



# Crosscare Information & Advocacy Services: Year 1

A report on our work over 12 months  
& the challenges we need to address  
in 2014 and beyond

## Who we are

Crosscare Information & Advocacy Services is composed of 3 projects: **Housing & Welfare Information**, **the Migrant Project** and the **Refugee Service**.

The projects came together in February 2013 to provide co-ordinated services from a 'one stop shop' drop-in centre at 2 Sackville Place, Dublin 1.



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## Why did we open our 'one stop shop' drop-in centre?

Crosscare decided to maximise the reach and efficacy of the 3 projects by commissioning a new shared drop-in centre in 2 Sackville Place, Dublin 1. The centre acts as a focal point for meeting clients. Through combining resources the 3 projects can offer a multi-disciplinary service and additional supports. The centre is a place of welcome, with computers, refreshments and volunteers who engage with the people using the services.

## What is this report about?

This report is an overview of the first 12 months of the 3 projects working together. It describes the work we do, the outcomes we achieve and the experiences of the people who use our services. It identifies key challenges we and our service users face in 2014 and beyond.

## What do we do?

Our direct service works in a number of distinct areas, providing an information and advocacy service to people around:

- Homelessness and the risk of homelessness
- Social welfare (applications, appeals and emergency supports)
- Immigration issues (visas, status and residency)
- Integration (citizenship, family reunification)
- Settlement help for people leaving the asylum system (accommodation, education, health)
- Support for emigrants & returning emigrants who are coming home to Ireland (pre-departure information for emigrants; pension, social welfare and housing for returnees)

## Who do we work with?

We focus our work on the most marginalised. This includes people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, undocumented, asylum seekers and the socio-economically marginalised. The majority are migrants, and about 90% were born outside Ireland, a proportion of whom are now naturalised citizens. We also work with Irish emigrants who are leaving or returning to Ireland.

## How do we work?

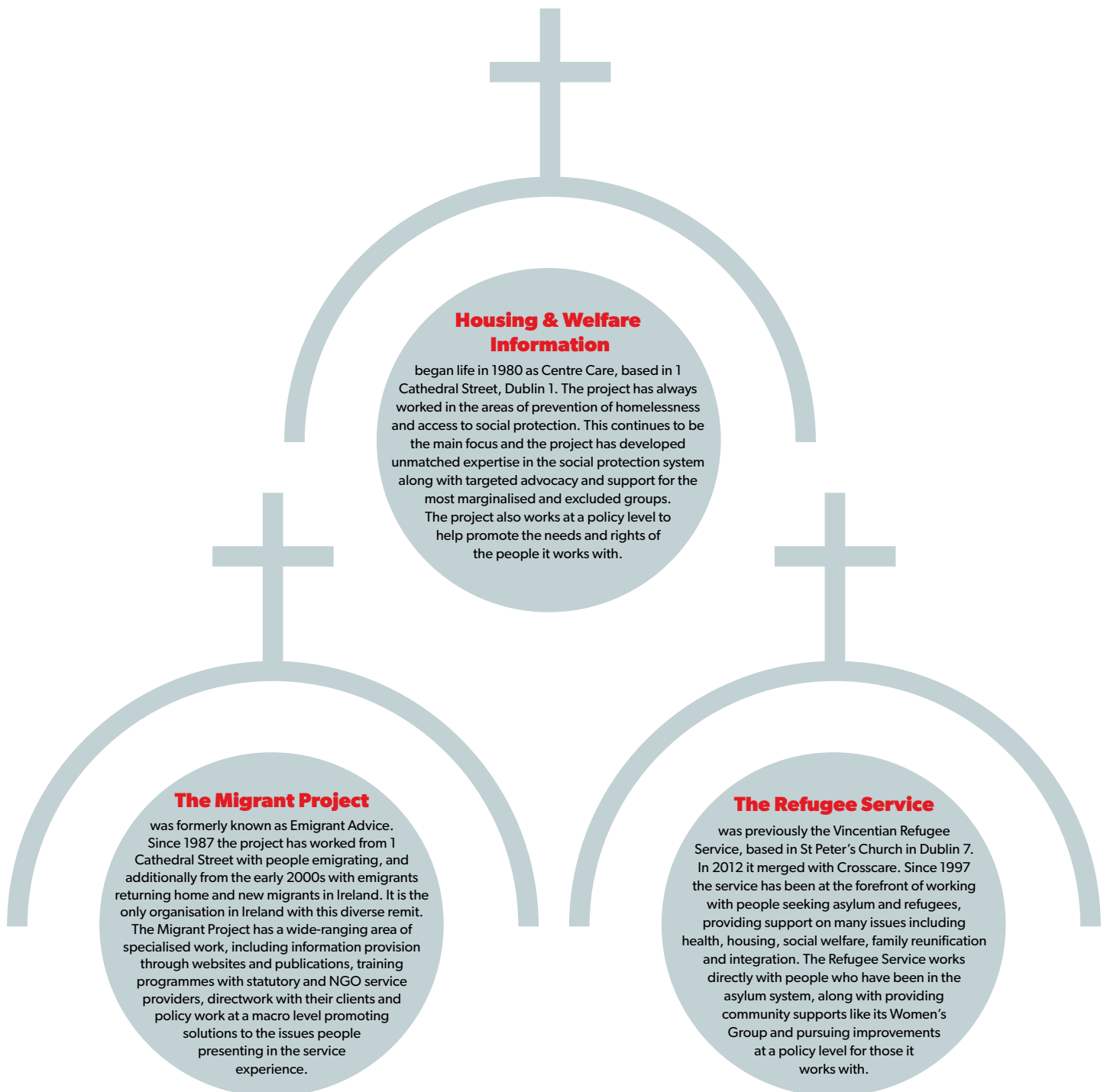
We offer a non-judgemental, open access free service to adults and their families. Clients present at our drop-in centre and are briefly assessed. They are assigned an information and advocacy officer who works to identify their issues and provides information and support. For many people we take on an advocacy role and represent their case with statutory and local authority services.

