

# Experiences of volunteering with newcomers in Ireland

A host community perspective



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## **Preface**

I hereby want to present you my Master's Thesis on experiences of volunteering with newcomers in Ireland. As I am writing this last part of my thesis, it also means the finalisation of my master's degree in Human Geography. Even though it took some time for my research topic to take shape, I am very happy with the final result. The process took me in different directions, exploring diverse subjects. When I started this thesis I had not expected to end up learning so much from this project, for which I am very grateful.

Since a young age I have been interested in societal developments, culture and mobility, which led me to a lot of interesting places and people. When one of my latest endeavours brought me to Ireland I immediately got fascinated by its history and people and I became more and more curious about how other people experience the unique atmosphere and hospitality of Ireland. Therefore, I am thankful for the chance of conducting this research as the final chapter of my studies at the Radboud University Nijmegen.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Prof. Huib Ernste, for giving me food for thought and feedback throughout this whole process. Moreover, I would like to thank Cultúr Migrant Centre for providing me a warm and welcoming team and invaluable knowledge. A special thanks goes to Tinu Achioya for giving me this opportunity and support and Ángel Marroquín for his help in exploring this topic and progress this research. Being an intern at Cultúr has truly been an enriching experience. Furthermore, I want to thank my parents, for always telling me to keep going and finish my studies, and last but not least I want to thank my girlfriend Shibeal, who has been there for me every day, showing patience, support, giving valuable feedback and believing in me from beginning to end.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to share these stories with you, I thank you for taking the time to read this thesis and I hope you will enjoy it.

## **Abstract**

As international immigration to Ireland is increasing, there has been little attention for its impact on receptive host communities. This study investigates the role of host community volunteers in supporting newcomers within a local community development organisation and explores their contributions to social integration. By focusing on Irish-born volunteers engaged in conversational English language classes, the research examines how experiences from volunteering influence perspectives on migration and how they impact existing migration narratives within the community.

Findings of the research include that motivations for volunteering are diverse and distinct from comparable fields of study. Experiences from volunteering positively influence people's perspectives, contributing to respect and understanding for migrants within the community. While volunteers acknowledge negative attitudes towards migrants are prevalent, there is no evidence of a strong polarisation in society. Furthermore, the study shows that volunteers play a significant role in facilitating integration of newcomers by enhancing social connections and access to services.

The research shows the importance of volunteers in promoting social cohesion, challenging negative narratives, creating nuanced perspectives within host communities and complementing government integration policies. Insights from this study will contribute to research and policy aimed at enhancing social integration and acceptance of diversity in evolving migration contexts.

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## List of abbreviations

Co.	-	County
COLC	-	Cost of Living Crisis
CSO	-	Central Statistics Office
EU	-	European Union
IRA	-	Irish Republican Army
Ireland	-	The Republic of Ireland
LCC	-	Louth County Council
MCC	-	Meath County Council
NGO	-	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPS	-	Personal Public Service
UK	-	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter will provide insight into the current state of migration in Ireland. It starts with a concise history of migration in Ireland and important developments that led to the current situation (1.1). This is then followed by an elaboration of the most recent developments which have led scholars to describe rural Ireland as a New Immigration Destination (1.2).

Subsequently, its implications for Irish society will be explored in sections focusing on Integration (1.3) and the societal relevance of the subject of this study (1.4). In the last section of this chapter (1.5), the scientific relevance of studying volunteering in the migration context is highlighted.

### **1.1 Migration in Ireland**

In recent decades, the Republic of Ireland has seen a major shift in migration. While it has historically been characterised by displacement and high levels of emigration, most notably since the great famine in the 1840's which decimated its 8,2 million population. In recent decades Ireland has experienced a significant increase of immigration, including returning Irish emigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and labour migrants (Mac Éinrí & White, 2008). Ireland's migration history and development is unique compared to European countries. As shown in Figure 1, net migration has only started to become positive since the late 1990's, following the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom and succession of new EU member states, with the years after the 2008 recession being the only exception to this trend (Fahey, Russell, McGinnity & Grotti, 2019). In comparison to European countries, Ireland has an exceptionally high economic growth rate and one of the highest proportions of foreign-born residents (Mac Éinrí, & White, 2008; McGinnity, Grotti, Russell & Fahey, 2018). Ireland also maintains the second highest population growth rate in the EU and the island has the prospect of rising back to its pre-famine level.

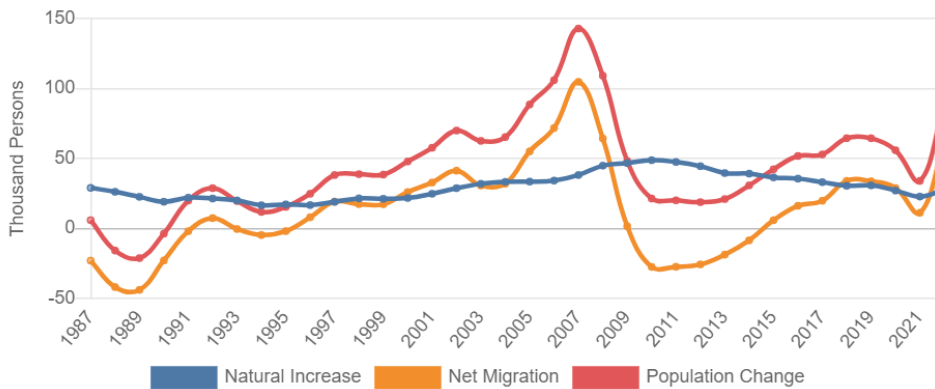


Figure 1. Migration in Ireland, 1987-2022

Source: CSO, Population and Migration Estimates, April 2022 (CSO, 2022)

## 1.2 New Immigration Destinations

The economic boom and the peace process in the 1990's caused a turning point and accelerated immigration to Ireland. Although eventually higher in the metropolitan (and economic) centres of Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway, it is not limited to the urban areas and increasingly influences small towns and rural areas. Rural areas are traditionally seen as having a predominantly white population and a homogenous culture, but this stereotype is contested as communities are becoming increasingly diverse (Woods, 2022). International migration patterns are changing and rural areas and small towns have experienced increased international immigration in recent decades, and have come to be identified as New Immigration Destinations (NID), a trend that is found especially in countries of the global north, including Ireland, Scotland, Greece, Spain, Australia the United States (McAreavey, 2017; McAreavey & Argent, 2018).

More recently, the Irish government enacted a policy framework including the aim for newcomers to settle outside urban areas, as the prospective population growth and concentration thereof in cities is deemed problematic (Fahey et al., 2019). The direct provision centre in Mosney, Co. Meath was established in 2016 as part of the policies, and is now the biggest in the country. When the centre opened, there were little to no supports either for the new communities to understand Irish culture or for the host community to integrate the newcomers (Hambakachere, R, personal communication, February 15, 2023).

### **1.3 Integration in Ireland**

Although there are migration and integration policies and strategies at multiple levels of government, like the Migrant Integration Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2020), the National Action Plan Against Racism (Government of Ireland, 2023) and the Louth Meath Joint Migrant Integration Strategy (LCC and MCC Community Section, 2019), the challenges and opportunities of migration vary for different localities. Governments provide frameworks, but are depending on various stakeholders to accomplish the goals set out in these strategies. Civil society organisations and grass-roots initiatives play an important role in the process of settlement and integration of migrants, especially in rural communities where the experience with immigration is limited and government services are tailored to the local context (McAreavey, & Argent, 2018). These organisations are in turn subject to limited funding, and rely on scarce resources and volunteers to accomplish successes.

The volunteers' effort to support newcomers is of major importance both at the individual level and for the wider community. It positively impacts migrants as they get acquainted with the language, culture and local opportunities and services. At the same time it benefits volunteers in skill development, learning about different cultures and expanding their social network. Volunteers of these organisations thus make an important contribution to settlement and integration of immigrants and are possible drivers of social change in the host community as they establish intergroup contact, which can improve acceptance of migrants in the wider community (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner & Christ, 2011). This is ever more relevant with the recent emergence of anti-migrant protests by far-right groups throughout the country (Loughlin, 2023) and solidarity protest in response (Wilson & Gallagher, 2023), immigration has come to the centre of the political and societal debate in Ireland. While negative attitudes towards migration draw increasing attention, nuanced or successful experiences with migration are mostly neglected in academia and media. It is therefore of critical importance to investigate how communities respond to immigration, and whether polarisation is perceived in these communities. This study will fill this void by qualitatively exploring experiences of voluntary support with newcomers, including refugees, international protection applicants and migrant workers in Irish rural communities.

