ inadequacy of allowances paid
- ❖ ineligibility for child benefit

Right to Work

Asylum seekers living in reception centre's are not legally permitted to work under Irish immigration law. Despite this, almost all of the women expressed a strong desire to take up work and hoped to get jobs as soon as confirmation of their status comes through. Living in the cramped quarters of the reception centre, without the right to work, with limited access to information on the status of their applications and even less intellectual stimulation was described succinctly as 'being nothing'.⁷³ Many lone parents wished to address this boredom and state of limbo by going out to work. Other lone parents consulted wished to have the financial independence which having a job would bring. 'I want a little job so I can pay for [daughter's] clothes.'⁷⁴

⁷¹ Interview 1: Nigerian lone parent

⁷² Interview 2: Nigerian lone parent

⁷³ Interview 1: Nigerian lone parent

⁷⁴ Interview 1: Nigerian lone parent

Inadequacy of Allowances

It was generally agreed that while these lone parents welcomed the payment, the living allowance of €19.10 provided to adults who are waiting for their asylum application to be processed, along with an additional €9.60 for every child, is insufficient to provide for a family's needs or indeed to cover other unforeseen or *one off* expenses such as school fees charged to cover administration and other costs such as books, outings, class trips and swimming lessons.

Child Benefit

Finally, parents applying for asylum are ineligible to receive child benefit for their children. This universal payment is not offered to asylum-seeking parents until their application has been processed and approved despite current waiting times running into years. Many of the lone parents interviewed recognised the importance of the payment in helping to address their financial difficulties. 'If I could collect child benefit for my daughters it would ease my money worries.'⁷⁵

The issues identified above are specific to the legal status and circumstances of asylum-seeking lone parents only and as such are not representative of issues affecting all minority ethnic lone parents. Issue unique to the legal status of other minority ethnic groups are identified below.

A condition of leave to remain based on the rights of the Irish citizen child requires the individual to be 'actively seeking employment'. If lone parents with leave to remain wish to apply for a visa on behalf of a family member they wish to be reunited with in Ireland, they must prove themselves to be 'financially independent', in order to be successful.

As a consequence of this condition, a number of African lone parents participating in this research had given up their studies in favour of seeking full-time employment so that they might be successful in applying for a visa to bring their partners, children or family members to join them in Ireland. Work permit holders applying for visas for

⁷⁵ Interview 3: Ghanaian lone parent

family members must also prove that they are in a position to support any additional family members who might come to Ireland on a visa.

Family Separation

Separation from family occurs across the spectrum of minority ethnic groups and happens for a variety of reasons. Some families are separated from each other as a result of economic migration. A lone parent on a work permit told of her heartbreak at reuniting with her daughters when they moved to Ireland to join her, after a prolonged separation. 'We had lost so much time. We had to renew our relationships all over again and get to know each other once more.'⁷⁶ This example illustrates the huge impact separation can have on interpersonal relationships and the cohesion of the family unit.

Immigrants to Ireland currently have no legal right to family reunification. The immigration system in Ireland as it is currently constituted can, in some instances, prolong family separation which in turn may artificially generate a state of lone parenthood for some minority ethnic parents coming to Ireland. The spouse or partner of an individual along with children in their family may not be considered, even for a temporary visa, until their spouse/partner in Ireland can prove 'financial independence'. This can keep spouses separated from each other or parents separated from their children for a period of years and impose on both parents all of the difficulties associated with raising children alone, as detailed in this section.

The practical application of the condition outlined above has an impact on the lives of work permit holders and those with leave to remain and their families. As such it affects only those minority ethnic lone parents from 'new communities' and does not apply to the indigenous ethnic minority group of Travellers or to lone parents from among the ethnic majority of 'white Irish'.

4.5.2 Childcare

A group of lone parents provided an example of the lack of coordination between services in their local area, in relation to childcare, and the impact this had on the

⁷⁶ Interview 7: Filipino lone parent

group. A local VEC ran English language classes every Monday morning for newcomers to Ireland who first language is not English. The VEC staff encouraged the residents of the local reception centre to sign up and attend. However, the crèche in the reception centre opened between 9am and 1pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays only.

4.5.3 Accommodation

Some of the concerns raised were unique to the accommodation of specific minority ethnic lone parents. These concerns are identified below.

The vast majority of asylums seeking lone parents were unhappy with the living situation in reception centres. Discontent centred on food preparation and living conditions.

Food Preparation in Direct Provision

A number of the lone parents who have lived in direct provision at one time and were still living in direct provision at the time of interview emphasised their concern about the food provided to residents in their hostels. The quantity of fried food which was deemed unhealthy by the women and the limited menu which offered little or no alternative were discussed. 'It was a case of eat it or go hungry.'. 'It is always the same, every day, for the last three years.'⁷⁸

Living conditions

Poor sanitation and unhygienic, cramped conditions in the facilities were also cause for concern among the asylum-seeking lone parents interviewed. 'It was dirty and I slept on bunk beds in a room with seven other women who were strangers to me.'⁷⁹ In some direct provision accommodation bathrooms are located on different floors to the bedrooms. Lone parents living in these centres are forced to bring their young child or children with them to the bathroom when there is no one to call on to watch the child/ren. These lone parents described conditions in the bathroom as so unhygienic they feared letting their toddlers out of their arms and onto the floor in case of exposure to harmful germs and bacteria.

