



# European migrants in Ireland: Pathways to integration

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## Abstract

Within the EU, efforts in relation to integration are generally directed towards migrants from outside the EU. However, there is evidence that intra-EU migrants face similar obstacles to integration to those of non-EU citizens. Since Ireland has a large EU migrant population, this paper critically explores EU migrants' integration in Ireland. Drawing on a wider longitudinal study, the paper focuses on the lived experiences of 39 migrants from EU Member States living in Ireland. Focusing on domains of integration, we explore the different pathways by which EU migrants move to Ireland and become part of Irish society. Cultural and social pathways – including language, study, adventure and social relationships – are important as the original motivation for migration. Contrary to popular perception, economic factors such as employment were mostly seen as enabling social and cultural interests. However, economic but also social pathways came to the fore during the recession, when securing one's livelihood and networks took on a new importance. We show that migrants developed various tactics to intensify their contact with Irish society and to develop feelings of being 'at home', despite a deteriorating economic situation. Despite these individual efforts, EU migrants continue to face obstacles to integration in Ireland: obstacles that need to be acknowledged and addressed within Ireland and across the EU more broadly.

## Keywords

European Union, integration, Ireland, migration

## Introduction

The number of people living in Ireland with a nationality other than Irish increased from around 273,000 in 2002 (7% of the population) to 420,000 in 2006 (11% of the population) (CSO, 2007). This increase is often framed in terms of two intersecting events: the period of rapid economic growth in Ireland that is known as the Celtic Tiger era, and the expansion of the EU in 2004 (Gilmartin and White, 2008). Like the UK and Sweden, Ireland opened its borders, without restriction, to EU citizens following

accession in 2004. In common with the UK, this led to a significant influx of migrants from the EU-10,<sup>1</sup> particularly Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and, later, Slovakia. However, more established movements of migrants from EU-15 countries, especially the UK

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and, to a lesser extent, Germany, France, Italy and Spain, also continued. By 2006, around two thirds of non-Irish nationals living in Ireland were from the EU (CSO, 2007) – from EU-15 as well as EU-10 countries. Thus, Ireland is one of a small number of European countries where intra-EU migrants make up a majority of migrant residents (Recchi, 2006: 65; Vasileva, 2011).

There have long been significant movements of people between particular European countries – for example, between Ireland and Britain, or between Italy and Germany. However, the enlargement of the EU to 27 states has expanded the range and scope of intra-EU migration flows (Favell, 2008). In 2004, Eurostat estimated that there were 6.3 million EU nationals living in the EU-15, but outside their country of origin (Braun and Recchi, 2009: 86). By 2010, Eurostat estimated that over 12.3 million EU-27 nationals were living outside their country of origin, but still within the EU (Vasileva, 2011). These newer migration movements are discussed in a growing body of literature, with a particular focus on migration from Poland to the UK (Burrell, 2009, 2010; Stenning and Dawley, 2009; see also Datta, 2009; Favell, 2008; Spencer et al., 2007). Other forms of intra-EU migration, such as student, retirement and lifestyle migration have also been considered in detail (see, for example, Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; Bott, 2004; Findlay et al., 2006; King et al., 2000). However, as Braun and Recchi point out, 'we know surprisingly little about the objective and subjective profile of the emerging population of free-moving Europeans' (Braun and Recchi, 2009: 85). There are also limits to our knowledge of the experiences of these free-moving Europeans, particularly in relation to their experiences of integration. In particular, the broader question of integration is rarely considered for intra-EU migrants. This is made clear by the European Common Basic Principles of Integration, which apply specifically to third-country nationals. The result is that the goal of integration, which is crucial to social cohesion across the EU, is often defined in a way that excludes a key section of the population of any EU country: intra-EU migrants. It is this gap that our paper seeks to address.

## Defining integration

The question of integration, broadly defined as how 'newcomers to a country become part of society' (Castles et al., 2002: 112–113), is of central importance to contemporary Europe since freedom of movement of EU citizens within the borders of the EU is a cornerstone of EU legislation. Socially, this is rationalized by invoking a common or shared European identity. Essentially, intra-EU migrants are characterized as mobile individuals 'at home' within EU borders. However, to date there is little research on how this assumption of a common European identity facilitates and affects integration. The question of integration also takes on a new sense of urgency in the current economic climate, as economic recession coupled with political instability may make it more difficult for newcomers to become part of a society, particularly if that society is becoming more exclusionary, protectionist or xenophobic.

