

**The Problematic Marginalization of African Immigrants in Irish Society**

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Regards

Pamela

**Title**

**The Problematic Marginalization of African Immigrants in Irish Society.**

**Abstract**

This is a qualitative study that aims to highlight the problematic marginalization of African immigrants in Irish Society. It involves African immigrants that migrated to Ireland on both voluntary and forced basis. The study will analyze the African immigrant perceptions on the phenomenon of marginalization and the effects it imposes on their physical and psychological well-being. The aim is identify some of the issues that perpetuate this phenomenon through an exploration of African immigrant experiences at both social and personal levels since their arrival. This will involve an examination of African immigrant's economic position, that is, experiences on accessing the Irish labor market including professional level and other resources such as education and housing particularly in the current economic climate. The study will also focus its analysis on the role of current governmental policy, integration strategies and other social structures in eradicating the marginalization of African immigrants and promotion of multiculturalism.

### **Research Aims**

The aim of this study is to highlight the causes and existence of the problematic marginalization of African immigrants in Irish Society. Through qualitative analysis, this study will;

- Analyze African immigrant perceptions on the phenomenon of marginalization
- Analyze social structures such as integration strategies and explore participant personal experiences and some of the most common areas of experience
- Analyze the effects of marginalization at participant's personal and social level
- To discuss the role of Social Policy, that is, establishing whether factors of S.P. eradicate or perpetuate the phenomenon.

In the last few years, numerous research studies involving African immigrants have been conducted as well as published by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Equality Authority. Some of their researched studies are *Immigrants at Work: Ethnicity and Nationality in the Irish Labor Market* by (McGinnity & O'Connell ,2008) and *The Survey of Migrants' Experience of Racism and Discrimination in Ireland* by (McGinnity et al., 2006). Their significant limitations are that they were conducted quantitatively. However, the Immigrant Council of Ireland conducted a qualitative research in 2004, the *Voices of Immigrants: The Challenges of Inclusion* that involved twenty-two participants of twelve men and ten women both EEA and non-EEA immigrants. But the study was limited to Irish immigration policy, focusing on how the current policy is under-developed and market-oriented and of less benefit to the immigrants. Therefore, this particular qualitative research will focus on African Immigrants and examine their experiences as previous quantitative research already indicated that they experience the most severe form of discrimination through racism.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **African immigrants in Ireland.**

During the Celtic Tiger years, Ireland attracted huge immigration through its economic growth, a significant number originated from the African continent. Immigrants are motivated by different factors or elements and the two most relevant that characterize African immigrants in Ireland are forced and voluntary factors. Forced migration refers to migrants such as refugees or asylum seekers who make up a significant portion of the African immigrants living in contemporary Irish society while voluntary migration refers to the African immigrants who voluntarily migrated from their countries of origin with hope of beginning a new life with numerous opportunities. The 2002 Census report indicated that 20,981 people were of African origin. In 2006, the number had increased to 35,326 people of African origin residing in Ireland with the most popular African countries being Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe.

However, specific statistics of African immigrants currently registered in the State under the Immigration Law are exclusive to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and are unavailable for access. Therefore, it is quite difficult to establish how many African immigrants are voluntary or forced migrants.

### **Marginalization**

Most researchers(Young, 1990) and (Thomson, 2001)agree that marginalization is an experience of oppression which is a result of discrimination. It is often process of disempowerment experienced in everyday life as well as practiced by dominant groups or institutions. It influences treatment of an individual or group less favorably because of real or

assumed characteristics. It is a socially patterned denial of rights that others enjoy. Therefore, experiences may be different and unequal treatment may result due to physical, economic, political or cultural conditions and these may include Race, Religion or Ethnicity just to mention a few. The common points of definition in most previous studies( Thomson 2001) is that marginalization is an experience that has significant effects on the personal and social life of the individual or groups concerned and originates from numerous sources within society. Below are some of the areas that bear the possibility of creating the existing problem of marginalization of African immigrants in Irish society.