### **1.4 Societal relevance**

Immigration can change the fabric of society and an adequate policy and community response are key factors for successful integration (OECD). Recent waves of migration have sparked debates in Europe about how to deal with different forms of migration. In the media, migrants

are often depicted as a threat to public safety and economy, a discourse that strengthens stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes in society (O'Regan & Riordan, 2018). The 2022 to present Irish anti-immigration protests have been the country's biggest in history and are seen as the first mobilisation of far-right politics in the country. Irish media now reports frequently about groups protesting to house migrants, noting that communities are divided over migration issues, by posing protesters against people in the same community working voluntarily or in support organisations for migrants (Murphy, 2022). Thus far, attitudes towards migrants in Ireland have generally been more positive or roughly comparable to other Northern European countries, and there is no evidence of a strong cleavage or polarisation in Irish society as a whole (McGinnity et al., 2018). However, the recent developments, the political debate and the media narrative suggest otherwise.

As migration governance has come to be at the centre of the political and public debate, civil society organisations and their role in the settlement and integration of newcomers have been neglected for decades, given the lack of qualitative evidence on how they impact communities (McAllum, 2019). The current study will focus on experiences of volunteers of such organisations, this will help to better understand interactions between host communities and newcomers and the process of integration. It will also give more insight into how existing prejudice and ignorance is challenged within communities, and to what extent these interactions generate social change towards better integration of newcomers and host communities.

## **1.5 Scientific relevance**

There is a large body of literature across academic fields studying aspects of volunteering, especially in social science and psychology. Scholars have investigated several aspects of volunteering, both in general and specified to community volunteering, humanitarian volunteering and helping migrants. Some scholars have focused on motivations (see for example: Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Kende, Lantos, Belinszky, Csaba & Lukács, 2017; Artero, 2019), others have studied the effects and benefits of volunteering, both for the individual volunteer and community (see for example: Wilson & Musick, 1999; Mateiu-Vescan, Ionescu & Opre, 2021). There has also been research on resources and demographic determinants of volunteering (Meijeren, Lubbers & Scheepers, 2022) and reasons for volunteers to (dis)continue their efforts (Behnia, 2012). However, research regarding the experience of volunteers and their perspective on newcomers is rather limited, and calls for a

better understanding of how the narrative of the volunteer is shared in the wider community (McAllum, 2019).

## **2. Research objective and questions**

This chapter will outline the main objective of the study, along with the overarching research question. Consequently, the research question is divided into sub questions specified to describe certain elements of the objective. The chapter will be concluded with a visual framework of the key concepts of the study (Figure 2)

### **2.1 Overarching research question**

The purpose of this study is to discover how volunteering with migrants influences ones perspective on migration and how this translates to integration in the community, wherein the community is seen as a shared space. People from these communities reach out to support newcomers by volunteering. This results in intergroup contact in an early stage of newcomer settlement, and establishes encounters between members of the host community and newcomers. One objective is to assess whether the perspective about migration of the volunteers change through encounters with migrants. The subsequent goal is to find out whether the narrative of the volunteers is shared in the community with people who have not been volunteering - thus supposedly had less encounters with migrants - and how volunteers deal with conflicting opinions about migrants in the community. A conceptual framework is shown in Figure 2.

The study will focus on Irish-born people who volunteer at conversational English language classes through a community development organisation aimed at inclusion and empowerment of migrants. Foreign-born volunteers will be excluded as they have migrated themselves, even though they might have been living in the host community for years, and can be well-integrated, they have distinct experiences of migration before engaging in volunteering (Behnia, 2012). Irish-born volunteers possibly also have a history of migration themselves, or are likely to have experiences with migration in their families. However, the experiences and stories of emigration to a different host community will probably influence ones perspective in a different way than the experience of supporting newcomers in one's own community. Settled migrants and newcomers likely have more of an outsider perspective to the host community than Irish-born volunteers, who can be confronted with this outsider perspective through interactions with newcomers, therefor this study focusses on Irish-born volunteers. This leads to the following overarching research question:

*How do experiences of volunteers helping newcomers in the host community influence their perspective on migration, and how do volunteers share their experiences within the host community?*

## **2.2 Research sub questions**

The host community is seen as the shared space in which native, or settled people, and migrants live together. Although the focus is on rural areas and towns, with a generally higher social integration and network density than in cities (Bienenstock, Bonacich, & Oliver, 1990), a community is not seen as a homogenous entity, in every community there will be variation in the sense of place and sense of belonging among community ‘members’, influenced by the activities in which people engage as well as their own backgrounds, values and worldview. It is therefore important to shed light on the reason for people to engage in volunteering in the first place, why people choose to volunteer in their own community, and also why they chose to volunteer with newcomers.

Chances are that people have a motivation to work with migrants, coming from certain ideas or preconceptions about migrants, which motivate them to engage in volunteering. Theories about volunteering (with migrants) can provide for a lot of insight in reasons for volunteering, but they cannot completely explain the context under investigation. To understand the motivation and initial perspective on migration, the first sub question will be:

*Why do people volunteer with newcomers within their community, and what is their initial perspective on migration?*

Drawing on the preconceptions and the engagement in volunteering, the volunteers will have ideas and expectations about their work and the accompanied experiences. Subsequently, the volunteers will undergo the ‘process’ of volunteering, they will experience the role of a volunteer, they will have encounters with newcomers as well as other volunteers (either Irish-born or settled migrants) and staff in the organisation. These experiences will over time likely influence their perspective on migration, as they will be encountered with more (and diverse) stories of migration. Through these experiences, the volunteer will get more knowledge and a better understanding of migration and possibly empathise or bond with migrants. There is little research on the experience of volunteering in this context and how it affects ones perspective, therefor this study pays increased attention to the experience of the

volunteer, and how these experiences are reflected in the volunteers narrative, leading to the following sub question:

*What experiences do people have from volunteering with migrants, and how does this influence their perspective on migration?*

As peoples perspectives get influenced by their experiences, the volunteer can develop or change their opinion about migration whilst having more encounters with migrants. The stories and experiences will be an important aspect of this study, as the aim will be to assess how the narrative is created on the level of the volunteer and consequently shared by the volunteer within the community. Will the volunteer share experiences, encounter other narratives in the community, will these narratives be conflicting their own, and will they challenge these conflicting narratives? This can be the process of the volunteer sharing experiences, stories with family members, friends, or other people from the community that are less close to the volunteer. The dynamic of this process will shed light on the social integration of the community, and existing narratives in the community as seen from the volunteers viewpoint. The aim of studying this process is to assess whether the volunteer can have a social impact on their social relations and the wider community, leading to the last sub question:

*Do volunteers share their experiences with other members of the host community, and how?*

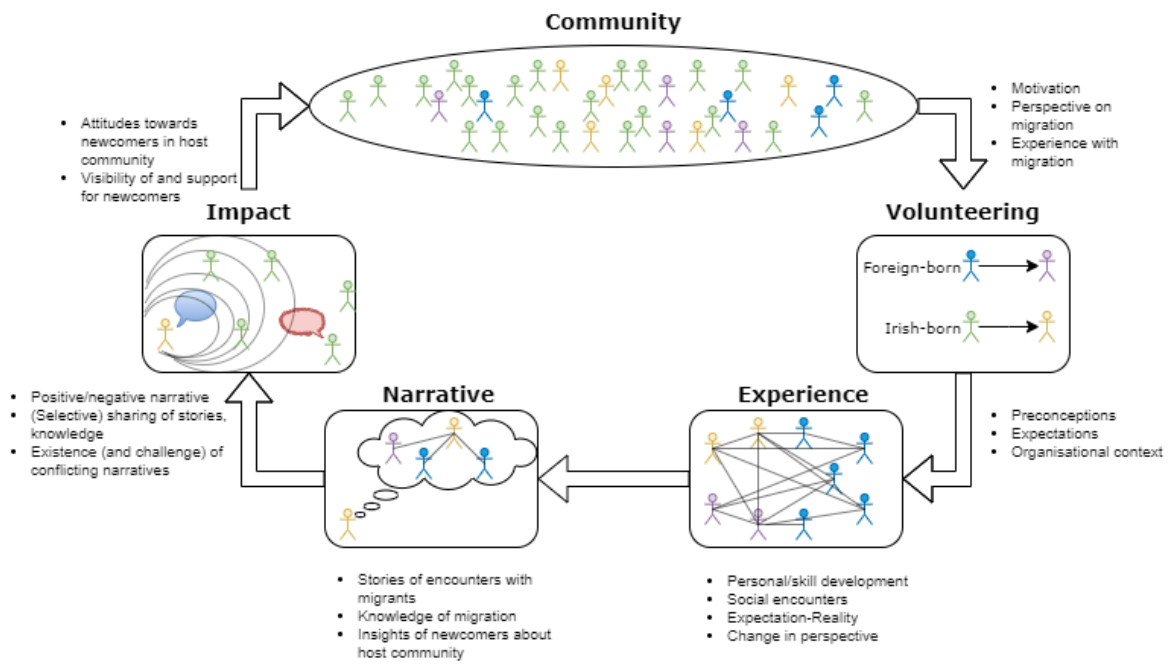


Figure 2. Conceptual framework

Source: Author

### **3. Literature review and theoretical framework**

This section will further discuss the current state of literature to show what is already known about the topic. It will also look at discussions around the various concepts used and provide the definitions that will be followed in this research.