⁷⁸ Interview 3: Ghanaian lone parent

⁷⁹ Interview 2: Nigerian lone parent

4.5.4 Engaging with Public Services

Health Service Executive Local Health Centres

Lone parents from other minority ethnic groups participating in this research identified a number of issues relating to standards of customer service among HSE local health centre staff. While customer service impacts on all service users, these lone parents highlighted issues of concern relating to elements of poor customer service which they perceived to be a direct result of their membership of a minority ethnic group. These issues are identified below.

A group of lone parents seeking asylum spoke of their experiences with Community Welfare Officers when applying for an exceptional needs payment for clothing. These women explained that they had learned from other parents to take off any jewellery or expensive looking clothing such as a warm winter coat, before going in to see the Community Welfare Officer. This was a precaution, they explained, in case the CWO made any comments about where they had gotten these items or how they could afford them (even if the clothes were cheap or second hand). Assumptions had been voiced by officials in the past that the women must have other sources of income in order to afford these clothes and so docked their clothing allowance accordingly.

City/County Council Social Housing Section

Once again customer service ranked high on participants' list of issues in relation to accessing city/county council social housing. The quality of service provision was raised but specifically in relation to perceived discrimination based on ethnicity. Therefore these are issues specific to lone parents from minority ethnic groups.

Customer Service

Individual Council staff members have been reported to be blunt by some of the minority ethnic lone parents consulted. 'There aren't enough houses here for Irish people. There is a long waiting list. Why don't you go back to the Philippines?'⁸⁰ A few lone parents highlighted positive experiences they have had when accessing public services including encounters with staff members who have offered clear and

⁸⁰ Interview 7: Filipino lone parent

accurate information in a pleasant and helpful manner. However, any suggestions of discourteous treatment, abuse of position or discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity or marital status must be viewed as a serious violation of public service quality assurance standards.

4.5.5 Health and Well-Being

The impact of parenting alone on health and particularly mental health can be considerable for all lone parents.⁸¹ Minority lone parents are equally vulnerable to conditions associated with mental ill health such as stress, anxiety and depression. They may also experience unique challenges in relation to their health due to other factors associated with being a minority ethnic lone parent. For asylum-seeking lone parents, time spent in reception centres awaiting the lengthy asylum process to be completed, which can take as long as 4 or 5 years, was described by a lone parent as follows:

It is tormenting the parent and the child. At least in prison, say if I got sentenced to 5 years, then I would be counting down the days until I got out, but here, I'm waiting and waiting and at the end of it they might say no.⁸²

Becoming physically ill is rarely an option for most lone parents but as a member of a minority ethnic group, particularly as a 'newcomer' to Ireland, many lone parents have nobody else to rely on to take care of their children, since they are separated from family and friends who would usually step in to help. When a lone parent was admitted to hospital for two weeks, her child had to be taken into foster care because there wasn't anyone else she could ask to take care of him.

4.5.6 Poverty

Financial difficulties are such a major concern for some residents in reception centres that it was also suggested a small minority of asylum seeking women engage in prostitution as a means of earning money to alleviate their financial concerns.

⁸¹ OPEN is involved in a Building Healthy Communities project among lone parents in Ireland which identified mental ill health, including depression, stress and anxiety as a common outcome of the isolation experienced by lone parents.

⁸² Interview 1: Nigerian lone parent

4.6 Important Issues for Traveller Lone Parents

4.6.1 Education, Training and the Labour Market

For some minority groups there is little tradition of accessing educational opportunities beyond primary or secondary level. This tradition is often exacerbated by a formal education system which can typically fall short of accommodating the diversity of groups outside the 'mainstream'. Traveller lone parents participating in this research articulated a strong desire to address their learning needs as adults 'I need support with my education and support to find employment' (Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parent). Engaging in education and training will create pathways for progression and assist Traveller lone parents to improve their situation and that of their children. 'Lone parents are especially vulnerable to the Traveller Training Centre "trap". It is a revolving door with no progress or no opportunities' (Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parent).

4.6.2 Childcare

Many Traveller lone parents can call on the support of family, usually due to the close geographical proximity of extended family members. 'I always had a babysitter when I needed one.'⁸³ This is certainly likely to be the case, to a much greater extent than other ethnic minority groups parenting alone in Ireland. 'I miss the helping hand required from family.'⁸⁴ For Traveller lone parents in employment, however, it can still be difficult to access childcare. 'Because I work full time I do find it difficult to access childcare if my family members are working or on holiday. I have had to take time off work in the past at my own expense, due to no childcare.'⁸⁵ This is a similar difficulty experienced by many lone parents in employment in Ireland.

4.6.3 Accommodation Needs

Private Rental Sector

Some of the Traveller lone parents (those who were not living on halting sites) reported being unable to source private rented accommodation in their area due to discrimination.

⁸³ Interview 8: Traveller lone parent

⁸⁴ Focus Group 1: African women's group

⁸⁵ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

Social Housing Waiting List

All the Traveller women consulted as part of this research had been married previously but were separated from their husbands and were parenting alone. Some had lived in social housing with their husbands but had to leave the accommodation when they became estranged. As a result these women returned to the bottom of the housing waiting list when they applied to the councils for accommodation as a one parent family. This is consistent with the experiences of any tenant who, having left home, reapplies to the local authority for social housing following marital breakdown or separation.