Although much of the research has pointed out that integration defined as becoming part of a society is difficult to quantify or assess (for some attempts, see Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003; Koopmans, 2010; Olwig, 2011; Wills et al., 2009), research across a wide range of national contexts has highlighted a number of common obstacles to integration. These include legal status, linguistic competence, recognition of qualifications, restricted access to employment, housing and other social services, and limits to political participation (see, for example, Phillips, 2010; Spencer, 2011; Vermeulen and Penninx, 2000). Other than legal status, which is relatively straightforward for most EU nationals living within the borders of the EU, a growing body of research in the wake of EU enlargement suggests that many migrants from the EU-10 face all the other obstacles. Their struggle to become part of the societies they have moved to is hampered by lack of local linguistic skills, limited or restricted employment opportunities, and difficulties in accessing housing and social services, as well as limited opportunities for political participation (Ciupijus, 2011; Kahanec and Zimmermann, 2009). We argue that the failure to understand the experiences of intra-EU migrants under the broader rubric of integration has

**Table 1.** Core domains of integration

Categories	Domains
Markers and means	Employment, housing, education, health
Social connection	Social bridges, social bonds, social links
Facilitators	Language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability
Foundation	Rights and citizenship

Source: Ager and Strang (2008): 170.

longer-term implications for social cohesion within the EU.

In this paper, we focus on pathways to integration for recent EU migrants to Ireland. By pathways, we mean both the routes by which migrants come to Ireland and the routes they take to becoming part of Irish society. Whereas other work focuses on pathways to incorporation once migrants arrive in a country (see Glick Schiller, 2008), we argue that pathways to integration begin with the original motivation for migration. In identifying these pathways, we also highlight the types of obstacles to integration that exist. Although there are attempts to assess integration as a process and an outcome across a range of EU countries, these most often focus on policy. For example, MIPEX (the Migrant Policy Index) assesses the extent to which countries facilitate migrant integration across a range of policy realms, such as labour market, education and political participation (see [www.mipex.eu](http://www.mipex.eu)). Our work offers a complementary perspective, in that we focus on integration as a lived experience. In investigating integration as a lived experience, we draw on the work of Ager and Strang (2008), who use an inductive approach to identify core domains of integration. They suggest that these core domains fall into four interrelated categories: foundations; facilitators; social connections; and markers and means (see Table 1).

These are wide-ranging categories that have broad relevance but, as Ager and Strang observe, need to be adjusted and calibrated for specific local and national contexts (2008: 185). In this paper, we

adapt the findings of Ager and Strang to a specific context: the experiences of integration of EU migrants in Ireland. This builds on previous work where we used these categories as the basis for a study of integration among four migrant groups in Ireland: Chinese, Lithuanian, Indian and Nigerian (Migration and Citizenship Research Initiative (MCRI), 2008). In that research, we found that EU migrants receive scant mention in public discussions of integration in Ireland: 'there are some provisions made for migrants from outside the EU [but] migration within the EU receives little or no attention' (MCRI, 2008: 20).

In discussing the specific context of EU migrants in Ireland, we draw on data gathered as part of a broader qualitative research project. This project was conducted between 2008 and 2011, and focused on the experiences of 60 recent migrants to Ireland. In all, 39 of the participants in the project were EU nationals, from 10 different countries (see Table 2).

We chose people to take part based on their year of arrival in Ireland, and included people who had moved to Ireland in 2004 or in 2007. Participants thus had spent between one and five years in Ireland before their first involvement in the project. We also used a longitudinal approach to our research. Although definitions and practices of longitudinal research differ significantly, for the purposes of our research project this meant that we generally

**Table 2.** Research participants, by nationality, gender and year of arrival

	2004		2007		Total
	M	F	M	F	
Finland	0	1	0	0	1
France	0	0	1	1	2
Germany	0	1	0	2	3
Italy	1	2	3	3	9
Netherlands	0	1	0	0	1
Poland	3	4	2	0	9
Slovakia	0	0	1	0	1
Slovenia	0	0	0	1	1
Spain	0	0	1	0	1
UK	3	3	3	2	11
Total	7	12	11	9	39

interviewed participants twice over the course of the project.<sup>2</sup> Whereas first interviews were semi-structured, second interviews were unstructured and related to the specific experiences of the participant as told to us previously. All but one interview were conducted in English, by at least one of the authors. The interviews were transcribed and analysed through the identification of key themes suggested by Ager and Strang's domains of integration. As a result of this approach, we encountered changes, over time, in how people understood their experiences of becoming part of a society. This dynamic qualitative research method differs from much other research on integration, which tends to focus on the narration of experiences or the policy landscape *at a particular point in time*. Thus, our research highlights the ways in which the relationships between different domains of integration change over time and the implications of these changes for social cohesion more broadly.

While our analysis was shaped by the work of Ager and Strang, we found that three broad issues were given most attention by the people who participated in our research. The first was cultural issues (including, though not limited to, language); the second was social interaction; and the third was employment. They correspond to three of the categories and four of the domains listed in Table 1, specifically facilitators (language and cultural knowledge); social connection (bridges and bonds); and markers and means (employment). However, these issues were important in the stories people told about moving to Ireland, as well as in the stories people told about their lives in Ireland. As a result, we see these as pathways to cultural, social and economic integration, where people's experiences are shaped by the specific pathways they followed to enter Ireland as well as by their encounters in Ireland. In the following sections, we discuss these pathways to integration as narrated by our research participants, and then focus on what our research revealed about the dynamics of integration for intra-EU migrants in Ireland.

