



One-Stop-Shop and the Delivery of Public Services for Migrants: Learning for Ireland

Roundtable: 4 July 2008 at Buswells Hotel, 10-1pm

1. Welcome – Denise Charlton, ICI

Denise Charlton, CEO of the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), welcomed all participants to the roundtable. She noted that the context for organising the roundtable was that the ICI was involved in working with ACIDI, the Portuguese High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities, who provide assistance to migrants through a One-Stop-Shop (OSS) and that the ICI wanted to take the opportunity to discuss and explore the OSS model further in how it might apply in the Irish context. This was partly motivated by the increasing numbers of migrants seeking assistance from the ICI in the past year and the desire to ensure continued quality service provision and clear access to legal and social rights and entitlements for migrants. The Office of the Minister for Integration has also visited ACIDI and has indicated in its policy statements that the OSS model is one worth exploring. The ICI is also part of a European project, which is exploring best practice in terms of service provision to migrants in six European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Germany and Ireland). The final report for this will be available in January 2009. The aim of this roundtable was therefore to learn more about the models that exist and to explore their relevance to the Irish situation in a practical sense.

2. Opening comments – Eleanor McClorey, Moderator

Eleanor McClorey noted the importance of the meeting in getting to connect with thinking on the themes of integration, information and international perspectives, and the importance of integrated practice across sectors and intelligent cross-sectoral planning.

3.1 Presentation by Leonie McCarthy, New Link - points of interest:

- Increased immigration to Peterborough took place at a time when services and local communities were not prepared. Services were inadequate, and high costs were incurred in attempting to provide support (interpreting etc). Tension became apparent in the community.
- It was noted that reassurance of the existing community was key to making the project work.
- Client details: it was recognised that first client contact presented a unique opportunity to get information from clients on a number of issues eg need for English language tuition, mapping skills, ensuring registration with a doctor, providing information on relevant community groups, providing assistance in forming a community group, accommodation etc.
- Noted the importance of, for example, getting landlords involved in referring people to the project as they were a key first point of contact for migrants.
- Noted the importance of educating the community in understanding cultural differences.
- Training has been provided to community groups in management and media to assist them to integrate into the community.

- Training has been provided to mediators/facilitators from migrant communities to liaise with the existing community and migrants in an attempt to resolve issues of concern and thereby alleviate tensions.
- Noted the importance of ensuring media pick up on positive stories.
- Referrals: the importance of follow up when referring a migrant on to another organisation was noted to ensure the appropriate action has been taken and that the migrant is satisfied with the service provided.

3.2 Presentation by Leonie McCarthy - points arising from questions and answers:

- It was clarified that the community mediators are paid.
- Rather than delivering all services required by migrants, New Link informs migrants how to access these services. This is important in allowing migrants to meet and interact with the existing community.
- It was noted that the UK government is more decentralised than the Irish government and a question was posed as to whether there are any state services brought together by the OSS. It was noted that there are not, and that there is a need for an integration body to be set up in the UK to look at integration across the country. The government has now set up a migration directorate which looks at more cross cutting co-operation across government departments.
- Noted the importance of putting a benchmarking process in place for the duration of the funding provided to them.
- Noted the importance of their myth-busting project (information sessions for residents etc).
- Noted the importance of addressing 'rubbing points' between existing community and migrants.
- Their database is web based so that it can be shared with other agencies in order to ensure appropriate service provision. Each migrant agrees that data may be shared.
- It was noted that quality of delivery of service can be achieved partly by showing the importance of the savings that can be made by delivering services appropriately.

4.1 Presentation by Catarina Reis Oliveira, ACIDI - points of interest:

- Framework of ACIDI – the High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities is a public administration body, which reports directly to the Portuguese Prime Minister. It is a cross-departmental structure which works with all other Ministries, and has the responsibility for co-ordinating their work on immigration and a mandate to do this.
- Public administration's initial lack of co-ordination indirectly resulted in migrants becoming illegal as the inadequacy of the system meant that migrants didn't have the time to keep returning.
- The OSS was set up under a right wing Portuguese government in both Lisbon and Porto.
- ACIDI is the umbrella organisation that has placed all Ministries in one building in order to provide information and services to migrants.
- Migrant associations were contacted to provide their own representatives to be part of the intercultural teams. Training is provided by ACIDI. Therefore, migrants are part of the solution and not part of the problem. They can have

direct contact with the neighbourhoods in which they live which has a multiplying effect in terms of the effectiveness of the OSS.