Halting Sites

Conditions on halting sites were described as cramped, basic and difficult. 'They put me into a site on my own which was miles from anywhere with no services like water or toilets.'⁸⁶

4.6.4 Experiences of Public Services

Health Service Executive

Traveller lone parents highlighted examples of discrimination and bias from HSE staff. 'When my son was small my brother drew "tattoos" all over the child's arms and torso, at my son's request. He loved it, of course, but the marker was permanent so several baths later he still had marks on his arms and body. When the health nurse visited, she saw the "marks". She said under her breath, "typical". When I challenged her she said she thought they were bruises. I was mortified, although I could understand why she needed to address it. I asked her what she meant by "typical" and she replied "Oh I know how ye believe in battering the life out of the children." I complained and was dismissed as a neurotic mother. Settled people believe we are very cruel to our children but the opposite is true. We adore our children.'⁸⁷ Despite making a complaint about the incident, this lone parent's grievance was not taken seriously or addressed to her satisfaction.

⁸⁶ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parent

⁸⁷ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

Poor customer service has also been the experience of lone parents from indigenous minority groups. 'They don't seem to get that they are providing a service and that we are their customers. [There is] so much bad practice and blatant disrespect for Travellers. I have seen the damage the stress of sourcing accommodation has on the mental health of women in our community. I have a low tolerance for rude people and zero tolerance for people in public service who are disrespectful to their vulnerable clientele.'⁸⁸

An Garda Síochána

Participants raised similar issues in relation to customer service provided by some members of An Garda Síochána. Once again these issues stemmed from perceived discrimination based on the lone parents' membership of a minority ethnic group.

Traveller lone parents also felt very strongly about the treatment they had received from some individuals within the Garda Síochána, both as Travellers and as lone parents. '[Gardaí are] very disrespectful and [they] abuse their power as they know there is no need to be afraid of a woman on her own.' 'So long as you're a Traveller your husband can kill you and they won't come out. You would have to be dead for them to get involved.'⁸⁹

These examples highlight poor customer service based on discrimination as a result of belonging to a specific minority ethnic group. and while the women consulted may have felt that being a lone parent added to the experience of discrimination, these incidents are not necessarily common to all lone parents in Ireland.

4.6.5 Attitudes to Lone Parenthood: Discrimination, Stereotyping and Stigma

The response of minority ethnic lone parents from new communities is starkly contrasted with comments from some of the Traveller lone parents who gave their opinions on the same question. Although not all the Traveller lone parents responded negatively, most did. 'They view lone parents as pariahs, leeches and dysfunctional.'⁹⁰ 'They haven't got any respect for Travellers, especially lone parent Travellers.'⁹¹

⁸⁸ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

⁸⁹ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

⁹⁰ Focus group 2: Traveller lone parents

⁹¹ Focus group 2: Traveller lone parents

Responses to this question also highlighted the stigma which the Traveller community itself attaches to lone parenthood, in particular separated lone parents. 'Separation is such a new thing in our community. Me and my children are discriminated against by other Travellers.'⁹² Attitudes within the community appear more lenient toward women who become lone parents after being widowed or are the victims of extreme abuse at the hands of their spouses.

In similar statements to those from 'newcomer' lone parents, the Traveller women describe the emphasis placed on remaining married in Traveller culture. 'The pressure to stay in a marriage is immense. The backlash from the community when you separate is horrible.'⁹³

These women also suggested that as separated lone parents there were few options left open to them. 'My own life, as such, is over. I know I will never be able to marry again.'⁹⁴ The feeling among these women was that they would never be permitted by their community to start afresh. 'I will never be able to meet someone new due to cultural restraints. I will always worry about having to go it alone.'⁹⁵

The Traveller Experience

Some expressions of dissatisfaction were voiced by Traveller lone parents in this research context with regard to settled people's perceived hierarchical treatment of ethnic minority groups in Ireland. 'Settled people view certain ethnic groups worse than others, Polish being best, Travellers worst. It is not fair as we all want to give our families a better life.'

⁹² Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

⁹³ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

⁹⁴ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

⁹⁵ Focus Group 2: Traveller lone parents

4.7 Organisations supporting Minority Ethnic Groups

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with staff members of organisations supporting and representing minority ethnic groups in Ireland highlighted similar issues raised by the lone parents consulted by OPEN.

The organisations consulted include:

- ❖ **Integrating Ireland:** An independent network of community and voluntary groups working in mutual solidarity to promote the human rights, equality and full integration in Irish society of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants.⁹⁶
- ❖ **Vincentian Refugee Centre:** provides services, including housing, advocacy and practical supports, for people seeking asylum, refugees and those with permission to remain in the state.⁹⁷
- ❖ **Irish Traveller Movement:** a national network of organisations and individuals working within the Traveller community. The Irish Traveller Movement consists of a partnership between Travellers and settled people committed to seeking full equality for Travellers in Irish society.⁹⁸
- ❖ **Galway Teen Parent Support Programme:** provides support services to young people who become parents while still in their teens. Support is offered in all areas of the young person's life – health, relationships, accommodation, social welfare entitlements, education, training, child development, parenting, childcare etc.⁹⁹
- ❖ **Galway City Partnership:** a group of local organisations coming together to promote the area as part of the National Development Plan and to tackle disadvantage and combat social exclusion.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ www.integratingireland.ie

⁹⁷ www.vincentians.ie/VRC

⁹⁸ www.itmtrav.com

⁹⁹ www.treoir.ie

¹⁰⁰ www.gcp.ie

- ❖ **Mayo Intercultural Action (MIA):** an organisation which exists to make newcomers to County Mayo feel welcome and to help them sort out any difficulties they have. It is a voluntary group run by a voluntary steering committee and a small multicultural team of volunteers.¹⁰¹

- ❖ **Cáirde:** a community development organisation working to tackle health inequalities among ethnic minority communities by improving minority ethnic access to health services and minority ethnic participation in health planning and delivery.¹⁰²

Representatives from these organisations raised similar issues to those which emerged from consultation with the ethnic minority lone parents. These issues include:

- ❖ Accessing the labour market
- ❖ Childcare
- ❖ Accommodation
- ❖ Health

As with the issues in Part One, some are relevant to all lone parents in Ireland while others are specific to minority ethnic lone parents.