## Pathways to integration

Intra-EU migration is often characterised as temporary or circular. Favell, for instance, suggests that

Eastern Europeans are 'regional "free movers" *not* immigrants' (2008: 703). This characterisation of intra-EU migrants is present in Ireland, where some studies suggest that migrants from the EU-10 'may view migration as being temporary' (Barrett, 2009: 156). This perception of migration as temporary is linked, in popular discourse, to an understanding of migration as economic. In Ireland, much of the political discussion about migration essentially treats migrants as economic units concerned primarily with capital maximization. As levels of unemployment rise in Ireland, and as wage levels fall, the assumption is that many recent migrants will leave Ireland because it is no longer economically advantageous for them to remain in the country. This assumption is not challenged in recent academic work that, despite some caveats, suggests 'the reaction to job losses by immigrants has been to out-migrate' (Barrett and Kelly, 2012: 109).

These assumptions of economic migration were not evident in our research. In contrast, of the 39 EU migrants who participated in this project, just eight had moved to Ireland for work. Instead, the significant majority explained their move in social and/or cultural terms. Social reasons for moving to Ireland were primarily linked to romantic or family relationships. In total, 10 participants described their move to Ireland primarily in social terms. However, cultural reasons for moving to Ireland were most numerous. These included learning and improving knowledge of English, short-term study, or the desire for new experiences or adventure. In total, 21 people prioritized cultural reasons in their discussion of why they moved to Ireland. In this way, our research findings mirror those from a more extensive survey of European migration to Berlin, which also found that economic reasons are not paramount, and that social and cultural reasons are more important (Verwiebe, 2011). The importance of non-economic factors has also been identified in recent studies in the UK (see Burrell, 2009, 2010; Perrons et al., 2010). In many instances, people highlighted one reason as being most important, but acknowledged that other factors were also relevant in their decision to move to Ireland. For example, several Italians told us that they came to Ireland because they had been unemployed in Italy and were looking for new opportunities. It was social connections – word of mouth from

other Italians – that led them to move to Ireland rather than elsewhere. Others, who moved to Ireland primarily for economic or cultural reasons, described feeling a connection to the country, often because of historic family ties. For example, one interviewee from the UK with Irish grandparents said ‘for a few years I had a kind of affinity with the place’ (2004UK03).<sup>3</sup> Reasons for migration are important, because they result in different sets of expectations for migrants. People who move for social reasons, such as romantic or family relationships, have a different outlook from those who move for economic or cultural reasons, and the different expectations shape the extent to which people become part of a society (for an overview of family migration in Europe, see Kofman, 2004; Scott and Cartledge, 2009; on cultural migration see Findlay et al., 2012; Halfacree, 2004; on the complexity of motives for migration see Niedomysl, 2011). These three key framing factors – cultural, social and economic – thus influence the decisions people make to migrate. Our research shows that they also influence the decisions to remain in a particular place, as well as the experiences of living in that place. As we will show, the changing relationships between the economic, social and cultural experiences of intra-EU migrants living in Ireland shape the extent to which they become part of Irish society, and also their desire to remain in Ireland.

### *Cultural pathways*

Cultural reasons for migration – learning or improving knowledge of English, study, or the desire for new experiences or adventure – are often short-term in scope. Cultural explanations were prevalent when people initially described their reasons for moving to Ireland, particularly those from countries other than the UK. Learning the English language was one of the most important reasons people provided. For instance, a young woman from Poland who had graduated from teacher training college in 2004 applied for waitressing jobs in Ireland in order to improve her English. As she told us:

I wanted to go and live in an English-speaking country. So just before I graduated I started sending applications for jobs and that because we joined the European Union

then. And there was a small hotel in [Co. Wicklow] who responded as the first and only person, so I had a quick interview over the phone and the woman told me to come over and she would be happy to take me on board as an employee.

(2004POL07)

A second important cultural reason for moving to Ireland was to study. Some interviewees came to Ireland initially for a short period, often on exchange programmes to study language, and then decided to spend a longer time in the country. For example, a young Italian man who studied English in Ireland for two months in 2003 really enjoyed the experience, and applied for postgraduate study in an Irish university the following year. He has been living, studying and working in Ireland since (2004IT03). A young French woman moved to Ireland in 2007 on a short-term work placement programme funded by the French government, and remained in Ireland when the programme ended (2007FR01).

Others moved to Ireland because they wanted to change something in their lives. For example, an Italian woman in her twenties told us that she and a friend came to Dublin in the summer of 2004, to visit another friend, as a kind of adventure. After returning to Italy and finishing her university degree the same year, she was ready for a change and therefore came back to Dublin:

after the degree I was ready to do some kind of long-term experience but I didn't really want to go in a place that I didn't know because that time I was alone. I had no friends, no boyfriend, nothing. So I just arrived in Dublin at the beginning of November 2004 and I found a job as a waitress.