We provide interpreter services in Roma-Romanian, Chinese and Polish on various days with the support of volunteers. The three projects work closely, with different team members taking responsibility for different areas of work.

Each project has information and advocacy officers with specific areas of expertise. We also have a large number of dedicated volunteers who make it possible to provide such a wide-ranging service, including reception and case work interns, data entry and hospitality volunteers, interpreters for our Polish, Chinese and Roma clinics, and working group members who represent the various communities we work with. We work closely with Crosscare's Homeless, Food and Community Services to provide as much support as possible across a wide range of areas and needs.

## Crosscare's ethos and approach

Our door is open to all people, but we prioritise those most in need and those who are marginalised. Crosscare's core values are respect, love and excellence, and our work is person-centred and rights based. We support people to have the power to make changes in their own lives. We aim to live out our values in every interaction by being non-judgmental, open and honest with all those who use our service.



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## **Some of the issues and underlying problems that presented to our service in the year include:**

### **Poverty and access to social protection**

- Delays in processing social welfare claims and appeals resulting in no income, homelessness or the need to access emergency food supports
- People with little or no income not being referred to the Community Welfare Service for supplementary welfare allowance or exceptional needs payments
- Poor decision making and service from some staff in local social welfare offices exacerbating peoples' marginalisation and vulnerability
- Incorrect application of the Habitual Residence Condition; for example, in relation to returning emigrants and people who have left the State temporarily
- Lack of access to medical card due to having no assessable income, with people avoiding going to hospitals or GPs as they can't pay the bills

### **The risk of homelessness**

- Landlords carrying out illegal evictions and applying high rent increases
- Lack of affordable accommodation, a majority of landlords not accepting Rent Supplement and market rents above the prescribed rent cap for Rent Supplement
- People unable to access homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment services due to the limited capacity of those services

### **Homelessness**

- People unable to access one night only emergency homeless accommodation due to limited availability of spaces
- Some people being refused homeless services and supports due to the application of invalid policies by Local Authorities, resulting in some homeless people being unrecognised, unreported and unassisted
- Difficulties for homeless people in accessing Intreo (formerly FÁS) job-seeking supports
- Difficulties for some homeless people accessing HSE mental health supports due to a lack of fixed address

### **Immigration, asylum and refugee matters**

- Significant changes in immigration policies for international students leading to many being unable to renew their immigration permission and becoming undocumented
- Difficulties in renewing permission due to bureaucratic procedures and processing delays, leading to loss of employment and social welfare claims being suspended
- Problems with renewing immigration permission based on changes in the circumstances it was linked to, such as separating from a partner or becoming unemployed, or crisis situations such as domestic violence, abuse or family breakdown