Accessing the Labour Market

Some of the organisations consulted for the research supported lone parents with leave to remain to return to education or training in order to address the conditions of their legal status which stipulate they must be financially independent within two years of receiving leave to remain. Many minority ethnic lone parents seeking employment possess academic qualifications from their country of origin which are not recognised in Ireland. This may result in some minority ethnic lone parents taking up lower skilled work than they are qualified for. In response to this issue some organisations (for example Mayo Intercultural Action; Galway City Partnership) are engaging with local employers, often in conjunction with Local Employment Services,

¹⁰¹ See www.integratingireland.ie

¹⁰² www.cairde.ie

to encourage them to 'break down barriers. Take a risk and give people a chance.'¹⁰³ This is being done through voluntary job placements and negotiations regarding flexible working hours to ease the issue of childcare which continues to be a big concern for these lone parents when they are working.

Childcare

In keeping with the majority of lone parents in Ireland, childcare has been identified by these organisations as a major concern for minority ethnic lone parents in Ireland. Firstly, in order for lone parents to fully participate in education and training opportunities, childcare must be provided, preferably on site. 'Childcare is a huge issue. If funding is provided for childcare, you will get full attendance on courses because it is such a weight off their [lone parent's] shoulders, not having to worry about childcare. Funders don't appreciate that this is a big issue.'¹⁰⁴

Secondly, accessing employment is almost impossible for lone parents without local, affordable childcare services. Service providers found that most lone parents rely on friends for informal child minding because crèches are too expensive. Many of the organisations OPEN consulted were collaborating with local childcare committees to represent the needs of ethnic minority lone parents at this level and to advocate on their behalf (for example, Galway City Partnership; Integrating Ireland).

In rural areas the lack of public transport is also an issue for all lone parents, which means both employment opportunities and childcare services must be accessible locally.

Accommodation

Housing was flagged by the organisations as another concern for minority ethnic groups, which reflects the broader trend among lone parents in Ireland living in or at risk of poverty. Minority ethnic lone parents from new communities may experience additional challenges as a result of being unfamiliar with the Irish housing sector. 'We do a huge amount of housing advocacy. We have two housing officers here helping people to find accommodation.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Mayo Intercultural Action (MIA)

¹⁰⁴ Mayo Intercultural Action

¹⁰⁵ Vincentian Refugee Centre

Accommodation standards, particularly in the private rented sector, are recognised as a major concern for minority ethnic groups, especially for vulnerable groups at risk of exploitation due to their precarious legal status. Some organisations have dealt with entire families living in one room or occupying derelict houses who are ‘terrified to speak up’¹⁰⁶ about the conditions for fear of being made homeless or being deported.

Some direct provision accommodation was also described as ‘scary’, ‘substandard’ and ‘a risk to health and safety’.¹⁰⁷

Health

Representatives from the organisations consulted were aware of health issues, particularly mental health issues, impacting on minority ethnic groups in Ireland. For minority ethnic lone parents living in unfamiliar areas, in unfamiliar estates, without a strong network of support or access to public transportation, or in rural areas, feelings of isolation and depression are common. These organisations, in particular Cairde, which deals specifically with minority ethnic health issues, work to combat the affects of such isolation and depression by supporting minority ethnic groups including lone parents to come together socially or in an informal learning environment.

A high level of innovative practice and cooperation between local groups and service providers representing minority ethnic lone parents characterises the work of the organisations consulted for this research.

The findings from the research outlined in this section require solutions to address the needs of lone parents from minority ethnic groups in Ireland. Section Five offers a number of recommendations generated by these findings which may prove useful to both service providers and policy makers in tailoring supports and services for this category of lone parents.

¹⁰⁶ Vincentian Refugee Centre Programme, Galway
¹⁰⁷ Teen Parent Support Programme, Galway

Section Five: Recommendations & Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

OPEN recognises, and the research confirms, that minority ethnic lone parents face many challenges in their position as head of a one parent family. These challenges are related to their membership of a minority group and to their legal status in Ireland. They are in addition to the many other challenges faced by all lone parents in Ireland, particularly those in or at risk of poverty. These challenges create barriers to participation for minority ethnic lone parents in the social, cultural, economic and civic structures of Irish society.

The findings from the research undertaken by OPEN, which are detailed in Section Four, raise questions which require further examination and discussion. Section Five, the final section of the report, makes recommendations based on these findings. The recommendations are for consideration by Government Departments, including Social and Family Affairs; Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Environment, Heritage and Local Government; as well as Combat Poverty Agency, OPEN and other relevant stakeholders, to inform future actions for the improvement of supports and services for lone parents from minority ethnic groups in Ireland. The issues which require further consideration are structured to reflect the themes examined in section four. The issues are as follows:

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Accessing Education, Training and the Labour Market

1. As discussed in the previous section, there was considerable enthusiasm among the minority ethnic lone parents consulted, for accessing various forms of education and training programmes. If service providers are to succeed in supporting lone parents to access education, training and up-skilling initiatives, the specific needs of minority ethnic lone parents have to be recognised and their status as a disadvantaged target group understood.