### **Current Government Policy**

In general, power generated by political systems is unequally distributed affecting all decision-making opportunities in all aspects of life such as schools, education, family or business. Systems of power fall in favor of dominant groups in all societies and it is quite visible through inequalities between the minority and majority group. As a result, minority groups are under-represented, therefore making their societal participation valueless or insignificant. African immigrants lack representation in Irish society and that is a significant contributing factor to their marginalization. They are under-represented at national level as current legislation permits immigrants to vote only at local level. It is very important to note that all areas of marginalization are interlinked and in fact if this phenomenon occurs in one area it influences the global situation of immigrants in other areas as well. This means that when migrants are politically marginalized they cannot influence the national policies and in consequence those policies might be unfavourable for them and reflected also by their social conditions. The current legislation automatically eliminates representation of immigrants in Parliament and this seems to suggest that democratic decisions are entirely up to the indigenous Irish Citizens even though African and other migrants are a part of the Irish

society. This sort of marginalization may be emotional and generates isolation, issues of self-esteem and intimidation. Some African immigrants lack immediate family support due to inefficiencies in the Irish Naturalization and Immigration Services. This inefficiency is likely to worsen as the Immigration Council of Ireland pointed out that a 21% budgetary cut in this particular service was introduced for 2011 and announced on 7<sup>th</sup> of December 2010. Further findings by Moreo & Lentin (2010) suggest that these inefficiencies produce long waiting periods experienced particularly by asylum seekers leading to damaging psychological effects to some people due to lack of a stable system of care, love and support such as family, an educational system therefore generating marginalization.

### **Integration Factors**

Ideas of culture circulate locally and globally and these can be language, religion, education, technology or social practice. These ideas also produce or generate inequality towards individual or social group status. For example, the western culture is assumed more advanced, fair and modern compared to other cultures. Furthermore, the use of English language has become a necessity in the modern world marginalizing those who do not have English as their mother tongue or primary language. *From Catastrophe to Marginalization: the experiences of Somali Refugees in Ireland* by (Moreo & Lentin, 2010) found that the language barrier has also hindered integration of some African immigrants into Irish society. However, the report acknowledges that African immigrants need to acquire linguistic skills even to access livelihood resources such as employment.

### **Access to the labor market**

McGinnity *et al.*, (2006) conducted a survey of migrant experiences of racism and discrimination on behalf of the Equality Authority and their research focused on the Irish

Labor Market. Their findings showed significant levels of discrimination against non-nationals particularly black immigrants. Some of their findings showed that African immigrants reported more difficulties in seeking employment than other respondents from other minority groups; as a result, unemployment amongst African immigrants as a percentage was quite high particularly between ages 19 and 64 years. Their findings also indicated that African immigrants were sometimes not able to be a part of the labor market because of discrimination even though they have the necessary documentation to seek employment. However, other difficulties faced by African immigrants are influenced by factors of Social Policy. For example, revision of the Employment Permit Act 2003 & 2006 declared Irish nationals first preference, EEA nationals were declared second preference and lastly Non-EU nationals. Such Policies contribute to the Employer's reluctance to hire African Immigrants especially when an employee is required to start work on an immediate basis. The Employment Act also has requirements that an Employer will have to consider such as a requirement to advertise for the available position for a certain period of time before they can apply for a work-permit for a non-EEA-national. On application, the employer may have to produce evidence that no Irish or EU citizen has applied for the position within the stated period. The Employment Permit is also accompanied by a fee from €500 and an additional waiting period of at least 6 weeks and will have to face a renewal on an annual basis. This influences the marginalization of work permit holders by positioning them at a disadvantage on the economic front which eventually leads to an effect on their livelihood. There has been a 41% decrease of Employment Permits issued between 2008 and 2009. 13 567 Permits were issued in 2008 compared to 7 962 issued and 1 901 refusals in 2009 by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Innovation. The most significant and important finding is that there was no African country in the top five nationalities issued with Employment Permits in 2009. This implies that the number of African immigrants issued with Employment Permits has decreased

because the issuing system has been shifted from low skilled occupations to highly skilled occupations in the recent legislation. This finding corresponds to results of the report published in 2008 by the CSO titled *Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland* that showed 82.4% of African, Asian and American nationals living in Ireland worked in the Manufacturing, Wholesale and Retail, Hotel and Restaurants, Construction, Business Activities and the Health and Social Work Industries.

### **Experiences within Labor Market**

McGinnity & O'Connell (2008) found that African immigrants were less likely to secure the most privileged jobs in the occupational structure. In that same research study, a sample of work-permit holders was also used to analyze earnings of African immigrants and the significant finding was a gender wage gap among African female migrants who earn 15% less per month than their male counterparts. Throughout the last few years scandals of employers such as Irish Ferries and GAMA who paid immigrants rates below the minimum wage have been exposed. It is undeniable that this continues to occur despite the existence of the Employment Equality Act of 1998 and 2004 and the Equal Status Act of 2000. The current economic downturn may lead to more of these experiences for African immigrants as they are at a vulnerable situation at present. They are at a higher risk of being made redundant or taking a significant and possibly an unlawful pay reduction.