### **Integration needs**

- Applying for family members to live in Ireland, including spouses, children and dependent parents
- Applying for naturalisation and upgrading to more secure or long-term permission
- Interpreter supports to help navigate and access State services





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## Outcomes – what our direct work achieves

*'We always come here if we have some difficulties, and the staff have been very helpful to sort out all the problems for us all the time. They take us seriously, and in a very professional manner. I hope that they can open more days or have more hours every week, and it is crucial for the elderly foreigner people like us who have no English.'*

**Zhang XingYu, China**

*'You helped me to survive, because I was in a very difficult situation, I don't feel very alone anymore. You helped me to get my papers, to get a flat, my social welfare money and you helped me with everything.'*

**Lyudmyla, Ukraine**

*'I appreciate the efforts and personal sacrifice you have committed to this. I will follow the guidance and instructions ... and plan my move carefully.... it is very encouraging to find helpful people like [you]..... there is a genuine interest and willingness to help in what you do. Please keep it up'*

**Michael, Ireland**

*'I thank you very much for Crosscare's help for all my family. We are lucky to have found this organization: they have very professional team and Chinese interpreter...and all for FREE!...They are very thoughtful – not only write the letter for us, and always write the postal address for us, so all we need to do just to paste the stamp on the envelope. These are small things but are important for us.'*

**Hu CuiLing, China**

*'I first visited {the Refugee Service} in 1998 and they have helped me to integrate, gave me information on my rights and entitlements and told me to be law abiding. I thank them so much for all their help and I have just got my Irish passport'*

**Lydie, Cameroon**

*Crosscare help me all the time, got me a temporary place to sleep, pushed my case, got my medical card, my GNIB card. Thank God for Crosscare since October I have no place to go, leave hostel, 10 am to 6 pm, tired walking around the city centre but can sit here. I tell friends if you have a problem go to Crosscare in Sackville Place.*

**Agostinho, Angola**

*'Three things I would like to say about the Refugee Service:*

- It is central, in the city centre for people to come to even those who are far away and it is very comfortable.*
- It helps to fix many problems for people, not just one or two problems.*
- Most important of all the staff are very good, they are excellent.'*