This should be reflected in all service plans drawn up by providers and in any future policies, including activation policies.

2. Lone parents from other EU and non-EU countries who have put down roots in Ireland, who are living and working in Ireland for a period of 2-3 years and who wish to return to education should not be subject to higher fees than Irish students attending the same institution.
3. Attendance at these institutions, for those who can prove pre-existing ties to the country, should go towards their residency requirements, especially in the case of mature students.
4. All lone parents who satisfy a means test should receive a grant whether attending courses on a full or part-time basis.
5. Additional supports should be put in place for minority groups where little tradition exists for continuing in education, especially to third level. Access plans which recognise diversity and make provision for the specific needs of lone parents should continue to be at the heart of the work done by every academic institution and educational setting. Numbers of access staff should be increased and supported further, e.g. through ongoing training/continuous professional development.
6. Culturally appropriate policies promoting an ethos of lifelong learning which respects the different learning styles of adults and accommodates diversity should be promoted across every formal, non-formal and informal educational setting. Best practice examples should be promoted, showcased and rewarded by the Department of Education and the Minister for Lifelong Learning.
7. There should be increased monitoring of working conditions by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to further protect potentially vulnerable workers

8. There is a need for more stringent laws, heftier fines and better safeguards to deter employers who would exploit employees recruited from among 'new' migrant populations
9. Sustained, multi-annual funding for statutory and non-statutory organisations which support migrant workers is required
10. Greater incentives should be put in place for minority ethnic lone parents to work when work is combined with social welfare payments, e.g. increasing the income threshold on the One Parent Family Payment.

5.2.2 Issues Relating to Legal Status

The impact which legal status can have on the experiences of minority ethnic lone parents is immense. Gaps in provision and ad hoc, short-sighted policy formation have informed the lives of one parent families from minority groups in ways which impede their potential to fully participate in and contribute to Irish society.

Asylum Seekers

1. The practice of direct provision should be abolished. Otherwise, immediate review and increased monitoring thereafter of standards of direct provision accommodation is required.
2. While OPEN is aware that information gathered during this research is not necessarily wholly representative of all direct provision accommodation, the practice of housing entire families in a single room, particularly with respect to teenage children of the opposite sex sharing bedrooms, or numerous strangers sharing cramped accommodation, should cease immediately and the same rules which currently govern the allocation of social housing under local councils should be applied.
3. A significant proportion of the minority ethnic lone parents consulted for this study were seeking asylum at the time. Food preparation and meal choice were raised as a concern by almost every asylum seeking participant. Direct provision reception centres and hostels should be equipped with facilities to

allow residents the option of preparing their own meals. Otherwise, reception centre staff should engage in greater consultation with residents and promote ownership of menu choices. Greater effort should be made to prepare culturally appropriate food for residents and to offer more choice and healthy options where possible.

4. Direct provision accommodation should offer increased childcare provision and crèche facilities and provide appropriate play space and amenities which meet the highest safety standards. This would alleviate difficulties identified by participants in attending educational courses which did not coincide with crèche opening times; as well as alleviating the stress associated with raising a child alone in often cramped, unsuitable living conditions, without sufficient access to appropriate play and recreation facilities.
5. Consideration should be given to increasing the living allowance and (exceptional needs) clothing allowance and to changing the administration of the allowance to coincide with the start of every season. This should be done in response to difficulties identified by asylum-seeking lone parents participating in this research, who found it problematic trying to purchase seasonally appropriate clothing for their children when it was needed, without the aid of the payment.

Humanitarian Leave to Remain (IBC)

6. Lone parents with humanitarian leave to remain should be permitted to apply for a family visa, especially if it helps them to seek/return to employment or, in cases where the applicant is studying, can prove their family member(s) will not be a 'burden on the state'.

Travellers

7. Travellers should be granted legal status as a distinct ethnic group.

5.2.3 Childcare

The cost of 'formal' childcare was identified in the research as prohibitive for the vast majority of lone parents. Most affordable childcare facilities have long waiting lists. Access to affordable, quality childcare opens up progression routes for lone parents to improve their lives and those of their children, via education and training

opportunities or employment. If lone parents are to be encouraged to engage with the labour market, as identified in the recent activation proposal, Government policy and funding must support lone parents to address barriers to this participation, in particular by sourcing affordable, quality childcare.

1. Funding for community childcare places should be increased.
2. Increased capital funding is required to deliver centres of learning which house state-of-the-art childcare facilities as standard.
3. Greater numbers of employers should be encouraged by Government to provide childcare facilities, through tax breaks and other incentives.
4. Government departments should consider introducing grants for entrepreneurship and childcare training for minority ethnic lone parents and provide tax breaks as an added incentive.

5.2.4 Accommodation Needs

Sourcing affordable accommodation, of an acceptable standard, which is appropriate for the needs of their families, was one of the major concerns for these minority ethnic lone parents. An insufficient stock of social housing, and poor standards in private rented accommodation and halting sites, impacts on the quality of life and financial circumstances of all lone parents, including those from minority ethnic groups.