### **Access to economic resources**

The structures of the economic system are very important in any society, especially in the new global economic market. However, ownership and control of capital and wealth are unequally distributed but descent social and public services are one of the main factors that attract immigrants, particularly income distribution. Unequal income distribution leads to poverty

and social deprivation. African immigrants are vulnerable to exploitative employers who employ immigrants at incomes lower than the legal working minimum wage. For example, the Irish Ferries Scandal of 2005 where Irish workers were made redundant and then replaced by immigrants for €3-57 per hour. Minimum incomes limit people from accessing decent housing and community resources and further compromising their safety and protection.

It should be noted that besides all of the above described aspects of marginalization experienced by African immigrants, there are also some additional issues faced only by asylum seekers. As mentioned earlier, asylum seekers, mostly made up of African immigrants are one of the top minority groups that suffer from absolute poverty as a result of economic deprivation. They are provided with Direct Provision accommodation and receive a weekly allowance of only €19-10 per adult and €9-60 per child. The asylum process takes a significantly long period of time before a decision is made because of the different stages involved in the procedure, unless the claimant is granted refugee status at the first stage. While this is ongoing, applicants are provided with accommodation, usually Direct Provision accommodation, essentials such as food are provided through State funding. *Ireland's Direct Provision hostels like "Refugee Camps"* by Smyth, (2010) reported that living conditions were mostly unfavorable with serious issues such as overcrowding in some accommodation centers and quite unpleasant for individuals particularly families and older people. Asylum seekers are issued a medical card to access health services when required and are not permitted to engage in employment or study or any form of business until applications have been approved. They lack representation, freedom and access to resources and are not involved in any instances of decision making on issues that concern them as a minority in a democratic State.

### **Racism and Unemployment as effects of Economic Downturn**

Race is a form discrimination based on skin color or association with a minority group. Black/African Non-EEA immigrants have been shown to be a very vulnerable group who experience racism or discrimination on the basis of their color of skin by previous studies. This minority group is sometimes referred to as non-nationals and assumed to originate from Africa due to their Black skin color. It is quite difficult for ordinary Irish people to distinguish between asylum seekers, work-permit holders, refugees, black-Irish citizens, work visa holders, students or those granted permission or leave to remain on the basis of exceptional circumstances. Most Black people in Ireland are assumed to be refugees or asylum seekers as a result they experience significant inequalities in contemporary Irish society. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) was established in 2001 to compile reports on incidents related to racism every six months. The 2008 report titled *Reported Incidents Related to Racism and Strategic Responses from the NCCRI* showed that reports of racial incidents has increased compared to incidents reported in 2005. The report also states that the most significant victims are Black Africans making up 42% of all reported incidents. It also states that discrimination occurs in the workplace and in the delivery of public and private services. The report further states that incidents are usually related to misinformation and the circulation of offensive. As indicated by previous research mentioned above, racial and discriminatory experiences have been a part of this ethnic minority group for a significant period of time but have since escalated due to the economic downturn.

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) published by the CSO towards the end of 2008 showed that the annual rate of job losses among immigrants exceeded that of natives. The survey showed that their rate of unemployment rose faster among immigrants compared to natives. McGinnity *et al.*, (2009) also conducted a study titled *Discrimination in Recruitment: Evidence from a Field Experiment* and found that migrant workers with similar

skills and experience were less likely to be called for an interview by employers based on their name given on the CV, that is, foreign sounding names were significantly less likely to secure interviews than Irish sounding names. All these experiences raise awareness on how effective protective legislation is enforced in contemporary Irish society because discrimination is escalating at very significant levels despite the existing legislation designed to protect society. This also places African immigrants in a particularly difficult economic position in the current economic climate especially with the natives themselves migrating to other societies in search of better opportunities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Research is a systematic investigation to discover facts or collect information. Social Research is discovering or generating knowledge about human society and social life. There are two approach methods to carry out a research and these are Quantitative and Qualitative. The aim of this research project was to:

- highlight the marginalization of African immigrants exists in Irish Society.
- to examine the effects of marginalization if any, and understand the participant's experience and the impact it has on their livelihood.
- to establish whether some factors of social policy encourage or perpetuate marginalization.
- examine the areas of experience based entirely on the opinions of the participants and the effects it has brought on their personal lives.