**Zaza, Georgia**





**5,000:**

the number of people we worked with

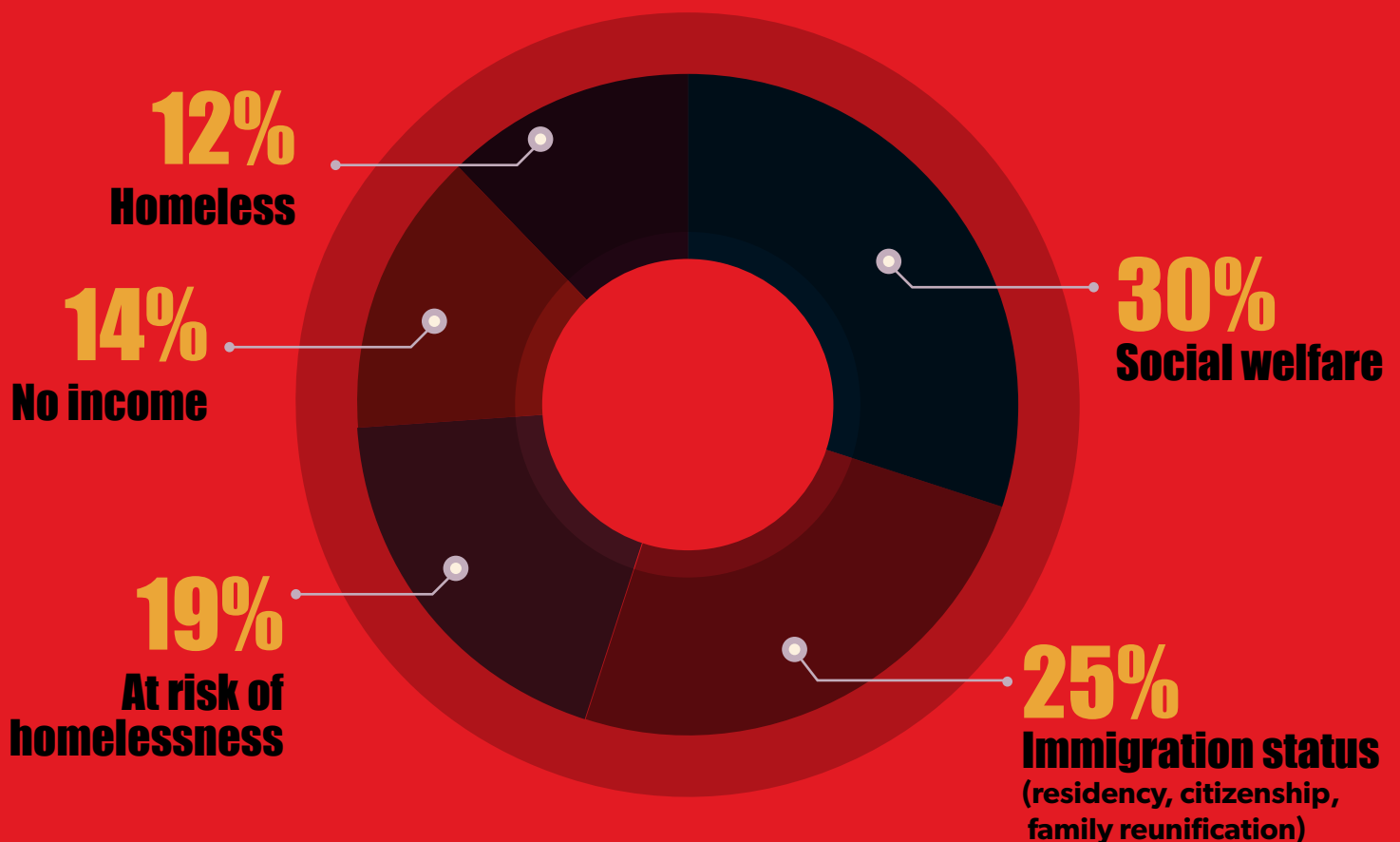
**12,000:**

the number interventions we had with them

**1,000:**

the number we could not work with due to over-demand for our services

## The main issues people presented with:



## The top 10 nationalities were from:



## The number of specialist clinics we ran throughout the year:

**144**

Polish Language

**48**

Roma (with interpreter)

**92**

Chinese-language

**32**

Outreach to Baleskin  
Reception centre

## Our volunteers:

**15**

Chinese language  
interpreters  
enabling us to run  
2 clinics a week

**11**

Polish interpreters for  
our 3 Polish-language  
clinics

**03**

Roma interpreters,  
working alongside  
staff in our Roma clinic

**09**

Hospitality volunteers,  
helping make our centre  
a place of welcome and  
friendship

**10**

website working group  
members, working on  
making our  
[www.livinginireland.ie](http://www.livinginireland.ie)  
website a relevant,  
accessible and excellent  
resource

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## CASE STUDY #1

**Anna and her child** had to flee her partner due to domestic violence. She was terrified he would carry out his threats to take her child and have her deported. Anna was homeless, undocumented and had no income and no-one to turn to. She had lived for years without any immigration status due to her partner's controlling behaviour. We worked closely with her to prepare the necessary documentation and advocated for her with the Department of Justice & Equality. She successfully obtained her right to reside in Ireland as the parent of an Irish child.

As Anna did not have valid immigration status in Ireland she initially had difficulty accessing emergency accommodation and social welfare supports. With our assistance and through effective advocacy and collaboration with the Department of Social Protection Anna's access to emergency payments and accommodation was kept open. Ultimately she obtained primary social welfare and housing supports. Anna's confidence grew and with support she successfully re-engaged with the legal system around her partner's behaviour. With our support she was able to work through exiting homelessness and gain secure housing suitable for her and her son.

One year on, Anna and her child have a brighter future. Her residency status is secure, she has left homelessness behind and has a stable home in a safe and supportive environment.

## CASE STUDY #2

**Sean** was deported to Ireland from Africa due to overstaying his visa. Originally from Dublin, he had not lived in Ireland for over twenty years and had no contact with his remaining family in Ireland from whom he was estranged. On his return he had no income or place to stay, and was referred to us by the Salvation Army on the morning of his arrival.