#### **3.1 Volunteering**

Volunteering has been studied thoroughly. As a phenomenon that can be witnessed in different times and places all over the world, the definition also varies across contexts. According to Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996) ‘volunteer’ was first used in the 1750’s, describing civilians who mobilized for military service in times of emergency. The term has since then been used to describe different types of behaviour, from responding in an emergency to helping out someone in need, unpaid work in a business, being involved in an NGO and performing activities on a regular basis or volunteering at a one-time event. (Mateiu-Vescan et al. 2021).

A widely used definition of the concept is developed by Wilson (2000, p. 215): “Volunteering means any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organisation”. This definition is broad and includes both informal and formal volunteering. Informal volunteering being more spontaneous acts of kindness, like helping someone cross the street or helping a friend with a job around the house, whereas formal volunteering features an affiliation with a formal organisation or regular time investment. This research will primarily look at formal volunteering, although informal volunteering will be taken into account as these forms of volunteering are not mutually exclusive. A more holistic approach to volunteering is the definition of Ganesh and McAllum (2009, p. 347), who describe volunteering as a “contextual activity and experience that individuals, groups and communities may go through”. This definition will be leading throughout this study because it emphasises the experience of volunteering and the importance of encounters between individuals and groups as part of volunteering.

#### **3.2 Migration**

This study investigates perspectives on migration, a broad concept that, due to the explorative nature of this study will not be captured by a single definition. Perspectives on migration can include a variety of ideas about migration as a process of human international mobility, like

attitudes towards immigrants, understanding of different motives and experiences around migration or any other kind of understanding of migration.

According to Lahav (2004), every nation develops a specific set of attitudes towards migration influenced by cultural and historical traditions. Ireland's long history of emigration, from the exodus caused by the famine up to recent emigration after the financial crisis in 2008, "has impacted the collective cultural memory and consciousness in distinct ways" (O'Regan & Riordan, 2018 p. 764). Being an island nation with a long history of emigration, there is a significant amount of Irish people with relatives living overseas, increasing the societal consciousness about migration. As an example, where in most European countries, older generations are generally more negative towards migrants, attitudes in Ireland are roughly the same across generations (McGinnity et al. 2018). Similarly, attitudes towards migrants do not differ significantly between urban and rural communities, as is the case in most countries of the global north (McGinnity et al. 2018). It is thus likely that Irish people have distinct perspectives on migration that are shaped both by historical and contemporary processes of migration.

The perspective on migration can be shaped by one's own experiences, stories from family and friends about migration, encounters with migrants, media narratives, public discourse or migration policy. Someone's perspective on migration can be part of the motivations to start volunteering with newcomers, but can also change due to the experiences and stories learned from it. As there can be a lot of variation in what people associate with migration, the interpretation of this concept will be further explored through the data collection.

### **3.3 Integration**

Integration can be described as a process taking place between immigrants and locals in the receptive community. Although immigration policy often aims to enhance integration, it is usually designed and funded from a national government level, despite being a policy area where a local approach is particularly important (Froy, Giguère & OECD, 2006). National migration governance thus has implications for local authorities, having to develop policy aligning with these migration and integration strategies (McAreavey, & Argent, 2018). This can be challenging, as local governments have limited experience, capacity and expertise to carry out support for newcomers, or tailor services to an increasingly diverse public and the local context.

As a result of this system, local authorities depend on the engagement of various partner organisations, NGO’s and civil society initiatives to successfully carry out national and local immigration and integration strategies (LCC and MCC Community Section, 2019). At the same time, these organisations are stakeholders who advocate for integration policy in line with their own perspective on integration and local experiences. Due to limited funding, these organisations rely on civic engagement such as donations and participation of volunteers from the community to be effective.

Ager and Strang (2008) developed a commonly adapted framework to describe the process of integration. In this framework, as shown in Figure 3, the foundation of rights and citizenship is the only element to which the national government is essential. The government can only to an extent facilitate language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability, as it varies from one local context to the other. The remaining social connections and markers and means are all embedded within local possibilities and support. This framework however, centres the immigrant and their individual assets while not fully taking into account the role of the host community in integration. The role of the host community is pivotal in integration as it hosts an existing network of social connections and means, into which migrants need to navigate.

**A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration**

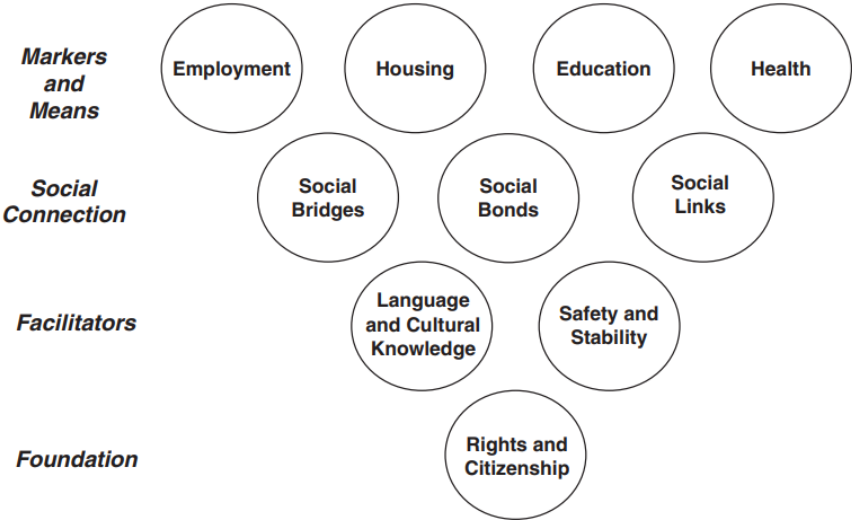


Figure 3. Conceptual framework of Integration  
 Source: Ager and Strang (2008, p. 170)

The volunteers helping newcomers can be the first to make a step to inclusion of newcomers in the community, can be facilitators and can provide meaningful social connections. As described by Meijeren, Lubbers and Scheepers (2022, p. 2) “These volunteers may offer a bridging function for newcomers in helping them to connect to local communities and activities”. The volunteers can also challenge negative narratives about migrants and integration that are abundant in the public, media and politics, especially reflecting racism and negative attitudes towards diversity in rural areas. By challenging negativity, they can contribute to better integration and respectability of migrants in essential services like health, employment, housing and education. People who voluntarily support migrants will have first-hand experiences that can influence their perspective on migrants and on the community, therefore they will likely have a different narrative to the one that’s dominant in the community and wider society.

### **3.4 Volunteering with migrants**

Volunteering with newcomers in NID’s is a relatively new research field, having combined aspects of more classical topics in formal volunteering studies such as humanitarian volunteering and community volunteering.

When looking at these broader subjects, like humanitarian volunteering with cultural differences between people, there is a significant body of research. Some scholars have identified the demographics of people that are more likely to volunteer for humanitarian organisations, like highly educated and more religious (Meijeren et al. 2022). Some authors have studied individual motivations, such as personal development (Mateiu-Vescan et al. 2021), or the desire to better understand the world and social relationships (Butcher & Einolf, 2017). Wilson and Musick (1999) have identified positive individual effects of volunteering like health benefits and occupational skills. Other authors have studied motivations that are related to a collective or the wider society, such as opinion-based identification, achievement of social change, opposing a dominant discourse or showing “a different side” of the host community (Kende et al. 2017; Gray & Stevenson, 2018; Artero, 2019). Roblain, Hanioti, Paulis, Van Haute and Green (2020) showed that voluntarily helping migrants is more likely if ones social network is more positive towards migrants.

Examples of humanitarian volunteering are missionary work and volunteer tourism, wherein an individual or small group leaves their home community, often for a specified time, to volunteer abroad (Griffin, 2013). This is clearly distinguishable from the current study as the volunteers themselves are newcomers in another host community, are generally

committed for a specified term and completely immersed during that time. Another example of humanitarian volunteering is a commitment to charities, where people are involved in charities or fundraising for a humanitarian cause, usually to benefit people in a different locality or country.