### **Why Qualitative Research?**

The chosen research methodology approach for this project was qualitative because it is more suitable to collect in-depth data and is characterized by a set of assumptions of how knowledge is produced and about the nature of reality itself. Qualitative research aims to discover how people interpret the world around them and how it influences their behaviour. It was suitable than quantitative research as it sought to explain and find meaning in social behaviour (Ritchie & Lewis 2007). The emphasis was on how the participants perceive and interpret their environment and the impact on their lives. It allowed the researcher to explore the views, beliefs, experiences, ideas and illicit some understanding on the feelings of African immigrants and their understanding of the issue of marginalization. The data researched in this approach is entirely the view of the participant, therefore describing the meaning of the lived experiences and providing a deep understanding of phenomenon as experienced by several individuals. The thematic analysis is the best suitable technique because it will help examine

the thoughts and experiences as well as the meaning of the phenomenon for participants concerned. This study aimed to collect data from the individuals who experienced the phenomenon so that they describe how, where and what they experienced in order for the researcher to grasp the very nature of their experience. This project focused more on the description of the experiences of the participants and less on the interpretations of the researcher. The experiences of the researcher were set aside as much as possible limiting influence on the participants' response.

Quantitative research would not have been suitable for this study because it is more effective in a larger audience for a broad and not in-depth study. Quantitative research involves the analysis of numbers and this study is clearly not about numbers or statistics. Quantitative research is conducted in controlled and manipulated settings therefore producing expectant findings compared to qualitative that aims to find interesting and unexpected results. Quantitative research is non-exploratory and reproduces existing theories and of known variables. Therefore, it would have been highly unsuitable for this type of project because the main goal is to explore and understand the opinions of the chosen participants.

### **Participants**

The data was collected from six participants both male and female. These participants were of young working class, aged between 28-35. These were the most suitable participants for this research because of their level of exposure to societal structures, that is, more active lifestyles and participation in the labour market of current Irish society compared to other age groups within this ethnic group. The data was collected through interviews as this is the most common research technique to date used in qualitative approach to access the most in-depth data. The interviews were planned to be conducted in fairly comfortable environments as it allows the participant to create a comfortable relationship with the researcher enabling the

participant to express their views more openly without any feeling of restriction. Five interviews were successfully conducted in fairly comfortable environments, that is, the participant's place of residence except for one that was conducted through "Skype".

The research involved note taking and these notes will be revisited during the analysis. However, the interviews were semi-structured; this means that the questions asked by the researcher were centred on particular themes and certain topics. The participant still availed of an opportunity to talk about other issues without restructuring the themes of research.

### **Analysis**

During analysis, the researcher will follow specific steps such as extracting significant statements from the descriptive experiences to create themes that focus on common experiences of the participants. The proposed method for the analysis of this research project is the data-led thematic analysis. It is more exploratory and aims to understand rather than know the data. It involves categorizing segments of qualitative data into meaningful themes. According to Braun & Clarke (2006), it is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within data. Although time consuming, thematic analysis provides a meaningful structure to the data. It is a method with flexibility and helps the researcher find rich and insightful information with its different stages outlined below:

#### **Stage 1: Familiarization of data**

Read, Re-read and read the data again. Following understanding, begin to make notes and create ideas by using the margin to code, that is, noting anything interesting or significant from the data.

### **Stage 2: Generation of Initial Codes**

Begin to create themes by looking for connections between codes. The codes can be a word, a line of text or a sentence. The themes are subject to change as the analysis continues.

### **Stage 3: Searching for Themes**

Continue to find relationships between the codes and identify patterns to create themes and sub-themes. The main goal is to create key themes that summarize the entire transcript. Finally, test the codes for reliability by elaborating, splitting, defining, rejecting or refining.

### **Stage 4: Review Themes**

Begin to tidy the themes and sub-themes to confirm the relationship between the codes, themes and the data and creating more possible sub themes. This stage is important because it allows time to re-organize the themes by examining if there was enough data in each theme to produce a quality qualitative analysis

### **Problems and Limitations**

Learning the way of life of this particular minority group which has become a significant part of the contemporary Irish society was an interesting and adventurous experience. However, unexpected situations are not uncommon in qualitative research, it is a question of how much the researcher is prepared to deal with the unexpected on occurrence. In this research project some of the unexpected issues were that most of the participants seemed to have very busy lifestyles, therefore it was very difficult to find suitable opportunities during sociable hours for the interviews to take place. As a result, interviews took place at unsociable hours. In one instance, the participant was asked to work night-time meaning he spent his day-time hours resting at home. It became difficult to arrange an opportunity to meet so he suggested that the

consent form be sent through the post for him to sign and return and then conduct the interview on the internet through “Skype” on one of the evenings before he left for work. It is important to note that some of these problems can limit the potential standard of the research because the participant may not be in the best of form due to other commitments therefore may not be in a fit position to remember and provide the researcher with crucial information needed. Overall, it was a challenging but interesting experience.