Sean had an initial consultation with a specialised information and advocacy officer, identifying his specific needs and what steps needed to be taken to re-establish his life in Ireland. An action plan was worked out. As Sean had no proof of his identity or his deportation, we obtained a copy of his emergency travel document and

deportation papers from our contacts in the Irish Embassy in the country from which he returned. We then advocated on Sean's behalf with the Homeless Persons Unit for him to be granted an emergency social welfare payment. We arranged for Sean to access emergency accommodation via the Homeless Freephone for one night while his application for social housing support was assessed by Dublin City Council.

Once Sean was accepted onto the waiting list for social housing support, we helped him find private rented accommodation in Dublin and access Rent Supplement. We also supported him to apply for a medical card and engage with broader health and wellbeing supports.

Sean is now living in his own place and is in receipt of Rent Supplement and Jobseeker's Allowance while he looks for employment.

## CASE STUDY #3

**Andre and Sofia** are refugees. Sofia has exceptional health needs as she suffers from a degenerative disease. Sofia's health difficulties were a consideration when they were seeking somewhere to live. Fortunately they found somewhere that suited her needs. They had settled well into the area and were linked with local services and social supports. Their adult son left the family home leaving them with a bigger portion of the rent to pay. The outstanding rent was over the rent supplement cap and they faced the prospect of having to find another suitable house to rent or lose their rent allowance supports.

They came to our service for help and had a consultation with a information and advocacy officer who advocated on their behalf with the local rents unit to pay the rent allowance at a higher rate, given Sofia's health needs and the lack of alternative affordable accommodation suitable for them. The application was successful and the family were able to remain in their home.

Andre has also been working towards getting his qualifications as a doctor recognised since he secured refugee status. We were able to secure funding on his behalf, to pay the fee to register and sit exams with the Irish Medical Council. Andre hopes to support his family himself by finding employment soon.



## CASE STUDY #4

**Paul** was refused Disability Allowance as he was deemed not to be sufficiently medically unfit to qualify for it. He is 16 years old and suffers from a severe form of Sickle Cell disease, a chronic life-limiting disorder which causes periods of extreme pain. He had been receiving Domiciliary Care Allowance prior to turning 16; his mother received Carers Allowance due to his condition and the care he required. When Paul's Disability Allowance claim was refused, the Carers Allowance claim was also disallowed. This caused extreme financial hardship to the family as the household's monthly income dropped by more than €1,000 overnight.

When Paul and his mother asked for our support, we enlisted the help of Paul's Consultant Haematologist and her opinion on his condition and how it affects his daily life and future opportunities. Paul's school principal also helped with information on his attendance, ability to engage in classes and on the care and attention his teachers need to provide to ensure his safety.

We made a submission to the Social Welfare Appeals Office on his behalf, and based on this the appeal was granted summarily without the need for an oral hearing. We also made a submission to Paul's mother's Carers Allowance appeal and attended an oral hearing with her to argue the family's case. Her appeal was allowed and her payment was reinstated.

## CASE STUDY #5

**Dominique** is a lone parent with four children. She was offered social housing by her local county council and gave notice to her landlord to leave her rented tenancy. The social housing was not ready in time and the council had to withdraw the offer. The family became homeless and accessed emergency homeless accommodation. A new offer of housing was made by a voluntary housing association and Dominique viewed the property informally. She was asked to sign documents at the premises without proper consultation or with access to an interpreter. She thought it was just an expression of interest, but in fact it was a contract. She didn't understand the implications of signing it, nor was it explained to her.

She later presented to the voluntary housing association and confirmed that she did not want to accept the offer because she thought the rent would be too high. She was then asked to sign a 'Surrender of Property' document, again without consultation with the council or interpreter assistance. She understood that she would be offered another property but was later told that she had 'surrendered' the tenancy and had effectively 'made herself homeless'. She was marked as ineligible for the council housing list for one year.

She presented to us to seek help with access to homeless services and to appeal the decision of the council. Dominique met with an information and advocacy officer who took on her case. Her situation was extremely urgent and complex, and she needed an advocate who could represent her case to the council and homeless services.

We helped the family to access emergency accommodation. The family had to live for six months in a hostel while we worked with Dominique to make an appeal to the council. She was later assisted by a voluntary legal assistance organization who sought a Judicial Review. The council then made an offer of three choices of social housing in her areas of choice. She was assisted with the arrangements to move accommodation and set up her supports in her new home.