(2004IT01)

Desire for something new also motivated people who had already started a career in their home country. One of our Polish interviewees was in his late twenties when he came to Ireland in 2007. He gave up a promising career in Poland because he and his wife wanted to do something different. They chose Ireland because it was an English-speaking country. Another Polish woman gave up an interesting local authority job in order to change things in her life. It was difficult for her to find similar employment in

Ireland because of her lack of knowledge of the Irish language,<sup>4</sup> so she initially made a living as a shop assistant in a fruit and vegetable store instead. Yet others cited both a desire to gain new experiences and economic factors as reasons for relocating to Ireland, as in the case of the young Polish man who told us ‘the main thing was English language because I wanted to improve my English and get some experience and some money’ (2004POL05).

Despite the prevalence of cultural explanations when people initially described their reasons for moving to Ireland, these became less important as people reflected, over time, on their experiences of living in Ireland. In the second interviews we conducted, people were more likely to focus on the ways in which they were experiencing social and/or economic integration. In contrast, discussions of cultural integration tended to focus on cultural norms in Ireland, and how they differed from or were similar to people’s experiences in their home countries. In this way, some of the key cultural reasons for migration – language, experience, adventure, study – moved to the background of migrant narratives, and became facilitators of integration rather than indicative of integration in their own right.

### Social pathways

Ager and Strang describe social integration in the form of social connections: both social bonds (with family or ‘like-ethnics’) and social bridges (with the ‘native population’). Strong social connections – both social bonds (with family or ‘like-ethnics’) and social bridges (with the ‘native’ population) – are described as central to the process of integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). Those who moved to Ireland as part of a family unit were more likely to emphasize social bonds. This was particularly the case for people with Irish partners: they often spend free time with their partner’s friends or family, as in the case of this young Polish woman describing her social life in a small town:

Sometimes with Polish or Irish because we have a few Irish friends or sometimes we would go with his family, his sisters or his cousins or whatever.

(2004POL01)

Social bonds with like-ethnics were most likely to be emphasized by those migrants for whom English was not a first language. These bonds took many forms. These included socializing in each other’s homes, participation in cultural activities (for example, cultural associations), or involvement in religious activities. Others spoke of the importance of media, such as magazines or newspapers, or of seeking out shops where they could buy familiar food. Interviewees with children emphasized the importance of places where their children could learn about language and culture, while others spoke of feeling at ease with like-ethnics, as in the case of the Italian man who said ‘most of my friends are Italian ... [with them] I feel more confident in the sense I am sure I am not doing something which is socially wrong’ (2004IT03b). This mirrors the findings of research on recent intra-European migration from the EU-10 to the UK, which emphasizes the importance of social bonds: the role of social networks, the role of institutions (e.g. the Catholic church), or the development of community structures (e.g. schools and shops) (Gill, 2010; Rabikowska and Burrell, 2009; Ryan et al., 2008, 2009). However, social bonds were also important for some native English speakers. For example, a woman from the UK spoke about her relief at having new English neighbours:

But we can relate to them great because they have the same sort of sense of humour as us and if we are sitting there moaning about Brian Cowen [the former Prime Minister] or that, whereas the locals might get a bit upset that we are insulting the Irish, we can do that amongst the four of us because we understand what we mean.

(2004UK04)

Social bonds sometimes came at the expense of social bridges: some people commented that spending time with like-ethnics meant they were not able to develop their English language skills. Others actively eschewed like-ethnics, either commenting that they did not migrate to spend time only with people from their own country, or alternatively making disparaging comments about their fellow nationals. One Polish man said of other Poles that ‘they want to live in kind of a ghetto’ (2004POL02), while a Polish

woman compared Poles unfavourably with other national groups in Ireland, saying that they had no community spirit. 'At this stage when I walk in the street and I hear Polish language I don't speak Polish language, I just keep my mouth shut', she said (2004POL07).

There were important differences between those who moved to Ireland as part of a family unit, and those who moved to Ireland with friends or alone. Those who moved to Ireland alone or with friends initially emphasized social bridges. They spoke of their efforts to make friends at work, in their local communities and through shared activities. People who moved to Ireland alone often used activity-focused groups and associations, as in the case of this interviewee from the UK who spoke of his difficulties in meeting people and forming new friendships:

Interviewee: [...] It is hard sometimes to know where to meet people.

Interviewer: Are there any places that you have found good for meeting people so far?

Interviewee: I have been going to a thing, up to last year, to Toastmasters, which is for public speaking and there is a social side to it as well, so that will be starting again in a couple of weeks so I hope to start going to that again.

(2004UK03)

For those who moved alone or with friends, work occasionally provided a means for forging social bridges. However, most people interacted with colleagues only at work and rarely outside work. Only a few interviewees stated that they regularly socialized with colleagues outside work, though in some cases companies actively encouraged socializing among colleagues by putting on various activities throughout the year such as barbeques and outings during the weekend that brought people together on a regular basis. If a company had a fair proportion of non-local employees, especially if they came from

the same European regional background and also arrived at roughly the same time, its employees tended to make up a much stronger social network of people who would also interact outside work times. In other companies, especially if Irish employees dominated, typical non-work-based interactions were mostly restricted to meeting in the pub after work. However, over time we noticed the extent to which social bonds were joined by, or in some instances replaced by, social bridges. This was particularly the case when people formed romantic relationships with Irish nationals, which gave them pathways to developing social bridges with other Irish. This, however, was not always straightforward, and some interviewees reported difficulties with these relationships. As one woman said of her Irish husband, 'I am disappointed in his family' (2004NL01b).