## **RESULTS**

The data-led thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data collected from six participants as outlined in the previous methodology section. Following the analysis, five themes emerged from the data and those particular themes will be used to outline the results of this research study. This section will be outlined in the following order:

- Integration
- Multiculturalism
- Current Government Policy
- Access to labor market and Resources
- Marginalization

### **Participant Backgrounds**

The starting point for this section was an analysis of the background information which was provided by each participant before the interviews took place. The significant finding was that each participant had been living in Ireland for at least 8years. Further on their SES background, Four of the participants are employed full-time and four out of the six interviewed, worked as assistants in the Catering, Health and Construction Industry. Only one of the participants had experience of working professionally as a trainee Accountant and the other participant is unemployed. Three participants have become Irish Citizens

Four of the participants appeared to have achieved a third level of education and one is in the process of achieving one. Five of the them are also parents of fairly young children under the age of fourteen. The participant countries of origin ranged from the West to Sub-Saharan Africa which made the study interesting because of the wide range of ideas and difference in culture that emerged as the interviews progressed. One of the most interesting findings, although expected one, was that the participants shared some common knowledge that

influenced their final decision to migrate to Ireland. It was an assumption that Irish society had a better standard of living, better education opportunities, a modern political background and a stable economy which offered the ability to support self and family.

### **Integration**

The participants were asked what they thought about the integration of African Immigrants. Most responses were negative and suggested that the participants were facing difficulty in integrating in Irish society. The male participants in particular thought integration is something that is difficult for African immigrants to achieve in Irish society. Participant 2 indicated that he had actually been in a relationship with an Irish girl and he decided to end it after 4years because of similar issues. He also stated that

*“I think those living in a fantasy world or disillusioned have settled but in reality, this is not the case. First of all, I think there are no social structures to enable Immigrants to integrate. Secondly, the population itself, is not educated enough to accommodate immigrants and most importantly the government was not prepared for multiculturalism and the influx of immigrants during the boom times. I mean...I personally do not feel welcome considering that I am now an Irish Citizen by law.”*

Participant 4 lived in the UK for a number of years before moving to Ireland to join his family and his response was particularly interesting and unexpected because he decided to compare the Irish society to the British society:

*“Africans are struggling to integrate here, I feel the Irish people are ignorant rather than racist. The African population in Ireland is also too small compared to East London in the UK where I lived for a while. Africans in UK have integrated comfortably and it's not rare to see White people working for Black people. I also think it is important to hold forums like those in UK that encourage multiculturalism because the issue of globalization creates a responsibility for all to make the effort to adapt”.*

Most of the participants seemed happy to talk about their own experiences which were a very important factor for this research. Most of the participants appeared to have an experience that influenced their opinion and efforts on integration. Participant 5 said he made a conscious

decision a couple of years ago about making an effort to integrate. He then gave the example stating that:

*“I don’t go out as much as I would like to because if go into a pub for example, I feel I’m constantly reminded that I don’t belong there. I also feel that Irish people will never change because of their ignorance.”*

Further on the experiences of integration Participant 1 stated that she would be surprised if an African Immigrant said they had no experience on an attempt to integrate. She felt there was a lot of prejudice and pre-assumptions among Irish people on foreigners. Her response was that:

*“I personally think twice about where to go...I mean places such as Brown Thomas on Grafton St. are just not friendly places to be because not only do I feel foreign but also the security guy follows me around. I feel comfortable shopping in and around the Moore St. areas where I know that I’m not the only Black person there. I really think even if I won the lotto and afforded to hang around the Grafton St. area I’ll still be treated the very same way...some people will probably think this is extreme but I really feel this is a reality.”*

Participant 6 felt that the economic downturn had turned people more prejudice. She felt that African Immigrants are regarded as people who are uninformed or uneducated. She described her own experiences as follows:

*“The fact that I’m different makes other people feel okay to judge me by my physical looks rather than my talents. People talk to me differently and always assume that I don’t understand their terminology. In community programs that are even designed for integration, you’re still not given the chance to unleash yourself because Irish people take over. I also feel that the media contributes to prejudice because it doesn’t portray immigrants in a positive manner but instead associates them with criminal and fraudulent behavior. I also feel that it’s a little harsh for women because we’re thought to be fraudulent towards the social welfare payments...as well as the Irish Born Children debate.”*

### **Multiculturalism**

Participants were asked if they would describe the Irish society as multicultural. As indicated earlier, most of the participants felt that there was a significant lack of integration structures in the Irish society and therefore were quite hesitant to describe the Irish society as multicultural. However, there was a sense of positivism for the future particularly in the response from