SW Rent Supplement & Rental Accommodation Scheme

1. Lone parents should not be required to choose between accommodation and the opportunity to work. Flaws in the current system keep lone parents in poverty traps by making it less appealing to work and more financially rewarding in the long run to remain on a supplementary welfare payment such as Rent Supplement, in order to continue to qualify for a place on the Rental Accommodation Scheme, rather than take up employment and lose entitlement to Rent Supplement.

2. The Renal Accommodation Scheme (RAS) should be rolled out further, and extended to include all low income renters living in the Private Rented Sector who satisfy a means test; particular priority should be given to those with children, including lone parents.

Halting Sites

3. Local councils must invest adequate resources to ensure all halting sites under their supervision are adequately serviced in terms of sanitation and electrical power.
4. Councils should avoid the creation of ghettos which can occur when halting sites are established in remote locations, as identified by some of the Traveller lone parents in this study. Halting sites should always be serviced by public transport routes and integrated into the surrounding communities, so as not to isolate Traveller lone parents further.

5.2.5 Accessing Public Services

Interaction with public service staff was the most common issue raised by minority ethnic lone parents in relation to accessing public services. A commitment to quality customer service underpinned by equality and diversity training for all service providers is vital to improving minority ethnic lone parents' experiences of dealing with public bodies.

1. Every public body should undergo a plain English audit, with all documentation, including forms, issued to the public receiving approval from the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). All paper work should be streamlined.
2. Quality customer service training and diversity and cultural awareness training for all members of staff should continue to be a priority, particularly for those at the coal face who deal with members of the public.
3. Internal promotion of examples of best practice among public service staff should be further encouraged.

4. Service providers must continue to encourage an ethos of professionalism among staff at all times towards all service users.
5. Public bodies should promote communication with migrant lone parents by recruiting bilingual/multilingual members of staff.
6. Appoint Travellers and other minority groups on the pay roll, especially lone parents.
7. Encourage greater buy-in from students and engage in regular consultation with students in Traveller training centres to ensure student expectations better match the likely outcomes of participation.

5.2.6 Funding for Organisations working with Minority Ethnic Lone Parents

1. Continued support is required, including sustained, multi-annual funding for organisations working with minority lone parents.
2. Successful pilot projects and dissemination of best practice should be rolled out as standard.

5.3 Conclusion

This report examines the specific needs of lone parents from minority groups such as indigenous Irish Traveller, black, Asian and other minority groups, including but not limited to migrant workers, in Ireland as identified through qualitative research conducted with lone parents and organisations representing ethnic minorities in the autumn and winter of 2008. Minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland face many challenges associated with lone parenthood, particularly for those in or at risk of poverty. However, minority groups also experience additional challenges related to their ethnicity or legal status.

Findings from the research identify minority lone parents as a diverse and resilient category within Irish society, who present policy makers and service providers with both challenges and opportunities for the future. It is hoped that this report adds to the body of research on the experiences of minority groups in Ireland, specifically those parenting alone, and it is also hoped that the report will generate ideas for

discussion among policy makers and service providers for developing initiatives to support minority ethnic lone parents, in consultation with minority ethnic lone parents and the organisations which represent them. This report will also inform the future work of OPEN in ensuring that the policy priorities developed by OPEN are representative of all lone parents in Irish society.

Bibliography

Alzouebi, K. (2006) *The Splintering Selves: A Reflective Journey* www.ling-ethnology.org.uk/documents/papers/alzouebi Sourced December 2009

Child and Family Research Centre (undated) *Towards a Better Future*. NUI Galway.

Coakley, L. and C. Healy (2007) *Looking Forward, Looking Back*. Integrating Ireland, CADIC.

David, M. and C.D. Sutton (2004) *Social Research: The Basics*. Sage Publications, London.

Day Care Trust (2007) *Listening to Black and Minority Ethnic Parents about Childcare*.

Employers Diversity Network (2009) *Issues and Challenges in the Recruitment and Selection of Immigrant Workers in Ireland*. WRC Social and Economic Consultants.

Equality Authority (undated) *Building an Intercultural Society*, Dublin.

Eriksen, T. Hylland (1993) *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. Pluto Press, London.

First Nations Early Learning and Childcare Action Plan (2005).

Health Service Executive (2008) *National Intercultural Health Strategy*, Dublin.

National Economic and Social Council (2006) *Migration Policy*, Dublin.

Immigrant Council of Ireland (2004) *Voices of Immigrants: The Challenges of Inclusion*, Dublin.

Immigrant Council of Ireland (2007) *On Speaking Terms: Introductory and Language Programmes for Migrants in Ireland*.

Kennedy, P. (2002) *Maternity in Ireland: A Woman-Centred Perspective*. The Liffey Press, Dublin.

Lentin, R. and R. McVeigh (2006) *After Optimism? Ireland, Racism and Globalisation*.

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (2008) *Enabling Equality: Migrant Women in Rural Ireland*. MRCI

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (2008) *Migrant Women in Rural Ireland*, MRCI.

O'Connell, J. in R. Lentin and R. McVeigh (eds.) (2002) *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*. Beyond the Pale BTP Publications Ltd., Belfast.

Open Door? Lone Parents and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) (2008)
OPEN www.oneparent.ie

OPEN's response to the Government Green Paper on Supporting Lone Parents
(2007) www.oneparent.ie

Out of the Traps (2006) OPEN www.oneparent.ie

McGinnity, F., Nelson, J., Lunn, P. and E. Quinn (2009) *Discrimination in Recruitment: Evidence from a Field Experiment*. Equality Authority, Equality Research Series.