This sense of disappointment was repeated by a number of interviewees, who struggled to develop meaningful social bridges with Irish nationals. Many interviewees commented on the friendliness of Irish people and, elsewhere, friendliness has been described as a key facilitator of social bridges (Ager and Strang, 2008: 180). Yet, for our interviewees, friendliness was often seen as quite superficial. As an Italian woman said:

I found quite all the times that it is very easy to hang on with Irish people but then it's not easy to become real friends. To know really who they are, what they want. At some stage you can't be closer to them.

(2004IT01)

Others echoed this observation, though also commenting on the quality of friendships with Irish people once they had become 'real friends'. The kinds of spaces where social interaction take place may contribute to this. People certainly visited pubs, but these do not appear to be a prime venue for social interaction for most Europeans (and non-Europeans). Visits to pubs usually happened with Irish friends, while trips and local excursions and activities such as outdoor activities mostly involved non-Irish friends and partners. Socializing around food, such as dinners and barbeques in the home, also appears to be equally common among non-Irish Europeans

**Table 3.** Occupation of interviewees at time of interview

Occupation category	Number	Type of position
Construction	4	Architect, engineer, technician
Wholesale and retail	2	Sales
Hotels and restaurants	4	Porter, waiter, receptionist, bar staff
Banking and finance	5	Bank, insurance, administrator
Real estate, renting, business activities	4	Administrator, call-centre, IT project manager
Education	3	Lecturer, administrator
Health and social work	2	Doctor, nurse
Other community, social and personal services	4	Childcare, trade union, charity
Students	4	Part-time work in childcare, retail, education
Other	2	Consultant, artist
Not employed	5	Retired, homemaker, unemployed

as among non-Europeans (MCRI, 2008: 113–119). One Polish interviewee described the difference in this way:

Polish people, when I am making the friends, the first thing they are going to do is they are going to invite you to the house. Irish people are going to invite you to the pub.

(2004POL03b)

This difference led to many interviewees questioning the nature of their friendships with Irish people, who in turn may not understand the perceived difference between socializing at home and in a public place, and the implications of this for the development of a harmonious relationship between migrants and the host community.

### *Economic pathways*

One of the key routes to economic integration, for migrants, is through employment: ‘perhaps the most researched area of integration’ (Ager and Strang, 2008: 170). While just eight of our research participants had moved to Ireland primarily for employment, 36 had experience of paid work in the country, while two had worked in a voluntary capacity. Table 3 shows the occupational category and the types of position held by participants at the time of the first interview.

In general, the people we interviewed fell into two broad categories: those who had arranged work before moving to the country, and those who sought work on arrival in Ireland. The small number who had a job offer on arrival in Ireland generally started work right away, in areas that corresponded to their level of qualifications. They also typically stayed in the same job for long periods of time, and either rarely or never changed jobs. This was particularly the case for migrants from the UK, who were generally happy with their experiences at work. However, some reported that they had problems getting their qualifications recognized and expressed concern about de-skilling. One woman expressed concern that her specialized nursing training from the UK was not being properly used and recognized at the regional hospital where she works. As she said, ‘if I had known what my career was going to be like here I don’t think we would have moved. That could be just because it is a very small hospital. I could be doing a total injustice to the other big hospitals, but I have been seriously de-skilled since moving here’ (2004UK04).

However, the majority of interviewees looked for work on arrival in Ireland. Many, particularly those who moved to Ireland in 2004, found it quite easy to get a job. However, this was rarely in their area of expertise. People with university-level education and, in some cases, several years of work experience work(ed) as cleaners or porters in hotels or as shop assistants. A number of interviewees from Poland



and Italy, most of whom moved to Ireland for cultural reasons, explained this in terms of their language competencies: they felt that on arrival their level of English was not sufficient for the kinds of job they were qualified for. Others told us that service industry jobs were the only ones available when they moved to Ireland. Their stories mirror other research, in Ireland and in the UK, which highlights sectoral concentration and underemployment for recent EU-10 migrants (see, for example, Cook et al., 2011; Kropiwek and King-Riain, 2006; MCRI, 2008; Stenning and Dawley, 2009; Wills et al., 2009). Our research adds to this literature, suggesting that migrants from some EU-15 countries, specifically Italy, also experience underemployment.