Participant 4, as can be seen below:

*“Well before the recession I would have said yes but because of the economic downturn I’d say no because the current atmosphere is not in favor of foreigners in general, not just African immigrants I think. If change was taking place for the better then it’s now going to take longer than anticipated. However, positive aspects will arise from the downturn as Irish people themselves are emigrating to other countries and therefore will experience being foreign in another country and hopefully return with a little more appreciation later on. I think the Irish people are generally understanding and will eventually come to terms with multiculturalism.”*

Participant 6 also responded:

*“I recently attended a community program for lone parents and I was shocked to learn that 10% of children in Ireland are born by African Immigrants. So I really have high hopes that Ireland will become a multicultural society in the near future.”*

Most of the participants seemed hopeful for change in the future but indicated concern that the change or adaptation is slower than expected for a modern society like Ireland.

### **Current Government Policy**

The participants were asked on their thoughts on current government policy regarding African immigrants. The participants expressed disappointment and also put forward some ideas on what they would like to see from the government.

Participant 2:

*“At the moment, migrant concerns are not addressed in government and again no basis. Issues such as marginalized job opportunities and social housing are not addressed enough. There is no regulation for third level institutions who accept certain numbers of mature students automatically limiting the number of those who wish to acquire or improve their skills in education. The system lacks recognition of African immigrants who work harder and pay taxes that some people are unable to pay.”*

Participant 4 responded in a similar manner but was more concerned about pointing out what he would like to see from the current government policy:

*“I would like to see the government coming more pro-actively through different arms such as education or FAS. I’d also like to see more aggressive promotions on integration with more positive aspects and media involvement. More compulsory legislative meetings and address the situation in all aspects of society as much as*

*possible including religion.”*

Participant 1 also stated that she would like to see the current government policy a little more encouraging and motivating for Irish people to take time and learn other cultures as well as to adapt to social changes such migration.

### **Access to the Labor Market and Resources**

Participants were asked what they thought about the African Immigrant’s access to the Irish labor market and other resources and their responses were quite mixed. Some had bad and difficult experiences while others sailed into work without problems. However, most participants pointed out that they would expect things to be harder now that there is an economic downturn.

Participant 5 spoke about his experience of looking for work at professional level towards the end of his final year:

*“I started looking for a job before the recession. Immigrants suffered the most in a class of 30. Anytime I got invited for an interview, it felt like a favor. I think social injustice is at grass root level because as an Irish Citizen I should avail of an equal opportunity like everybody else.”*

The participant also spoke about his experience at work at a professional level:

*“My first experience of working professionally was quite difficult and challenging because the social exclusion at that level is subtle, it’s something that you can’t put a finger on but you can feel it exists. Some people use their positions to intimidate you unnecessarily and it’s not only unfair but unjust too. As an individual, you can’t showcase your talent and therefore no chance of a promotion...I feel it’s hard for other people to accept that migrants can rise up the ladder as well, I personally found it upsetting and emotionally draining. It’s an experience that can make you lose motivation, sometimes make you aggressive but not physically and deeply affects your self-esteem especially if you’re a man. It hinders your ability to address situations because you’d have developed fear of professional suicide. ”*

Participant 3 thought it depended on what kind of work the person would be interested and also mentioned that it is in most cases easier for African migrant women to get work than

African migrant men. She gave examples stating that:

*“I think it’s easier for women to find work, for example in the care sector than men and easier for men to get work in the construction industry. Sometimes the language barrier can make things tougher for people. My personal experience of seeking work wasn’t bad and I’m quite happy with my job although sometimes I feel I don’t stand a chance for a promotion. I suppose things have become tougher in the current economic climate...I mean my husband was laid off about a year ago and is struggling to find work at present. He has fears that the longer he stays out of the labor market the harder it’s going to get for him to get back.”*

Participants were also asked on their thoughts on African immigrant’s access to other resources and to talk about their experiences if any. Most participants had no particular experiences on accessing resources that would be exceptionally different from the rest of the society. Most responses were similar to the following answer of Participant 4:

*“Well! I think everybody is on the same boat on the access to resources. I mean the long waiting lists of social housing and so on need to be addressed by the new government. Sometimes situations are means tested individually and its great but some issues still need to be addressed.”*

However, Participant 6 mentioned some of her experiences when she was an asylum seeker living in Direct Provision Accommodation:

*“...I remember a very difficult, isolating, distressing and lonely time in life. The first 2 years of my life in this country were hell, you basically had no access or control of over your own life unless your asylum application was successful and I imagine that the problem still exists. I tried to apply for places in colleges just to find something to do while waiting but no success until I learnt that I was not permitted to do so. Thinking about it now makes me realize that even if I had got the place, there was no chance to proceed because I had no job to fund expenses because I wouldn’t have been permitted to work either. I really pity those in that situation at the moment.”*

### **Marginalization**

One of the final questions of the interview was about marginalization. The participants were asked what they understood by marginalization. Responses were quite similar to each other and below are some of them from participants concerned:

Participant 1:

*“I think it often refers to social exclusion of a particular group of people.”*

Participant 2:

*“A deliberate exclusion of an individual as a result of prejudice, assumed characteristics or stereotypical information.”*

Participant 5:

*“Often refers to imbalances in society directed upon a minority group, for example, being made to feel second class.”*

Participant 6:

*“It refers to unequal treatment of a person or group in comparison to the rest of society.”*

There were no fundamental differences in the responses of African immigrants that were naturalized and those that are not. Their experiences in all aspect were quite similar.

## **DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to highlight the problematic marginalization of African immigrants exists in Irish Society. The focus of this study was directed upon the;

- African immigrant perceptions on the phenomenon of marginalization
- Participant personal experiences and an exploration of some of the most common areas of experience
- Effects of marginalization at participant's personal level
- The role of Social Policy, that is, establishing whether factors of S.P. eradicate or perpetuate the phenomenon

### **Summary of Results**

The results indicated that marginalization of African immigrants is not just a phenomenon but a reality in contemporary Irish society. Most participants had experienced marginalization in one form or another. Participants still felt foreign even after at least 8years of being a resident in the State, basically most participants feel more like second class citizens. Participants encounter difficulties in integrating in Irish society and therefore have not yet settled and also indicate that there are not happy or comfortable to visit various places freely. The participants also felt that prejudice, pre-assumptions and stereotypical information contributes to negative attitudes that the general public possess against African immigrants, perceiving them as uneducated, uninformed and fraudulent. The participants are also not satisfied with the role of Social Policy in integration measures and promotion of multiculturalism as the contribution of African immigrants is not highlighted at all to the population therefore making it difficult for African immigrants to access work and other essential resources and most importantly gain acceptance into society. Other findings that emerged were that the general population cannot distinguish between an asylum seeker, a refugee, a permanent resident or an Irish Citizen and

therefore those that have earned citizenship felt that they are treated unfairly because of classification based on assumed characteristics, that is, those of an asylum seeker or a refugee.

### **Findings and Implications**

The findings of this research which indicated that African immigrants face difficulties in seeking employment. Some participants suggested that this may be happening because African immigrants are judged by their looks rather than their talents. This research corresponds with findings in the report *Immigrants at Work: Ethnicity and Nationality in the Irish Labor Market* conducted by (McGinnity & O'Connell, 2008) that indicates that Black people, mostly of African origin faced disadvantages in seeking employment in the Irish labor market. This implicates that legislations such as the Equal Status Act 2000&2004 and the Employment Equality Act 1998 & 2004 are not enforced effectively and African Immigrants lack protection from existing legislation while in search of work. The Equal Status Act does not seem to protect Citizenship Status as African immigrants that have earned Irish Citizenship through naturalization equally face the difficulties that non-citizens face in search of employment opportunities.

Only one out of the six participants in this study has experience of working professionally. This particular participant described his experience of looking for a professional occupation as a challenge because it took longer than anticipated as he began seeking while in the final year of his undergraduate program before the recession. He also mentioned that he was aware that his fellow African class mates were in a similar situation. This finding corresponds to other research findings of the above study by McGinnity & O'Connell (2008) that point out that African Immigrants suffer a huge occupational gap. The current government policy lacks recognition for African immigrants. African immigrants are forced into compromising

positions that hinder them to report and address unfair and unjust situations on occurrence therefore inducing fears of professional suicide, that is, reference to other employment opportunities.

*The Survey of Migrants' Experience of Racism and Discrimination in Ireland* by (McGinnity *et al.*, 2005) indicated that Black people, that is, African immigrants experienced the most severe form of discrimination through racism. Their findings indicated that Black Africans experienced the most harassment and discrimination compared to other groups in their study. The findings also indicated that most experiences occurred at work, in public places like pubs and in public institutions even when factors such as education, age and length of stay are accounted for. (McGinnity *et al.*, 2006) also found that the immigrants surveyed were most likely to socialize with people from their country of origin. These findings are similar to the results of this research where participants spoke of their experiences in work and public places which have also influenced them to avoid other social places to visit such as pubs and shopping around the Grafton Street area. Experiences of oppression due to discrimination continue to occur in contemporary Irish society despite the Anti-Discriminatory Act (1977). African Immigrants are hard working and third level educated as indicated by the study but they are experiencing serious difficulties in integrating because social structures are inefficient to facilitate the social changes occurring within Irish society.