- Pre-sorting service: This is an initial service to gather all relevant information on a particular migrant into a database and to provide him/her with an immigrant card, which contains useful contact details. This allows the OSS to send text messages providing important information of which the migrant should be aware (for example, alerting of an upcoming visa expiration). The existence of a database entry for each migrant enables the OSS to view that migrant's history of presenting problems on subsequent visits, to ensure that the previous problem has been addressed. Not all database information is shared with all Ministries - a Ministry will only have access to information that is relevant to it. This is key to protecting client confidentiality. Data on a particular client is only deleted once a relative declares that the person is dead.
- Within the OSS building spaces for migrants have been developed to, for example, present their artistic work.

4.2 Presentation by Catarina Reis Oliveira - points arising from questions and answers:

- The Office of the Minister for Integration is excited by the concept and it noted interesting aspects to it, but it also noted the need to look at it carefully and understand why it works. It noted the challenge in bringing the OSS concept into an environment where there is no equivalent for citizens, as it is important that the opportunity for accessing services is seen to be equal.
- It was noted that the OSS statistics provided point to the number of visits per day, and therefore the need for the existence of the service. In addition, it was noted that a breakdown of figures to show revisits can be obtained.
- It was noted with regard to figures on undocumented migrants that ACIDI only gives informal figures as it is a state service. Informally, the percentage of undocumented migrants presenting would be around 20%. The OSS would assist these with trying to regularise.
- It was noted that a key argument in setting up the OSS in Portugal was that public institutions had been set up by the Portuguese government for emigrants abroad and therefore there was a need to be coherent and give the same rights to those who come to Portugal.
- Socio-cultural mediators are trained by ACIDI and must speak Portuguese as well as their own language. They are encouraged only to speak the language of the migrant if the migrant has very little Portuguese.
- The importance was noted of socio-cultural mediators being given the opportunity to sit on, for example, police groups in order to feed in the migrant voice to make sure that the mainstream is acting appropriately.
- A question was posed as to whether there is a mechanism to feed in data at policy level and if policy reflects the OSS experience, in particular in relation to undocumented migrants. It was noted that there have been important changes since the creation of the OSS. In enacting new laws, there is constant dialogue with immigrant organisations who give views, and then these are fed into parliament.
- The importance was noted of public campaigns to show migrants in a positive light and create awareness of their positive contributions to society.
- Concern was expressed about the issue of segregation of one part of the population into one building.
- It was noted that the OSS works on a local level in conjunction with 75 local support centres which work in partnership with it. These support centres

engage in their own activity programme, but part of their activities are funded by ACIDI.

- The importance of ACIDI in providing a human, friendly face was noted. In the early days, a complaints book was put in place in order to ensure quality of service and in particular the police worked in conjunction with the socio-cultural mediators in local support centres to ensure they were providing such a service.
- With regard to the success of the Support Officers, it was noted that some have been more successful than others. The role of, for example, the Family Reunification Support Officers and Legal Support Officers has been to reinforce the rule of the law – e.g. to liaise with the police if they have been taking too much time in processing an application.
- The issue was raised as to how to achieve a balance between mainstreaming and segregation of services. It was noted that in the context of ACIDI, Portugal originally had a mainstream service for both citizens and migrants in the form of the 'Citizens' Shops', but that this service proved to be inefficient for migrants. Therefore, a political decision was taken to provide specific services for migrants. An important aspect of this was a huge investment by ACIDI into public opinion polls on immigration and publicity campaigns to guarantee a positive reaction towards migrants.
- The Office of the Minister for Integration noted some reservations regarding separate service provision for migrants. It was noted that many important comments had been made regarding the structuring of the OSS in order to deliver seamless services. The concept is central to the thinking of government on what kind of strategy might best reflect the idea of providing information and useful service delivery.

5. Closing remarks – Denise Charlton, ICI

From the point of view of the ICI, the organisation became involved in order to look at the Portuguese model of service provision and also models in other jurisdictions. The ICI would share some of the concerns raised at the roundtable. The importance of ACIDI having a mandate over other Ministerial departments in its NGO/state approach was noted, as was the importance of recruiting the High Commissioner from the NGO sector. The ICI would like to look at whether the model is applicable to Ireland and whether there might be a possibility of long term service provision to migrants with state assistance (whether through funding or through a partnership approach). The ICI is still at the exploratory stage in relation to this.