Peelo, D., O'Connor, A. and G. O'Toole (2008) *Positive Action for Traveller Employment*, Equality Authority, Brunswick Press Limited, Dublin.

Pettigrew, N. (2003) *Experiences of Lone Parents from Minority Ethnic Communities*, Department of Work and Pensions, Research report No. 187, www.dwp.gov.uk

Ratcliffe, P. (2004) *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society*. Open University Press, Berkshire, England

Rowlingson, K. and S. McKay (2002) *Lone Parent Families: Gender Class and State*. Pearson Education Ltd., Essex.

UN INSTRAW (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) (2007) *The Feminisation of Migration*. Working Paper 1, Gender, Remittances and Development Series

Government Publications

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2008) *Migration Nation*
www.integration.ie

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2005) *National Action Plan against Racism 2005-2008* www.integration.ie

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2008-2010

National Women's Strategy 2007-2016

Department of Social and Family Affairs (2007) *Supporting Lone Parents*. Official Government Publications Office, Dublin 2.

Department of the Taoiseach (2007) *National Development Plan 2007-13*. Official Government Publications Office, Dublin 2.

Department of the Taoiseach (2007) *Programme for Government 2007-12*

Articles/Factsheets

'Lone parents from ethnic minority communities: exploring needs and responses' OPEN+, Vol.1, Issue 1.

'Filipino professionals 'forced out' of Irish jobs market' Metro Éireann, January 1, 2009

'What became of the Chileans?' Metro Éireann, May 17, 2007

Rights and Entitlements of Migrants in Ireland: Factsheet 3: Rights of International Students in Ireland. Immigrant Council of Ireland

Websites

Build Initiative www.buildinitiative.org

Census 2006 www.cso.ie

Combat Poverty Agency www.cpa.ie

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform www.justice.ie

Equality Authority www.equality.ie

Higher Education Authority www.hea.ie

Immigrant Council of Ireland www.immigrantcouncil.ie

Irish Immigration and Naturalisation Service www.inis.gov.ie

Integrating Ireland www.integratingireland.ie

Irish Times www.irishtimes.com

Irish Traveller Movement www.itmtrav.ie

Metro Éireann www.metroeireann.com

Office of the Minister for Integration www.integration.ie

OPEN www.oneparent.ie

Pavee Point www.paveepoint.ie

Appendix 1**List of Organisations consulted as part of the Research:**

- AkiDwA (Akina Dada wa Africa): network of African women in Ireland
- CADIC: Coalition against the Deportation of Irish Children
- Cairde: NGO working to address health inequalities among ethnic minorities
- Clondalkin Travellers Development Group
- Galway Refugee Support Group
- Integrating Ireland: national network of refugee and immigrant groups
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)
- National Traveller Women's Forum
- National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)
- Refugee Information Service (RIS)
- Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Cairde
- Integrating Ireland
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)
- Aistear Beo Family Centre, run by the Daughters of Charity, Blanchardstown
- Edmund Rice International Heritage Centre (ERIHC) Information and Support Unit, Waterford
- Galway Teen Parent Support Programme (TPSP)
- Irish Traveller Movement
- St. Margaret's Traveller Community Association, Ballymun
- Vincentian Refugee Centre
- Waterford Women's Centre

Appendix 2**Schedule of questions used during the interview with lone parents:****OPEN Research to identify the specific needs of people from minority ethnic groups parenting alone in Ireland.****Topic Guide for Interviews with Minority Ethnic Lone Parents****Date**

The researcher will introduce herself and briefly outline the work of OPEN. The researcher will explain the purpose of the research and give a timeframe for the duration of the interview (45 minutes). The researcher will make it clear that the interviewee may end the interview at any time or skip any question they do not wish to answer. The researcher will reiterate the **confidentiality** of the interview and will thank the interviewee for agreeing to participate.

Introductory Questions:

- What is your first name?
- How many children do you have?
- Are they currently living with you?

(Skip for members of the Traveller Community)

- Where are you from?
- How long have you been in Ireland?
- Can you tell me why you decided to come to Ireland?

Experiences of Parenting Alone:

- What are the biggest challenges for you as a parent? Why?
- How do you deal with these challenges?
- Where/who can you go to if you need support? Why do you find this supportive?
- What would make the task of parenting alone easier? Why?

Experiences of the Irish System:

How has your experience of Ireland been so far? Positive/Negative etc? (Skip for Travellers)

Have you ever come into contact with any of the following services?

- *Direct provision centres,*
- *Social welfare offices,*
- *County Councils,*
- *Hospitals, Health Centres, G.P. surgeries,*

- *Schools, colleges or further education institutions,*
- *Employment or training centres,*
- *Trade Unions,*
- *Crèches,*
- *Social Housing Providers or rental accommodation*
- *Gardaí*

How was this experience for you? Why?

How could these services be delivered differently to better address your needs as a lone parent?