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## Our other work

### 1. Policy and advanced advocacy:

A key part of our work is bringing the repeated issues we see through our frontline service to a higher level. We have set up a number of key forums to help us do this. We meet with the Garda National Immigration Bureau, the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, the Department of Social Protection and the Reception & Integration Agency regularly to highlight current concerns and to feed the experiences of our clients to the policy makers.

As members of the European Network Against Racism, the Homeless Network, the Migrant Welfare Group, the Dublin City Intercultural Action Committee and the Direct Provision Forum we work collaboratively to promote positive changes to policies that affect the people we see.

### 2. Training and specialist support:

We provide training to non-government and statutory organisations, such as emigration and returning emigrant issues to homeless services around Dublin, and on identifying and reporting racist incidents. We also offer support to NGOs, social workers and others in the areas of work we specialise in.

### 3. Websites and publications:

The Migrant Project has two dedicated websites.

**[www.livinginireland.ie](http://www.livinginireland.ie)** is an integration-focussed website available in 5 languages. **[www.migrantproject.ie](http://www.migrantproject.ie)** is aimed at emigrants and returning emigrants, and offers unique and detailed information. Our websites host our publications, including our monthly newsletters, guides for emigrants and resources for returning emigrants.

### 4. Research:

In the last year we focussed on research into 'new emigration', with reports on the experiences of recent Irish emigrants to Canada conducted through networking and online surveys with people who went on 'working holiday' visas (**[www.migrantproject.ie](http://www.migrantproject.ie)**).

### 5. Outreach and community work:

We provide outreach clinics in Baleskin Reception Centre in north county Dublin and Avondale House food centre in Dublin City Centre. The Refugee Service Women's Group meets weekly with a variety of training, educational, social and personal development classes offered to participants.

### 6. Working in partnership:

We work very closely with Crosscare's Homeless, Food and Community services, including the Community Outreach Centres. We have partnered with North City GP Training to provide a free GP service to high-need and vulnerable clients. We work closely with a number of organisations to develop our work and provide the best outcomes for our clients. These include PILA, the Public Interest Law Alliance; the Mercy Law Resource Centre, particularly around social welfare and homelessness; NASC, Doras Luimni and the New Communities Partnership as partners in our policy work with the Department of Social Protection; and Department of Foreign Affairs Emigrant Support Programme-funded organisations including the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, the London Irish Centre and Irish Community Care Merseyside and Manchester.

## Key issues and challenges for 2014 and beyond

The first year of our three services working together has been exciting, challenging and eye-opening. The demand for what we offer is clear in the number of people presenting and the numbers we unfortunately do not have the capacity to meet. We have seen a clear link between the effects of an economic recession and the issues the people coming to us are experiencing.

We are committed to advocating for social justice through improvements in the provision of statutory services that take the real and urgent needs of our service users into account. Our priority in 2014 and into the future is to work as effectively as we can to generate positive outcomes for the individuals and families we see. Crucially we also aim to identify and promote solutions to the structural issues that cause the problems they face, and effect positive change on a societal level.

Of the many and varied problems we come across the following are the most urgent, and will be priority areas of work for us:

### 1. Homeless and the prevention of homelessness.

This is a core area of our work. The reality for many of our clients is that they are at imminent risk of homelessness or are unable to leave situations of homelessness. We will support the people who come to us to get the assistance they need to avoid or exit homelessness. We will advocate for effective changes in service provision and statutory policies to ensure all people are properly assessed and allowed to access emergency and supported accommodation as appropriate, to work towards the national strategy of eliminating homelessness.

**2. Deprivation and poverty.** Difficulty in accessing social protection is the biggest issue we see. Many of the people we work with are surviving with the help of food banks, free medical services and charitable support. We will work in partnership with Crosscare's Food and Community Services to provide emergency supports to those in need. We will advocate on behalf of individuals for emergency payments in times of crisis and assist

them to access appropriate social welfare payments. We will lobby the Department of Social Protection to provide equal and equitable access to welfare supports for those who are entitled to them.