Another comparable field of study is that of volunteering with refugees, which received increased attention in recent years. Especially since the so-called refugee/migrant crisis of 2015, there has been extensive research on volunteer initiatives or ‘welcome initiatives’ (see for example: Hamann & Karakayali, 2016; Mayer, 2018). Although this form of volunteering takes place within the host community, this body of literature is also distinguishable as it studies a phenomenon that emerged in a context of crisis-response, almost exclusively in cities and often characterised by short-term engagement. Critics of abovementioned forms of volunteering describe it as highly politicised (Kende et al. 2017; Artero, 2019), emphasizing a ‘victim’ and ‘helper’ dichotomy (Stock, 2017) or the perpetuation of a colonial worldview (Griffin, 2013).

The focus of this study is different from abovementioned studies, as there is expected to be less a dichotomy between volunteers as helpers and migrants or newcomers in need of help. There are certainly disadvantages among the newcomers (like language proficiency or adaptation to the labour market) which result in their need for support, but the purpose of the relation is that of social and cultural integration. Nevertheless, the motivations for volunteers to help newcomers can definitely overlap with those found in the studies mentioned above. Although volunteering with newcomers in the rural context and on a more structural level is all-present, there is far less research on the subject. This study focusses on volunteering with all kinds of newcomers, which is more encompassing than just refugees, and emphasises the importance of the community as a place, or shared space, in which settled people and newcomers have social encounters (Aquilino, Harris & Wise, 2021).

As this study looks at volunteers from within the host community, it will be more suitable to describe it as community volunteering in the form of citizen initiatives. Such initiatives are characterised by volunteers who self-organise, sometimes in a formal organisation, to create public services which the government is lacking. However, these initiatives are often still closely linked to governments and institutions as they operate in the same field of interest (Igalla, Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2019). These organisations usually operate on a non-profit basis and the majority are active in sectors such as (rural) community development or employment & training, sectors that are also the primary fields of interest of the organisation in the current study. This study will aim to better understand how

abovementioned characteristics of humanitarian volunteering as well as community volunteering are reflected in the context of volunteering with newcomers in one's own community.

### **3.5 Impact on host communities**

This research will focus on the narrative of the volunteers, and how these volunteers position their narrative within the host community, this will give a qualitative account of host community perspectives about migration and whether these are challenged or debated internally. Behnia (2012) has studied volunteering with newcomers in Canada, and found that two groups of volunteers are distinguishable in motivation and experience. Volunteers who are (foreign-born) former migrants that have been settled in the community, and members of the community who have been born locally or elsewhere in the country. This research will focus on Irish-born volunteers to shed more light on the role of non-migrants in the process of settlement and integration of migrants, as a form of intergroup helping behaviour.

Intergroup helping behaviour can be driven in different ways. According to intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew et al. 2011), the volunteers' encounters with migrants can result in more positivity towards migrants in their social network, this assumes that the volunteer will be more positive due to more encounters with migrants, and transfers this positivity to their social network, thereby being a driver of social change. Other authors argue that norms within the network of the volunteer, especially acceptance of migrants, are important determinants for intergroup helping behaviour (Roblain et al. 2020). This would mean that people who volunteer in this context, already have a social network that is mostly positive towards migrants. This is in line with differential association theory, which suggests that "people's values are influenced by the groups they interact with most intensively" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 132).

As opposed to the classical idea of these volunteers only coming from radical-left, antiracist, and faith-based groups, Fleischmann and Steinhilper (2017) found that people volunteering with migrants have increasingly different backgrounds and less homogeneous social networks. Furthermore, this study focusses on rural areas and towns, where social networks tend to be more dense, and more homogenous regarding political attitudes (Bienenstock, Bonacich, & Oliver, 1990). Rural areas may have a nationalist, xenophobic or parochial reputation in academic and public debates, but the acceptance and accommodation of migrants has become widespread, to the extent that some scholars are starting to identify a concept of "rural cosmopolitanism", which can be described as a property of a community or

individuals, encompassing openness towards diversity, different cultures and languages with distinct characteristics to the classical cosmopolitanism found among urban elites (Woods 2018; Woods 2022). In the present study, varying opinions about migration are expected within the community and one of the aims is to find how these opinions are identified by volunteers and whether they can have impact on them.

## 4. Methodology

To answer the research question: “*How do experiences of volunteers helping newcomers in the host community influence their perspective on migration, and how do volunteers share their experiences within the host community?*”, a qualitative approach is most useful. This allows the researcher to get in-depth information from the participants and delve into the context of the study. It also gives the researcher a better understanding and representation of the stories and experiences, that could not be obtained with a standardised approach.

### 4.1 Methodological approach

Creswell (2007) describes five methodological approaches for qualitative research, of which the narrative approach and grounded theory approach are most applicable to this study. The narrative approach focuses on the individual experiences and stories, whereas grounded theory focuses on finding patterns in the social interactions between individuals. These methodological approaches as described by Creswell (2007, p. 78) are shown in Table 1.

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Narrative</i>	<i>Grounded Theory</i>
<i>Focus</i>	Exploring the life of an individual	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field
<i>Type of Problem Best Suited for Design</i>	Needing to tell stories of individual experiences	Grounding a theory in the views of participants
<i>Discipline Background</i>	Drawing from the humanities including anthropology, literature, history, psychology, and sociology	Drawing from sociology
<i>Unit of Analysis</i>	Studying one or more individuals	Studying a process, action, or interaction involving many individuals
<i>Data Collection Forms</i>	Using primarily interviews and documents	Using primarily interviews with 20-60 individuals
<i>Data Analysis Strategies</i>	Analyzing data for stories, “restorying” stories, developing themes, often using a chronology	Analyzing data through open coding, axial coding, selective coding
<i>Written Report</i>	Developing a narrative about the stories of an individual’s life	Generating a theory illustrated in a figure

Table 1. Contrasting characteristics of Qualitative Approaches

Source: Creswell (2007)

This study takes an explorative approach, without a predefined theoretical framework, the research aims to study multiple individuals and describe characteristics of a community and social impact therein, for which grounded theory is a useful approach. Although the study will

look at these concepts, the aim is not to develop a theory or generalisation about the community, but rather to focus on the social interactions within the community through individual stories. Thus, the community is more important as a contextual aspect of the study, rather than the main subject. The narrative approach is more suitable in this particular study, as it focuses on describing the individual experiences of respondents. Studying the individual experiences allows to develop a chronological overview of the volunteers' stories. When studying multiple individuals and their stories, patterns of social interactions and perspectives can be discovered.

This study uses participant observation, personal conversation and semi-structured interviews as the main data source. Such an approach is most common in studying citizen initiatives (Igalla, Edelenbos, & van Meerkerk, 2019), and especially suitable for this study as interviews allow to get a more in-depth understanding of the specific context by zooming in on social interactions and lived experiences of participants therein (Behnia, 2012; McAllum, 2019). Additionally, due to the explorative nature of the study, it is necessary to allow participants an open conversation, in which topics can be explored that might not have been thought of beforehand by the researcher (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

Therefore, the approach is best described as narrative analyses, gathering data through collecting stories of multiple individuals, reporting their experiences, and analysing the chronology and meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2007 p. 54). This method is also used in studies with a similar inductive design (Frykman, & Mäkelä, 2019; McAllum, 2019).

## **4.2 Study area**

To get an insight into the community and the narrative of volunteers, it is important to have access to the right individuals, who are accessible and willing to share information with the researcher, this study is therefore conducted as a volunteer and participant in activities organised in a NGO. The research looks at volunteers who work with migrants through a local community development organisation in counties Meath and Louth in Ireland. The volunteers are part of various projects including conversational English language classes and events and activities in and around the towns of Duleek and Ardee (with a population between 4.000-5.000) and the towns of Navan and Dundalk (with a population of 30.000 and 39.000 respectively), the location of the study area can be seen in Figure 4.

This area was chosen for the research as it consist of relatively small towns surrounded by rural areas, which can be identified as New Immigration Destinations (NID), characterised by a recent development of increased migrant settlement in the area, where public services are

still mostly tailored to the local context (McAreavey & Argent, 2018). As the goal of the NGO is to establish a sustainable and continuing role in community development and migrant integration, the volunteers are engaged on a regular basis and for longer periods of time, distinguishing them from crisis-response volunteering or ‘welcome initiatives’ which have been studied before (Hamann & Karakayali, 2016).