Most of the people we interviewed who had to do less skilled work initially were eventually able to secure jobs that corresponded more closely to their educational qualifications. This typically happened after they had obtained experience in the Irish work force for one to two years, made local contacts and/or become more fluent in English. Some actively looked for jobs that were more appropriate for their level of qualification while others diversified into new areas of work through contacts in previous jobs. One of the Polish women, for instance, explained that she got her job as a union organizer in the construction industry more by chance, through an office job in a construction company. While working in the office job she heard about and subsequently became involved in a cross-border union project for migrants. Another Polish man told us that his career took off only after he had spent about 18 months learning English with Irish friends and attended a six-month F S<sup>5</sup> course. This experience of trading-up over time has also been noted in the context of EU-10 migrants in the UK (Burrell, 2010: 300). Only a minority of people were not able to secure a qualified job and therefore continued in the service industry. This is the case of one of our Polish interviewees, who came to Ireland just after he had finished an MA in marine biology. He got a job as a night porter at a big Dublin hotel soon after his arrival to support himself, but, despite doing voluntary work in projects related to his area of expertise, he was not able to obtain a job closer to his qualifications during his five years in Ireland. An Italian woman who is a

librarian by training has been equally 'unlucky'. She moved to Ireland because her husband was transferred by his multinational employer, but has only been able to get voluntary work. She recently decided to upgrade her skills and change her qualifications by doing a Master's degree at a local college. An Italian woman who moved to Cork with her husband in 2007 also told us that her training in the area of early childcare of several years and her two years of work experience in this area are not recognized by Irish authorities. Since her arrival she has been forced to work as a nanny at a much lower salary and to follow an expensive and time-consuming multi-year training course despite her extensive training in the area.

Ager and Strang (2008) highlight a range of ways in which migrants may encounter barriers to securing employment. These include non-recognition of qualifications and/or work experience, as well as limited language proficiency or cultural knowledge. Certainly, these themes emerged for many of the people we interviewed for whom English was not their first language, such as those from Poland and Italy. However, we also found other barriers to securing employment, for example in the case of women with young children, who had limited access to affordable childcare and thus limited opportunities to work. We noted a number of difficulties that European migrants encountered once in employment, ranging from de-skilling to discrimination. During the Celtic Tiger era, many of these difficulties were avoided through employment mobility: people changed jobs as a means of improving their working conditions. This mobility has become more restricted, and many European migrants now have fewer opportunities to move jobs. We return to this point at a later stage in the paper.

## The dynamics of integration

The use of a qualitative, longitudinal method offered new insights into integration as a dynamic process for European migrants in Ireland. In particular, our research offers an alternative view on the complex relationship between cultural, social and economic pathways to integration, and on how it changes over time. Our emphasis is on lived experience, as

narrated by the migrants who participated in our research. From this perspective, two important points emerge. The first is that the understanding of the importance of economic, social and cultural factors changes over time, and this is apparent in the changing narratives people construct to describe and explain their experiences as migrants. The second is that improvement in one aspect of people's lives can mitigate deterioration in other aspects, in a tactical approach to becoming part of a new society. We discuss each of these points in turn.

### *Changing narratives of integration*

Two broad trajectories of change were apparent in the stories people told us about their lives in Ireland. The first related to their personal lives; the second to broader socio-economic conditions. In relation to personal lives, people emphasized changing social bridges and social bonds. This was particularly the case for those who had formed new romantic relationships or who had ended previous relationships, but other friendships were also highlighted. For example, a Polish man we interviewed had, between the first and second meeting, 'suspended' his marriage (his wife lived in Poland) (2004POL02b). When we first met, he talked about living in two countries being 'the most difficult part of my life'. By the second meeting, Poland did not figure prominently in his narrative, and he portrayed Dublin in a new light:

I like Dublin, this is my city. I like it because of the crowd on the street. I like plenty of people around me. I like the lights down here, being independent ... The only thing I don't like in Ireland is rain.

(2004POL02b)

Meanwhile, a young Polish woman had developed a relationship with an Irish man whom she described as 'the right guy really'. They were about to travel to Poland to meet her family for the first time. Yet she said 'but if he wasn't here I would still stay in Dublin ... I don't think I will go back to Poland to live there at this stage of my life, I would like to stay here, this is my home' (2004POL07b). For this woman, social bridges had become increasingly important over the period between the two interviews.

In particular, her friendship with an older Irish woman she met through volunteering had become very important to her sense of belonging.

When personal lives were relatively unchanged, people's stories often focused on the broader socio-economic conditions in Ireland. Our research spanned the advent of the recession in Ireland, the country's bail-out by the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and EU, a dramatic rise in levels of unemployment, and a deterioration in working conditions for workers in both public and private sectors (Gilmartin and Migge, 2011). Broad discussions of the crisis in Ireland punctuated many of the second interviews we carried out. One woman from the UK, who worked as a nurse in a hospital in rural Ireland, expressed forthright views on the crisis, saying the government 'should have let [a bank] go bust in the first place' (2004UK04b), while a man from the UK spoke of the changes that had happened since he moved to Ireland in 2004, saying 'the swagger has gone, the Celtic Tiger confidence has disappeared' (2004UK02b). However, underpinning all of these general narratives of crisis was a concern with how this would affect people's lives. Often, the general became the particular, as people spoke about how they were finding it more difficult to make ends meet, or about their fears for the future. In these ways, the crisis intersected with personal lives in ways that were often unsettling and upsetting. The man from the UK was married to an Irish woman; together, they were bringing up three children. When we first met, he was more upbeat. Even though his work in an architecture firm had been scaled back and his pay cut, his wife was about to qualify as a teacher and he was hopeful for their future. By the time of our second meeting, his wife had been unable to find work, he was fearful of losing his job in another round of redundancies, and he spoke of their 'subsistence life'. Though neither of them wanted to move, he told us that they were actively trying to migrate to the UK, despite the wrench that would mean for his wife and their two oldest sons (2004UK02b).