**3. Supporting people to move from direct provision accommodation.** The transition from direct provision accommodation to independent living poses numerous challenges around accessing housing, social welfare, education and employment. We will support and assist our clients in creating a sustainable life in Ireland. We will advocate for them to ensure that their needs are identified and addressed through appropriate social policy.

**4. Securing immigration status and family reunification.** The issue of immigration status is at the heart of the problem for many of our clients: how to keep or secure their permission to live in Ireland, and how to be reunited with family members. We will work with individuals to positively engage with the immigration services to get residency permission that gives them security and the chance to integrate and contribute to society. We will work to promote the rights of all migrants and citizens to have their family live with them in Ireland.



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## Endorsements

*"We at Mercy Law Resource Centre are proud of our long standing relationship with Crosscare ..... Over the last few years we have worked very closely....in relation to housing and related social welfare issues .... they really care for their clients and are dedicated in their work to getting the best possible outcome"*

**Maeve Regan, Solicitor-in-Charge, Mercy Law Resource Centre**

*"...I am delighted with [your resource for returning Irish emigrants]. We are getting a lot of queries here on this very issue and your document will be extremely helpful in providing them with very useful information"*

**Tony McCullagh, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Ireland, South Africa**

*"I have had the pleasure of working with Crosscare Housing and Welfare Information Service for a number of years. The staff are excellent advocates, building their skills and expertise case by case. Despite resource limitations the staff seem to approach each day with optimism and passion, and that's a very important quality - humility in the face of their clients' needs"*

**Ciara Murray, Public Information Consultant**

*"My experience of working with Crosscare Refugee Service is that communication is genuine, information accurate and your efficiency is inspiring. I have yet to find another organisation equal to yours. It is an absolute pleasure working with you."*

**Riam Naji, Dublin Adult Learning Centre**

*Thank you for the very friendly, efficient and professional help you have given and continue to give to the members of our Project. It is greatly appreciated by all and we know that, when we refer someone, [they] will always be listened to and helped....*

**Mary King, Chair, Dun Laoghaire Refugee Project**

*"We very much appreciate the outreach service from Crosscare Refugee Service provided to residents in Baleskin Accommodation Centre. The value ... cannot be over emphasised...[It] strengthens essential supports for people at a vulnerable time in their lives. We are delighted to work with Crosscare in such a collaborative way. "*

**P.J. Boyle, Clinical Nurse Specialist Baleskin HSE Medical Unit**

*"As a third level Chaplain I appreciate the support that Crosscare offer to our students and especially to those who have difficulties with visas and immigration status"*

**Fr. Alan Hilliard, Coordinator of Chaplaincy Service, DIT**

*"The contribution of Crosscare Refugee Service to the work of the Network is vital to ensuring a resilient civic society response to racism in Ireland."*

**Shane O'Curry, Director, European Network against Racism in Ireland**

*"Crosscare Migrant Project provides essential support to returning emigrants, in particular assisting people in accessing accommodation and obtaining statutory entitlements. This support is particularly important for clients of the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, some of whom have not lived in Ireland for many years. The support they receive.....is vital in helping them to make the transition to life outside of prison."*

**Joanna Joyce, Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas / Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants**





cross  care





**Drop-in Centre:** 2 Sackville Place, Dublin 1

**Appointments:** 1 Cathedral Street, Dublin 1

**Telephone:** 01 873 2844 / 01 872 6775

**Email:** [migrantproject@crosscare.ie](mailto:migrantproject@crosscare.ie); [refugeeservice@crosscare.ie](mailto:refugeeservice@crosscare.ie); [housingandwelfare@crosscare.ie](mailto:housingandwelfare@crosscare.ie)

**Website:** [www.crosscare.ie](http://www.crosscare.ie); [www.migrantproject.ie](http://www.migrantproject.ie); [www.livinginireland.ie](http://www.livinginireland.ie)

Crosscare is the Social Support Agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin. We serve those who are most in need in our society regardless of their race, nationality, religion, beliefs, values or sexual identity. We provide a wide range of focused supports and programmes aimed at empowering people to achieve their own potential.

Crosscare works in the areas of homelessness, community supports and young people. Our work is person centred, rights based and supports peer led initiatives that give people the power to make changes in their own lives.

Crosscare's vision is of a society where all people have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. With over 70 years' experience working with those in vulnerable and marginalised situations, Crosscare's mission is to provide innovative and relevant services to those most in need.