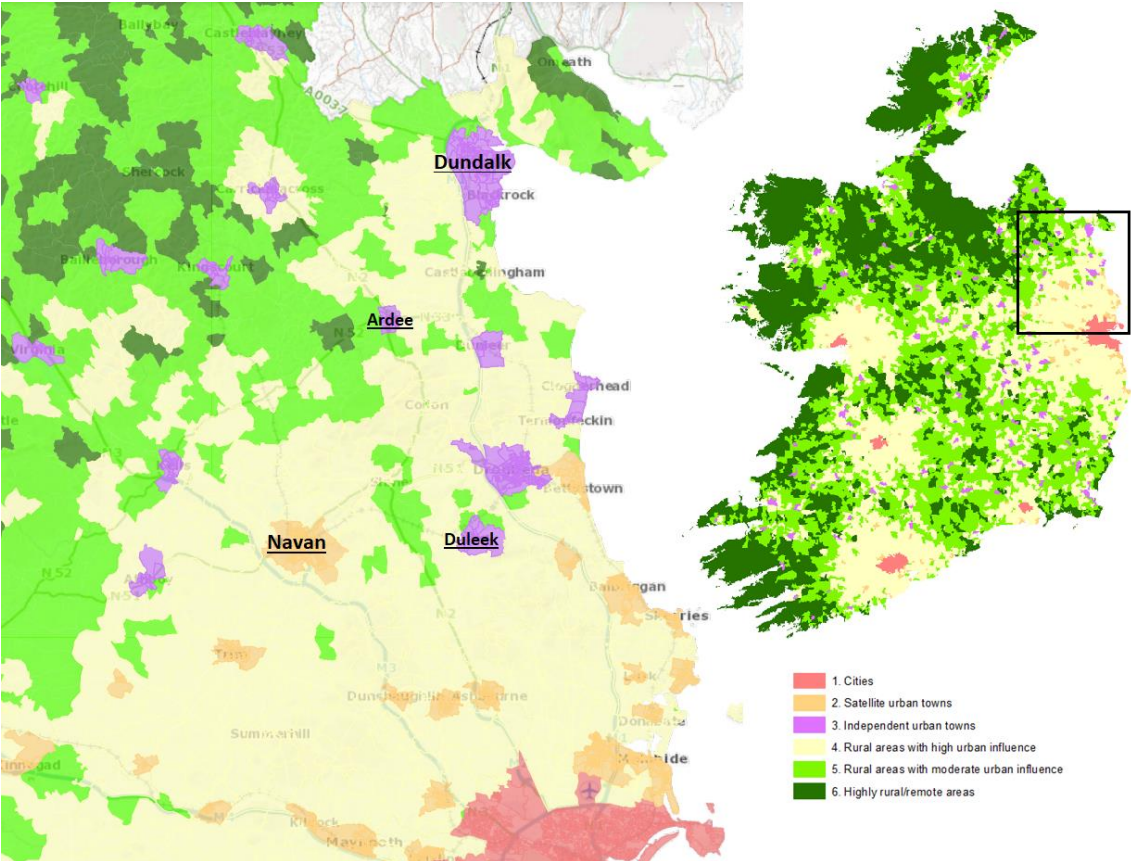


Figure 4. location of study area.  
 Source: CSO Ireland, 2019

**4.3 Participants**

To capture the volunteer’s narratives and assess whether the perspective about migration of the volunteer changes through encounters with migrants, it is important to get a close understanding of the experiences and social interactions in the community. To find participants, the first contact was made with volunteer coordinators of conversational English language classes in the different towns. After the first contact, a class was attended where various volunteers teach newcomers the English language. Through participation and observation the setting in which the volunteering takes place and the individual volunteers were introduced. The role of the researcher as a volunteer and the purpose of the study was

introduced to the volunteers and students and contact information of individual volunteers was collected. Irish-born volunteers of different ages and genders were then contacted and asked about their willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews. Additionally, snowball sampling was applied to receive contact information of people who had previously been volunteering with the organisation.

#### **4.4 Interviews**

Between February and May, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were structured to discuss four main themes, a topic list with open-ended questions related to these themes was used for the interview guide, the list is enclosed in Appendix 1. The first part of the interviews comprised an introduction to collect information about the background and motivation of the volunteer, as well as (pre)conceptions and expectations before the volunteer started volunteering with migrants. The second part or theme, was experiences, focusing on stories from the volunteer about their work and about interactions/encounters with migrants, other volunteers, and the organisation. The third theme was about the perspective, the perspective of the volunteer about migration and to what extent this perspective on migration has been influenced by their encounters. The last theme was about sharing with others, were these experiences and perspectives, possibly in the form of stories, shared with people who don't volunteer? And did volunteers feel like their perspective or knowledge about migration differed from that of the people they shared stories with? The goal of these four main themes was to provide insight in the creation and possible transformation of the narrative of the volunteer, and the positioning of their narrative in the context of the community. The data collected during the fieldwork comprised seven interviews as well as fieldnotes of observations and conversations with volunteers while attending the classes.

#### **4.5 Analyses**

All interviews were audiotaped and manually transcribed according to the verbatim method. After transcription, Atlas.ti 23 was used for the narrative analyses. The coding took place in two cycles. During the first cycle, initial and values coding methods were applied, the process was then followed by a second cycle of focused coding, these coding methods were applied as described by Saldana (2013) and elaborated below.

In the first cycle of coding, initial coding and values coding were applied simultaneously. The purpose of initial coding, also referred to as 'open-ended coding', is to

code transcripts line-by-line, leaving open all possible outcomes and directions, thereby being able to find analytic leads that need further exploration (Saldana, 2013). This method is especially common in grounded theory and ethnographies but suitable for all kinds of qualitative research. The purpose of values coding is to apply codes that “reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldana, 2013, p. 110). This coding method is especially suitable for studying cultural values and interpersonal experiences, such as those of participants in volunteering. It will also contribute to describing the volunteers’ individual stories and perspectives, and allow to focus on how and when values are shared.

During the first cycle, mostly complete lines or paragraphs in the interviews were coded, sometimes with multiple codes as the quote would touch on different topics or perspectives relevant to the research. During the initial coding, code categories arose such as ‘Migrants’, ‘Volunteering’ and ‘Community’, with many codes describing properties or aspects of these categories. Values coding was applied focusing on values, attitudes and beliefs communicated by the interviewee. This combination of coding methods allowed for a strong foundation of analyses of the topics brought up by the interviewees and their personal views around these topics. An example of the coding process in the first cycle can be seen below in Figure 5.

<p>76 V: Yeah *sighs*, and since I've joined Cultur.. Like I was always kind of, you know.. everyone's equal, equal rights for everybody. Doesn't matter who you are, color, breed, race../</p> <p>77 I: Where you're from.</p> <p>78 V: Doesn't matter where you're from, you should be treated the same.</p> <p>79 I: Yes.</p> <p>80 V: And, I always had that mentality and the people will be going on like 'oh, all the immigrants coming in' and you know 'they're all being housed' and, usually I just go yeah, yeah, yep. But since I've started in Cultur and I've seen people and I've seen their struggle and, there's a face to it now. Like I find it disappointing when people close to start talking like that. I can't, I feel, yeah just disappointed.</p> <p>81 I: *nods*</p> <p>82 V: Now, I don't pull them up on it because I don't want to get dragged into an argument. But, like I've had friends that made remarks and it's kind of, shut the * up will you, you don't what you're talking about, you've never met these people, you don't know their struggle.</p>	<p>3:19 Yeah *sighs* and s... 3:20 Yes, V: And, I always ha...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ A: disapprove discrimination</li> <li>◆ B: people to be treated with di...</li> </ul> <p>◆ negativity perceived in network</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Sharing: disappointment</li> <li>◆ Volunteering: change perspecti...</li> </ul> <p>3:21 Now, I don't...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ avoiding negativity</li> <li>◆ Migrants: misunderstood</li> </ul>
<p>50 V: I am having a great time, I am learning so much about other cultures, so much. And I think I get more out of this than I give because.. You know there is a fear factor with people from other countries.</p> <p>51 I: Yeah.</p> <p>52 V: You know, you don't know anything about them. But they're the same, we're all the same.</p> <p>53 I: Yeah.</p> <p>54 V: And I think the classes have taught me that, but we're the same, but we all have our own little stories, you know: traditions, culture, family life, work life, uhm.. So in the class when they talk about their families and their culture, I am taking all this in and, you know I'm learning so much about what it's like to be Ukrainian, what it's like to be Brazillian, you know so, I'm learning lots.</p>	<p>2:16 I am ha...</p> <p>2:17 You know there is...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ learning about different cultures</li> <li>◆ Migrants: misunderstood</li> <li>◆ Migrants: ordinary people</li> </ul> <p>2:18 And I think the da...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ learning about different cultures</li> <li>◆ Migrants: nationalities</li> <li>◆ Personal development: learnin...</li> <li>◆ Volunteering: change perspecti...</li> </ul>

Figure 5. Examples of first cycle coding

Source: Author

After the first cycle coding, focused coding was applied to create a code hierarchy. Some codes were merged into broader codes and all codes were colour coded and organised into 15 code categories, with each code representing an association, property, negative, positive or neutral relation to the category. The code categories were then sorted into 4 overarching code groups: 'Personal Development, Values-Attitudes-Beliefs', 'Volunteering', 'Experiences/Stories' and 'Community and Society'. All transcripts were reviewed, in which the new coding hierarchy was applied and codes were further added and merged. The result of this process is shown in Figure 6.