Through these trajectories of change, our qualitative approach highlighted some key insights into integration as a lived experience for European migrants in Ireland. The first is the way in which people's experiences change over time, for reasons

that are both personal and structural. The second is the apparent disjuncture between people's objective experiences and their subjective sense of being part of a society, as well as their use of narrative to rationalize that disjuncture. This understanding of integration cannot be easily measured using standard quantitative techniques. However, insights into the dynamic and experiential aspects of integration are crucially important for understanding both how people become part of a society as well as the factors that may inhibit this process (Phillimore and Goodson, 2008: 321–322).

### *The tactics of integration*

In their discussion of low-paid migrants in London, Datta et al. (2007) suggest that they use a range of tactics to cope with their situation, including generating additional income and developing alternative support networks as a buffer against social exclusion. Datta et al. use the term 'tactics' in opposition to the more commonly used concept of migrant coping strategies. Drawing on the work of De Certeau, they argue that the use of tactics is more appropriate, since tactics represent 'the art of the weak' (Datta et al., 2007: 409; see also De Certeau, 1988: 37). This distinction between strategy and tactics is also appropriate for our discussion of European migrants in Ireland. Integration, in the context of Ireland, represents strategy at work: 'it postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats ... can be managed' (De Certeau, 1988: 36). Thus, the broad question of integration – of becoming part of a society – is seen as irrelevant for European migrants, who are understood to be part of a shared space called Europe. In more specific terms, there has been a general failure to operationalize integration in Ireland, with the country described as having a *laissez-faire* approach to integration policy (Boucher, 2010; Maguire and Titley, 2010). Regardless, any statements that are made on integration deliberately exclude people from the EU, who make up two thirds of Ireland's migrant population.

Despite the strategic attempts to create a common, shared 'we' of Europe, European migrants in Ireland – from a range of backgrounds – were made

increasingly conscious of the outsider status of migrants in the course of our research (Koefoed and Simonsen, 2011). Speaking of the changes he had witnessed in Ireland, an interviewee from the UK said 'you see evidence of it within the media and you hear it on radio phone-ins and people getting on their high horse about foreigners coming in and sponging off the State' (2004UK02B), while others spoke of experiences of discrimination towards migrants or favouritism towards Irish nationals in their workplaces. The contrast between an effective lack of recognition of EU migrants as migrants at the level of policy and a hyper-awareness of migrant status at the level of everyday practice means that intra-EU migrants have to use tactical approaches to become part of Irish society. These tactics are coming under pressure as the crisis in Ireland continues.

The first set of tactics relates to economic integration. Key to this is employment mobility, particularly for those who arranged jobs after moving to Ireland. In order to improve their economic situation, this group of people changed jobs regularly for better pay, conditions, and to get experience in areas more directly related to their training and qualifications. For example, an Italian woman who moved to Ireland in 2007 worked in restaurants, in a shop, and in customer service; studied for an Irish third level diploma; and now works in a bank (2007IT03). A Polish man first worked for a recruitment company, before getting a job as an analyst for a political party (2007POL01). However, this tactic was becoming more difficult. By the time of the second interviews, many people reported feeling trapped in their job, and employment mobility no longer seemed an option. As a young German woman said, 'it is risky to stay out of a job and you never know how long it will take' (2007GER02b). As a result, people reported taking second jobs and cutting back on expenses, while also highlighting the extent to which their experiences were similar to those of Irish people also affected by the crisis. To some extent, people reported an increased use of cultural tactics in these circumstances, such as focusing on language skills or on upskilling or retraining in Ireland. However, these were seen as primarily ways of improving economic circumstances, rather than of intrinsic value.

The second set of tactics relates to social integration. Many interviewees who reported a significant deterioration in their economic circumstances were willing to tolerate this, because of an improvement in their social integration. This had occurred for people who had managed to expand or strengthen their network of friends, as well as for those in romantic relationships. This tactic was particularly striking in the case of a young man from the UK, who worked as an architect. When we first met, he was non-committal about living in Ireland, and was trying to cope with a difficult work situation – architectural practices have suffered significantly with the collapse of the property bubble in Ireland. By the time of our second meeting, his economic situation had deteriorated further. His employer had made 80 out of a staff of 120 redundant, and he had taken a 40% pay cut and described himself as ‘working to live’. However, in the meantime he had developed a new relationship with a woman from Ireland, and he spoke about being very happy in Ireland and not wanting to leave; he claimed that, if he had to leave because of unsustainable economic conditions, it would only be for a short while until things would get better (2007UK01b). A woman from the UK, who had moved to Ireland because of her husband’s employment, had put considerable effort into building social networks for herself and her children. As a consequence, though their income had dropped significantly as a result of the recession, she was very happy with their life in Ireland. ‘I would love to stay’, she said, ‘because as a family we are really happy here and the children are really happy and doing well at school and we have lots of nice friends and a lovely life’ (2007UK02b). Though we have just highlighted two instances here, the use of narratives of social integration to gloss over or minimize growing levels of economic marginalization was one of the most striking aspects of the second set of interviews.