One of the participants described her experience as an asylum seeker living in Direct Provision Accommodation. She pointed out how she lacked access to resources because she was not yet officially recognized a Refugee. She described her experience as distressing and particularly isolating for about 2 years. She directed the blame towards the system and that corresponds with a report by Moreo & Lentin (2010) titled *From Catastrophe to*

*Marginalization: the experiences of Somali Refugees in Ireland.* The report criticizes the system for a lack of transparency in the decision-making process and the lack of co-ordinated resettlement support service in areas such as accommodation and educational needs. The report further criticizes the asylum system in Ireland stating that it has dis-empowering effects that affect the mental and emotional well-being of the individual because not only does it put pressure on the asylum seeker to prove that they are a genuine refugee but also states that the reception policies can be devastating.

Some of the experiences highlighted in this study indicate that factors of Social Policy perpetuate the marginalization of African immigrants in Irish society because they lack efficiency and re-enforcement.

## **Conclusion**

The research findings have indicated the existence of marginalization of African immigrants in society. It is undeniable that the marginalization phenomenon is not just a perception but a reality for some. African Immigrants have stated that integrating into Irish society is difficult due to prejudice and pre-assumptions. The role Social Policy is to protect and eradicate unjust social issues but this research has shown that some factors of Social Policy are hugely influential to some of these marginalization issues and may even enhance the problem. The participants fear that the current economic downturn has worsened threats to their livelihood as migrants have become more vulnerable to job losses and unjust pay reductions as well as racial discrimination and more importantly making the general public more prejudice towards African immigrants. But there is also hope that the economic downturn may bring some positivism and appreciation for African immigrants as the Irish people are emigrating to other societies in search of better opportunities that will require them to integrate and experience being foreign as well.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The data used in this research study was collected from six participants only and therefore the information is not enough to generalize findings. Only one of the participants had experienced life as an asylum seeker and therefore her experiences might be only used as anecdotal knowledge not enabling for any kind of generalization findings to all asylum seekers living in Irish society. This research can be developed further by focusing on participant experiences on integration and participant opinions on multiculturalism. The participant may have different opinions and experiences if current governmental policies get reviewed by the new government.

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**APPENDIX 1**

Attached below is a letter of consent that all the participants were asked to sign before the interviews were conducted to confirm the voluntary agreement to participation in this study.

Dear Participant

Firstly, I would like to thank you for taking your valuable time to engage in this interview. I am a Social Science Degree student at DBS about to complete my final year. All final year students enrolled in this programme are required to submit a final year research project on a topic of their choice. My chosen topic is the **“The Problematic Marginalization of African Immigrants in Irish Society”**.

The interview will take approximately 30mins with about 12-15 questions that will require your response. Please feel free to answer any of the questions in a manner in which you are comfortable. All of the information you will provide is crucial and valuable in this research and some of it may be personal, therefore I would like to assure you that it will be handled with extreme caution and retained in a strict and confidential environment.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the interview, please feel free to contact me on 0877420992 or by email at [pamela\\_sibanda@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pamela_sibanda@yahoo.co.uk) or my supervisor, Dr Anna Wolniak at [anna.wolniak@dbs.ie](mailto:anna.wolniak@dbs.ie) .If you are happy to proceed with the interview, please complete below in the spaces provided and sign at the end of sheet.

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Children (Age/s) \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_ Country of Origin \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

**APPENDIX 2**

Below are the questions that were asked following a brief chat about the SES background information that the participant had provided.

- 1) Could you tell me why you migrated to Ireland?
- 2) Would you describe the Irish Society as multicultural?
- 3) What do you think about the integration of African Immigrants?
- 4) Could you tell me about your own experiences of integration since your arrival?
- 5) What do you think of current government policy regarding African Immigrants?
- 6) What kind of work do you do?
- 7) What do you think of African Immigrant's access to the labour market?
- 8) Could you tell me about your experience of seeking work?
- 9) What do you think of the African Immigrant's access to resources such as healthcare and education?
- 10) Could you tell me about your own experiences of access to those resources?

11) Do you have school-age children? Could you tell me about their experiences of integration within the school?

12) Tell me about your experience in finding them a school?

13) Since your arrival, what do you feel has been your biggest achievement? If any, tell me about your experience to that achievement?

14) What do you understand by marginalization?

15) Do you have any plans for the future?