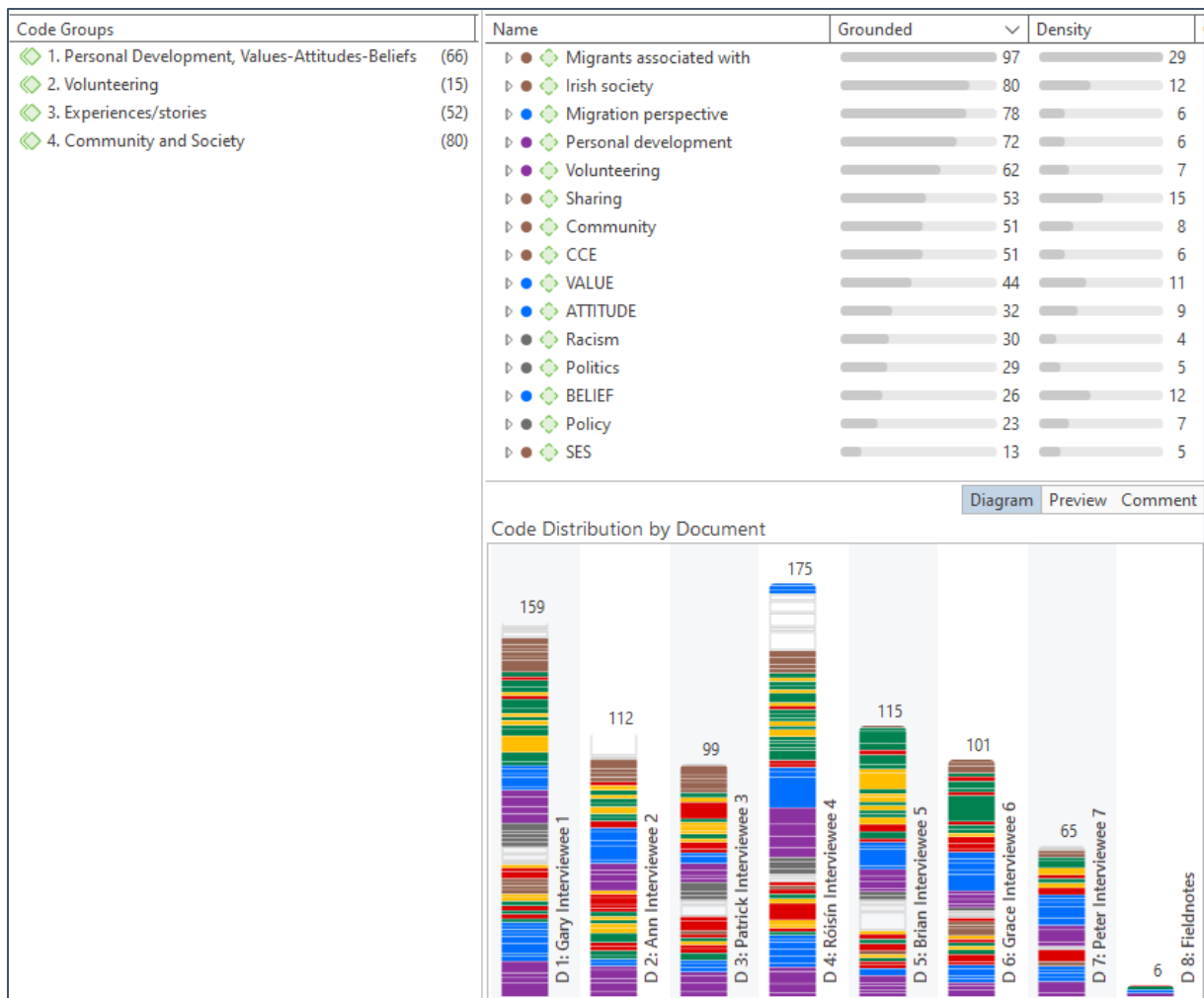


Figure 6. Categorisation after second cycle of focused coding

Source: Author

## 5. Results

In this chapter, the results of the qualitative analysis will be presented and discussed. Accordingly, the chapter will describe to what extent the results can be related to the theoretical framework and the research questions and whether new insights have come to light from the data. In conjunction with the conceptual framework (Figure 2), the results will be presented starting with the motivations of the volunteers (5.1). Consequently, the focus will be on the experiences and stories shared by the volunteers (5.2), followed by a description of the social environment based on the respondents' remarks about the community and society (5.3). At the end of every section, a preliminary conclusion will discuss the research sub questions. Together, these sections will provide an answer to the main research question posed in Chapter 2, which will be discussed in the Conclusion chapter.

### 5.1 Motivations to volunteer

This section will aim to answer the first research sub question as presented in Section 2.2: *'Why do people volunteer with newcomers within their community, and what is their initial perspective on migration?'* To answer this question, the results are divided into three subtopics. The first subsection (5.1.1) describes how respondents got involved in the organisation and how they decided to start volunteering, along with information about the backgrounds and demographics of the respondents. The second subsection (5.1.2) will focus on the motivation and personal development aspects as a reason to start volunteering with migrants. The third subsection (5.1.3) will aim to describe the volunteers' initial perspective on migration. The last subsection (5.1.4) provides a conclusion of the results in this section and will reflect on the abovementioned research question.

#### 5.1.1 Getting involved

As outlined in Chapter 2 and 3, there can be several reasons for people to get involved in volunteering. This subsection will focus on the background of the volunteers, the initial decision to start volunteering within their own community, and more specifically in English language classes with migrants. Some scholars have argued that voluntarily helping migrants is more likely if one's social network is more positive towards migrants (Roblain, et al. 2020), whereas other studies focusing on demographics found that people that are higher educated and more religious are more likely to volunteer with migrants (Meijeren et al. 2022).

Most of the respondents in this study got involved in the English classes through an ad, the ad was found in the local newspaper or a bulletin in the local church or library. The majority contacted the organisation out of their own initiative, two respondents were motivated by their partner and one other volunteer got involved through a friend. Most volunteers mentioned background, personality aspects and values as a reason to get involved.

*“...my wife’s seen an ad in the local paper, for people just to teach conversational English, and she said Patrick you’d be very good at that. I would talk to the wall, I talk to anybody, I would.”* (Interviewee 3, 2023)

The respondents were aged 37 to 76, with most of them retired, and none working in full-time jobs, this was also mentioned as a reason to volunteer. Respondents noted that time investment and availability were important conditions to their involvement, and that several former volunteers as well as students had stopped participating, sometimes after several months, due to getting a job or moving further away.

*“I just happened to be retired. If I was working, I would not be involved with Cultúr, because I just wouldn’t have time. [...] I think, it’s a certain age group persons as well, because if you have got young children, you’re too busy. If you’re working full-time, probably too busy.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

Volunteers also expressed they were interested in community work in general and wanted to keep contributing to the community after retirement. Most respondents had done volunteering activities before, or were engaged in several other community groups and activities.

*“I stopped working but I still wanted to do something, to contribute something.”*  
(Fieldnotes, 2023)

*“I’ve had more comebacks than Muhammad Ali or Frank Sinatra. I’ve retired four times and I keep meeting people that say do you want to you work here, do you want to work here, right? I’m involved in three or four different community groups. In fact, I’m busier now than when I was working.”* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

As well as being active in the community, there was some overlap in the respondents' occupational background. Several volunteers had worked in nursing and teaching, the latter of which is perhaps unsurprising for volunteers at English language classes. However, when asking about the respondents' background, many explained both their occupational background as well as their engagement as a volunteer more in relation to their personal values, as shown in below examples.

*“No well just, just that I could give the help, if I could give the help I give the help, because it's in my nature to help.”* (Interviewee 6, 2023)

*“And I think maybe empathy is more important than degrees really. [...] because some people highly qualify then in the end they don't, they're not able to make people feel at home, or welcome or create a community and all that things.”* (Interviewee 1, 2023)

*“Yes, yes. And I suppose that just stood to me over the years and, I suppose really, you ask me why I decided.. I think it was the fact that I wanted to try and make a difference for people that were in dire circumstances, you know.”* (Interviewee 4, 2023)

The most prominent of value codes throughout the data was 'Helping people', and the above examples show different respondents moving the conversation from their background towards more affectional motivations. In the first example, Interviewee 6 explains how both teaching and volunteering were forms of helping people, and how she would always help people if she had the opportunity, whereas Interviewee 1 argues that empathy is more valuable than having a teaching degree, thus focusing on what is more important in the volunteering context. Interviewee 4 explains she wanted to make a difference for people in dire circumstances, and thereby draws a relation between helping as a nurse and helping migrants. In all these examples, the respondents were initially talking about the role of their background, but eventually expressed a more values-based personal perspectives.