However, in instances where neither economic nor social tactics were being particularly effective, a third tactic was being suggested by some interviewees. This was mobility: moving from Ireland to another country, which may or may not be the country of origin. People often mentioned the prospect of moving on in the course of our research, but did not often act on this. By the end of the research project,

three of the 39 interviewees had left Ireland, and two were about to leave – mostly to study or work in other countries, with just one moving as a response to sustained unemployment. Many more spoke about leaving Ireland as an option, but seemed reluctant to act on it. These competing desires are shown here, in the words of a woman from the Netherlands, married to an Irish man. Her husband had to commute to Holland for work, and she was living in rural Ireland with their two children, feeling isolated. She said:

We still have the discussion about ever going back to Holland, I don’t think it will ever happen because he is happier here in Ireland and the language problem and he loves where he is from and I don’t think he will ever find that in Holland. But I do find it a bit of a disconcerting idea that I will never go back to Holland ... I feel sorry that my children won’t have that same upbringing.

(2004NL01)

Recourse to return or onward migration worked as a form of narrative insurance, but the practicalities and implications of moving, particularly for those with Irish partners, often seemed insurmountable.

## Conclusion

Despite the rapid increase in intra-European migration, little attention is paid to these migrants’ experiences of integration. This is because, at European and national policy levels, intra-European migrants are seen as being ‘at home’ within Europe. However, if integration is defined as newcomers becoming part of a society, then integration – both presence and absence – is equally relevant to intra-European migration and migrants.

Our focus in this paper is on the lived experiences of a small number of recent intra-European migrants in Ireland. In particular, we wanted to understand their subjective experiences of moving to and living in Ireland, and the implications of these experiences for how they might become, or not become, part of Irish society, thus taking a more dynamic approach to the broader question of integration. Our analysis of the experiences is framed by Ager and Strang’s articulation of domains of integration (2008). However,

our discussion focuses on the key domains as articulated by our research participants: language in particular as a pathway to cultural integration; bonds and bridges as a pathway to social integration; and employment as a pathway to economic integration. Our use of a longitudinal qualitative method allowed us to observe changes in people's understanding of the importance of each of these domains and their role in the dynamics of integration. In particular, while cultural reasons dominated in people's decisions to move to Ireland, it was economic and social pathways that came to the fore over time. Our research also identified a number of obstacles to integration as experienced by research participants. In terms of employment, we saw evidence of de-skilling and downward mobility. While employment mobility initially gave migrants a way of dealing with these issues, this has been restricted by the advent of the recession in Ireland. In terms of social bridges, people talked about the difficulties of making friends with Irish people, though they occasionally overcame this through developing romantic relationships with Irish nationals and, through this, extending their network of Irish friends. Improvements in social connections, we found, could mitigate deterioration in other aspects of people's lives, most notably in employment and in economic wellbeing. However, when there were no significant changes in social connections, economic hardships were felt more intensely, and sometimes led to talk of onward or return migration. Yet this was not always a clear option, particularly for those with Irish partners who were reluctant to leave the country.

In the absence of integration initiatives that are specifically targeted at intra-EU migrants in Ireland, migrants are developing tactical ways of becoming part of Irish society. However, tactics, by their nature, are narrow in scope and effectiveness, and they provide a very limited replacement for a wider acknowledgement of the realities of migrant life in Ireland through appropriate policy formulation and implementation. Our research highlights a number of ways in which intra-EU migrants in Ireland struggle to become part of Irish society. Yet these are not identified as matters of structural or policy concerns, and the onus to overcome these obstacles is thus

placed on the individual. However, if integration is, as the European Common Basic Principles suggest, a 'two-way process', the other part of that process must also be addressed. This paper, with its focus on integration as lived experience, offers a starting point for this engagement, with relevance not just for Ireland, but for social cohesion across Europe more widely. With over 12.3 million intra-EU migrants at a time of economic crisis across Europe, the imperative of becoming part of a society takes on a new and grave urgency.

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### Notes

1. The term 'EU-10' is used in Ireland to refer to the 10 countries that joined the EU in 2004.
2. Saldaña (2003) provides a detailed discussion of time in the context of longitudinal research, and suggests – hesitantly – that nine months is the minimum time required for a longitudinal study (see Saldaña, 2003: 1–8).
3. Interviewees are identified by the year of arrival in Ireland (either 2004 or 2007) and by a nationality identifier (for example, NL for Netherlands).
4. Proficiency in the Irish language is required for many public sector jobs in Ireland.
5. FÁS is the Irish National Training and Employment Authority. It is state funded, and provides training courses and recruitment services.

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