Experiences of (other) Irish People:

- How often do you interact with Irish/settled people?
- How do Irish/settled people view minority ethnic groups (Polish, African, Chinese, Travellers, etc.), in your opinion? Is this accurate? Why do you think so?
- How do they view lone parents, in your opinion? Is this accurate? Why do you think so?
- Do Irish/settled people need to change their views/attitudes toward members of minority ethnic groups who are parenting alone? If yes, how could this be achieved?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research.
--

Appendix 3

The format used to structure the focus groups:

OPEN Research

Specific Needs of Minority Ethnic Lone Parents in Ireland

Focus Group

Minority Ethnic Lone Parents

Location

Date/Time

Format

2.00pm Introductions (5 minutes)

2.05pm Format for the afternoon (5 minutes)

2.10pm About OPEN (5 minutes)

2.15 pm About the research (5 minutes)

2.20pm Brainstorming on the **challenges** facing minority ethnic lone parents in your town/city: Agree on **three** of the biggest challenges (10 minutes)

2.30pm Discussion on how these challenges should be **addressed**: (20 minutes)

What changes would make life easier/better? (10 minutes)

How could these changes be made? Locally/nationally? (10 minutes)

Appendix 4

List of questions used to structure interviews with service providers and stakeholders:

OPEN Research to Identify the Specific Needs of Lone Parents from Minority Ethnic Groups

Topic Guide for Interviews with Service Providers

Date/Location

- Q. Tell me about the work done by your service? Where is the service based? Are there other regional/national offices?
- Q. How many people avail of this service? How many service users are lone parents? Where are these lone parents from? What is their status?
- Q. What supports do these lone parents require when they come here?
- Q. What are the challenges/difficulties they face? How are they supported to overcome these challenges/difficulties?
- Q. Do services currently offered to lone parents from minority ethnic groups need to change/adapt to better address the needs of lone parents? Why? If yes, how?
- Q. What are the plans for your service in the future?

Appendix 5

Table 1. Lone Parent Family units in private households classified by nationality, ethnic or cultural background and number of children, CSO 2006:

Table 1. Lone Parent Family units in private households classified by nationality, ethnic or cultural background and number of children, CSO 2006										
Due to confidential issues it has only been possible to provide a very broad nationality grouping and an intermediate ethnic or cultural background grouping										
Ethnic or Cultural Background	Total lone parent family units	Number of children in family unit								Total number of children
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7+		
Total Irish										
White	<i>Irish inc: Irish Traveller Any other White background</i>	168,244	98,262	44,328	16,937	5,988	1,886	565	278	276,621
Black or Black	<i>Any other Black background</i>	535	294	152	63	23	2	1	-	895
Irish	<i>Chinese and Any other Asian background</i>	167	60	43	37	17	6	1	3	384
Asian or Asian	<i>Other including mixed background</i>	162	83	42	24	10	3	-	-	294
Irish	<i>Not stated</i>	301	148	87	51	12	2	1	-	539
	<i>Total</i>	1,138	697	283	101	42	10	4	1	1,818
	<i>Total</i>	170,547	99,544	44,935	17,213	6,092	1,909	572	282	280,551
EU										
White	<i>Irish inc: Irish Traveller Any other White background</i>	1,462	685	423	227	87	22	12	6	2,789
Black or Black	<i>Any other Black background</i>	6,513	3,946	1,756	583	164	43	14	7	10,213
Irish	<i>Chinese and Any other Asian background</i>	72	37	23	8	2	2	-	-	125
Asian or Asian	<i>Other including</i>	73	38	20	11	3	1	-	-	128
Irish	<i>Other including</i>	644	368	165	66	32	9	3	1	1,094

	mixed background									
	Not stated	326	184	79	49	9	4	1	-	551
	Total	9,090	5,258	2,466	944	297	81	30	14	14,900
Other Inc:Multi Nationality										
White	<i>Irish inc: Irish Traveller</i>	341	199	85	40	14	2	-	1	562
	<i>Any other White background</i>	872	539	244	64	22	3	-	-	1,322
Black or Black Irish	<i>Any other Black background</i>	3,150	1,299	1,040	496	229	62	19	5	6,242
Asian or Asian Irish	<i>Any other Asian background</i>	516	317	131	48	13	7	-	-	810
	Other including mixed background	322	190	86	33	8	3	-	2	526
	Not stated	119	63	34	14	6	2	-	-	207
	Total	5,320	2,607	1,620	695	292	79	19	8	9,669
No Nationality and Not Stated										
White	<i>Irish inc: Irish Traveller</i>	1,035	611	264	93	37	25	2	3	1,726
	<i>Any other White background</i>	78	47	18	7	4	2	-	-	130
Black or Black Irish	<i>Any other Black background</i>	63	26	23	11	1	2	-	-	119
Asian or Asian Irish	<i>Any other Asian background</i>	7	5	2	-	-	-	-	-	9
	Other including mixed background	14	9	2	1	2	-	-	-	24
	Not stated	3,086	2,011	719	243	85	17	6	5	4,675
	Total	4,283	2,709	1,028	355	129	46	8	8	6,683
Total										
White	<i>Irish inc: Irish Traveller</i>	171,082	99,757	45,100	17,297	6,126	1,935	579	288	281,698
	<i>Any other White background</i>	7,998	4,826	2,170	717	213	50	15	7	12,560
Black or Black Irish	<i>Any other Black background</i>	3,452	1,422	1,129	552	249	72	20	8	6,870
Asian or Asian Irish	<i>Any other Asian background</i>	758	443	195	83	26	11	-	-	1,241
	Other including	1,281	715	340	151	54	14	4	3	2,183

mixed background									
Not stated	4,669	2,955	1,115	407	142	33	11	6	7,251
Total	189,240	110,118	50,049	19,207	6,810	2,115	629	312	311,803