Among the volunteers who had started more recently, another motivation mentioned frequently was the war in Ukraine, and the desire, or feeling of a moral obligation to help those people coming to Ireland. This was explained from both personal as well as societal perspectives.

*“Well first of all, you know, the war and that, it was probably a noble thing to do, in terms of the war and you know how terrible it was and you know..” (Interviewee 7, 2023)*

*“The Irish people would have.. The history of Ukraine would mirror of the history of Ireland big time, right? Both bullied by a bigger neighbour, both countries that have got independence relatively recently, both countries whose population was decimated by a famine that was caused by the big neighbour, right okay? Irish people realise that the famine is still in the air slightly back here, right? And so there is a lot of affinity towards the Ukrainians.” (Interviewee 5, 2023)*

In the first example, the respondent expresses the desire to help people who have struggled as a personal belief, a ‘noble thing’. In the second example the respondent draws a parallel between the Irish people’s history and the situation in the Ukraine, explaining a seemingly natural affinity with this group of migrants. All respondents had their own story about how they got involved in volunteering with migrants, but generally the affectional reasons, personal values and beliefs, along with time availability were mentioned as the main reasons to get involved.

### 5.1.2 Motivation

The results outlined in the previous subsection show that the decision to start volunteering for a specific cause is not coincidental, and is the result of underlying motivations. As outlined in Chapter 2, people can be motivated by their own backgrounds and views. Some people are looking for personal development or a meaningful activity, whereas others are ideologically motivated to start volunteering, and the motivation to work with migrants specifically, can come from certain ideas or preconceptions about migrants.

As found in previous studies (see for example: Mateiu-Vescan et al. 2021), people not only volunteer to help others, but also to get something out of it themselves, whether this is personal skill development or a motivation to employ personal interests. The respondents in this study were very diverse in their personal motivation to volunteer, for some it was seen as a challenge, moving out of one’s comfort zone, whereas for others it provided a meaningful activity or a way to accomplish new skills.

*“Because, uhm.. I wasn’t doing much, at the time. So it was an outlet for me as well, it wasn’t just for volunteering. It wasn’t just for the sake of volunteering, it was for me to get out of the house as well and have my own thing.” (Interviewee 3, 2023)*

In this example, the volunteer explains how he used to stay at home a lot due to his health situation, and that the volunteering would be a trigger to get out of the house and find a meaningful activity to which he could commit on a weekly basis and that would benefit the volunteer in terms of health as well as socially. Another volunteer explained that she was attracted to the teaching aspect of volunteering in the classes.

*“So for a long time I wanted to be a teacher, and then I changed my mind and I did something else. And now that I’m finished and retired, I said maybe, there’s a little bit of me that still, would like to be a teacher, you know, or help in some way. So, this is perfect for me.” (Interviewee 2, 2023)*

In this example, the volunteer finds a way to employ the personal interest of becoming a teacher, a wish she had when she was younger. The volunteering helps in a way to still accomplish this, giving a sense of personal development. Other volunteers also expressed an eagerness to learn new things, some who had been teaching in schools for years, would still find a personal challenge as they now had to use their skills in a different context:

*“Like, it was a whole new field to me, you know, I have, you know.. I have never had to deal with people that their first language wasn’t English, you know? So it was kind of, it was a learning curve, really.” (Interviewee 4, 2023)*

Several respondents also mentioned their interest in languages, as much as the classes were focused on the English language, most volunteers would have their own interest in other foreign languages. Some would follow weekly classes to learn Spanish or French, whereas others had met people through the classes that would teach them Italian, Ukrainian or Portuguese.

*“I think in Ireland the problem is we assume we can’t learn, you know. I mean, people in Holland, their English, effortlessly, you know, because they kind of have to, you know. Whereas in Ireland, we’re spoiled. We have English next door so we don’t*

*bother, you know. The Americans speak English as well so, you know and all the films, all the films are in English. So why would we learn Spanish for example?"*

(Interviewee 7, 2023)

*"I also I kind of, I like the whole concept of learning a language. I like the psychology of that, you know what I mean. And how, how people actually learn. Like when I learn Spanish, you know. It's really, it really makes your brain work overtime, and I, I kind of like that it."* (Interviewee 7, 2023)

In the above example, the respondent shows pity for Irish people not being eager to learn a foreign language, as their first language is perhaps the most useful in everyday life. He later explains his own interest in learning a foreign language. However, respondents acknowledged that they would learn a foreign language out of interest and enjoyment, rather than for the necessity of it.

Along with language, several respondents expressed 'learning about different cultures' and 'meeting different people' as personal values and positive ways to develop, it was also frequently mentioned as a reason to volunteer in different community groups, and especially with migrants.

*"Well, I suppose really, as I say I like travelling a lot, I like meeting people from other countries. And obviously if people from other countries come here, I mean it's an opportunity for me to learn, as well as to help you know."*

There seemed to be a general interest in learning about different languages and cultures and an eagerness to learn new things more broadly, but none of the respondents expressed a strong desire to develop skills that would be of greater personal or career related benefit, this is perhaps related to the fact that most respondents were not active in the labour market.

### 5.1.3 Initial perspective on migration

As outlined in the previous paragraph, respondents in general had positive associations with learning about different countries and cultures and meeting different people. The reasons for developing an interest in this varied a lot between respondents, for some it was clearly linked to a broader perspective on migration, others did not express a clear perspective. Some respondents worked with or had various encounters with migrants in the past, whereas for

others it was relatively new. Some volunteers talked about their own experience or that of family members living abroad and how this influenced their perspective on migration.

When looking at the experiences of respondents themselves, stories about migration were limited but nonetheless associated with interesting perspectives. Only two of the people interviewed had lived outside Ireland, both in London for a duration of five to six years. Two other respondents had done seasonal work in London for a few months, but returned to live in the town they grew up in. Five out of seven respondents also moved within Ireland, which resulted in different perspectives in its own right. In response to the question of personal experiences with emigration and how it influenced their position in helping migrants in Ireland, one of the respondents had the following to say:

*“I lived in London for a while, yeah. In the early seventies [...] That's a very interesting question. I never thought about it, uhm, I don't know. I don't think that was uhm, part of my decision. I think my.. Now, having said that, I would always be of the opinion that, uhm.. Children, you know, need to move outside their own comfort zone, you know, move to another country if possible, but at least move out of their own town or village or, you know, in order to broaden their outlook I suppose. You know I would have dealt.. I would have nursed I suppose when I was in London. I would have nursed people of different countries, you know, different nationalities, etc. [...] Not just, English people, you know, members of the UK. And I would have worked with staff from different countries as well so, I suppose that uhm.. Now, I was a very young nurse, I was only newly qualified when I went to London, you know, so.. But I suppose I learned, really learned my skills. Not necessarily my nursing skills but uhm, how to, how to communicate with people..” (Interviewee 4, 2023)*

In this part of the conversation, at first instance the interviewee replies *“I never thought about it”*, signalling no connection between having lived abroad and the perspective on migration. However, this is immediately rectified by sharing the opinion that it is beneficial for children to move place in order to get out of their comfort zone, with the purpose of broadening your outlook. This is then backed by the respondents' own experience of working with people from different backgrounds when staying in the UK. Another respondent had a completely different response, that was related to their own experience with discrimination against Irish people:

*“I was in London went to work, but I was a student, and there were notices on a lot of doors: No blacks or Irish, you know so [...] We were at the receiving end of a lot of racism. [...] So we should, I think that's why people should tolerate them [migrants], you know their fathers or grandfathers were, were the other way around.”*

(Interviewee 1, 2023)

In this example, the respondent brings forward a clear example of racism. By explaining that Irish people have been discriminated against in the past, introducing a historical and ethical perspective around discrimination to back the opinion that people should be tolerant towards migrants. All respondents that went to England mentioned that it was either during ‘the Troubles’ or around the time of IRA campaigns in England, and two other respondent would have been aware about anti-Irish feeling. When asking about their own experience with discrimination in the UK, they responded the following:

*“Uhm not, yes, not really, no. To some extent, there was a bank strike here when I went to England and there was, the IRA had a campaign in England at the time, right. So they had a campaign in the north and they had occasionally a campaign in England. In fact, I think one of the, when I was in England, they tried to blow up the British Government in Saint Paul's Cathedral. Saint Paul's City Cathedral is a famous cathedral in London, right? [...] but I would be conscious of the fact that, you know, there was a bit of anti-Irish feeling over there. Let's say that I've never met, I never met any hostility, I thought the people over there to be lovely.”* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

*“Uhm, I have to say unbiased I found English people were very tolerant I thought, by and large towards us, and that time the troubles were on in Northern Ireland, the people were dropping bombs everywhere, and I found them very tolerant I thought, you know.”* (Interviewee 7, 2023)

First hand experiences with anti-Irish racism were not echoed by most respondents, even though respondents in the above examples were aware of the possible prevalence due to political tension at the time. At the same time, none of the respondents mentioned having to ‘adjust’ in London, as it is to an extent seen as an adjacent culture. Some of the volunteers that had moved within Ireland however did express having to integrate, or get used to minor

cultural differences. One of the volunteers had experienced this as positive, and felt like becoming part of a welcoming community:

*“Yeah I like it here, I do, I like it in Duleek. It took a while to get used to it, I have to say. [...] Like I love living in Duleek, I love saying hello walking by people. Like I grew up in [Dublin], you didn’t just say hello to strangers like. Whereas you’re walking here you’re just walking by somebody and you just say good evening, or good morning or.. It’s just a nice atmosphere, you know, it’s a small community. It’s a small community but we have a lot of different cultures in it.”* (Interviewee 3, 2023)

In contrast, another volunteer mentioned that even after 50 years of living in the town, she only felt beginning to be accepted to the community.

Most stories about migration however tended to be of a positive kind and 6 out of 7 respondents had immigration and emigration experiences in their family. Some interviewees showed how their perspective on migration was formed by this, as for example in the following conversation:

*“No, I’ve lived in Ireland all my life. But I have three children, who, unfortunate but three of them live in other countries. [...] One lives in France and two live in the UK. But my son who lives in France, because his French is not very good, he can’t get work there. They, in France, they only employ you, first of all if you have very good French, or if you’ve been born in France. So there’s kind of negativity, in France, so he’s working online for an Irish company. [...] My two children that work in the UK, they feel. Well one of them, she’s only just after moving over, she feels that the Irish are welcome in the UK, but she says, you know she is well treated. But there is a lot of unrest in the UK, with people of different colour, you know. She feels that there is a problem over there.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

In this example, the interviewee explains that she learned from her children about struggles associated with living in a different country, something she recognises with migrants in Ireland. The way in which these stories influenced her migration perspective was then elaborated.

*“But I think, because my children live away, I hope that people in other countries will be nice to them, so it makes me feel, that I should be nice to people who come to my country. Because my children are in other people's countries.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

Another volunteer explained that through his family ties he got positively acquainted with Eastern European cultures, having a nephew married to a Polish girl and two children adopted from Russia.

*“I suppose I've just, I've been in Poland quite a lot because I have a nephew married to a Polish girl. So I probably would have affinity with people from Poland you know. You know the culture of Ukraine and Poland are very similar. In fact, part of Poland was once as you know part of Ukraine, you know. [...] it would be familiar it would yeah. And actually the strange thing was actually, I adopted two kids who were Russian, right, that complicates matters, right?”* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

In this story there is both a positive association with Poland and Ukraine, as well as the awareness of struggles, especially those experienced by his children because of the current conflict.

*“I heard if there was anything on their mind, you know, it's not. We're not fighting with your children, we're fighting with Putin. You know, and I think the situation with most Russians who are in the war, vast majority are actually just.. My, my son would have been fighting against Ukraine if he hadn't been adopted. He was adopted from an orphanage. And he'd be bottom of the food pile, right? So he'd be tossed into the army in the front and that's, you do what your told till you get shot.”* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

Although affected by the conflict, the respondent explains that his children, as well a majority of Russian people, do not feel any particular affiliation for the Russian war, thereby emphasising there aren't much hostilities between ordinary people from different countries. Similarly to the example above, although with a completely different story, another respondent expresses affinity towards helping people from a different background. In a conversation about family migration, this volunteer explained how helping people from a different culture was rooted in her family as well as in religious believes.

*“I do have some aunts, A cousin of my father's a priest and my two sisters nuns. [...] they all did huge amount of work, for society and for Ireland, plus across the world, I mean they went out with nothing. May I know, one of my sister spent four years in Ghana, she went to the order so she had support, but like in the beginning, they sent her, 2 nuns into the wilds of Africa or, different places and then just “God will provide”. And they just went with it, but look at all the work they did, you know. All over the world. And you can see that in all the names and places and all that.”*  
(Interviewee 6, 2023)

In this example the volunteer explains that it must have been hard for her sister to move to a completely different place, although they were able to do highly valued work by doing so. This is reflected in the volunteer’s own experience in helping migrant children integrate in a school in Ireland, where she even went back to help out after retiring.

*“But we, we did get a group of children that I had, and they were also from Syria, but they were from way in the hinterland of Syria, they haven't been to school much. So we were doing the best and I went in. I had retired at the stage but I went back in to help these, and we were trying to get them, that we would start them off slowly and then we would integrate them class by class. A couple a class of them. And we couldn't understand, they would come late and that, then they said they had no clocks. You know, and it was our stupidity I have to say, it was our ignorance. Until one day I don't know what registered, but something registered and we suddenly realised they couldn't read our numbers. So when we were telling them go to room 6, they didn't know where room 6 was because they didn't know the number six. So we had to teach, we were very busy teaching them how to write their name, and teaching them the alphabet. But we forgot that they, we didn't realise they didn't read our numbers.”*  
(Interviewee 6, 2023)

This recent experience had led to an even better awareness of the struggles that come with migrating to a country with completely different language and customs. The same volunteer also shared a story about having an Indian woman living with her, and how she would experience being the only Irish person when she attended an occasion with just Indian people:

*“It was one of the children's birthdays and they were having a party. And our parish priest is also from India and he was invited to the, to the ceremony, because it is a ceremony for them for the birthday, and so was I. But I was the only white person in the room. Which you know, we discussed. Because I said now I am the minority. [...] It just gave me the experience of being a minority and in the family home situation, they had to speak English for me because they all spoke the same language.” (Interviewee 6, 2023)*

This story shows a realisation by the respondent about never having experienced being a minority before, and how this was brought up to people during the celebration she was attending, leading to people having to adjust to her presence by speaking English.

As evident from the data, most respondents had prior experiences that contributed to their migration perspectives, this was reflected from their own experiences of moving or going to different places as well as stories about immigration and emigration in their families and previous encounters with people from different countries.

#### 5.1.4 Conclusion

This section has shed light on the reasons for respondents to get involved in volunteering with migrants and how previous experiences had shaped their migration perspective. Thus, the results from this section will help to answer the first sub question outlined in Chapter 2: *‘Why do people volunteer with newcomers within their community, and what is their initial perspective on migration?’*

In all the examples outlined in this section, the respondents had experiences related to migration, which influenced their migration perspectives to varying degrees. For most respondents, this perspective was not very tangible or concretely explained, but there seemed to be a general awareness about immigration and emigration. One of the most important reasons for respondents to start volunteering was time availability, along with affectionate reasons and eagerness to learn about different cultures and languages. A lot of respondents showed how previous experiences and stories had influenced their perspective on migration, about struggling with language as well as culturally diverse and discriminatory environments. However, for most respondents this was not directly what triggered them to start volunteering with migrants. Personal values and beliefs, and affectionate reasons such as helping people seemed to be more common. The next section will explore more of the stories from the

volunteering itself and to what extent this further influenced the volunteers' migration perspectives.

## **5.2 Experiences**

This section will aim to provide an answer to the second research question: *'What experiences do people have from volunteering with migrants, and how does this influence their perspective on migration?'* To answer this question, the narratives of respondents were analysed to create a chronological overview and thereby focus on changes in perspectives and opinions originating from the experiences of volunteering, rather than experiences from before. The first subsection (5.2.1) elaborates on the respondents' experiences from volunteering with migrants by reflecting on the stories shared during the interviews. The second subsection (5.2.2) will focus on changes in the volunteers' perspective as related to or resulting from these experiences. The last subsection (5.2.3) provides a conclusion of the results in this section and will reflect on the second research question.

### 5.2.1 Experiences from volunteering

Stories from volunteers about migrants they had met during the classes were abundant, and varied from formal educational perspectives, practicalities and struggles in daily life all the way to personal and emotional stories. As shown in the previous section, most of the volunteers had relations with or worked with people from different countries before, although a lot of stories were told about the experiences from volunteering. Altogether, the volunteers mentioned 21 countries of which they had met people from during the classes. They had diverse stories about migrants and integration in the community. The interviews were coded with positive associations, neutral associations and negative associations. The distribution of these codes over the interviews can be seen in Figure 7, in which the green, yellow and red colours represent the kind of associations respectively and the blue codes represent elaboration of migration perspectives.

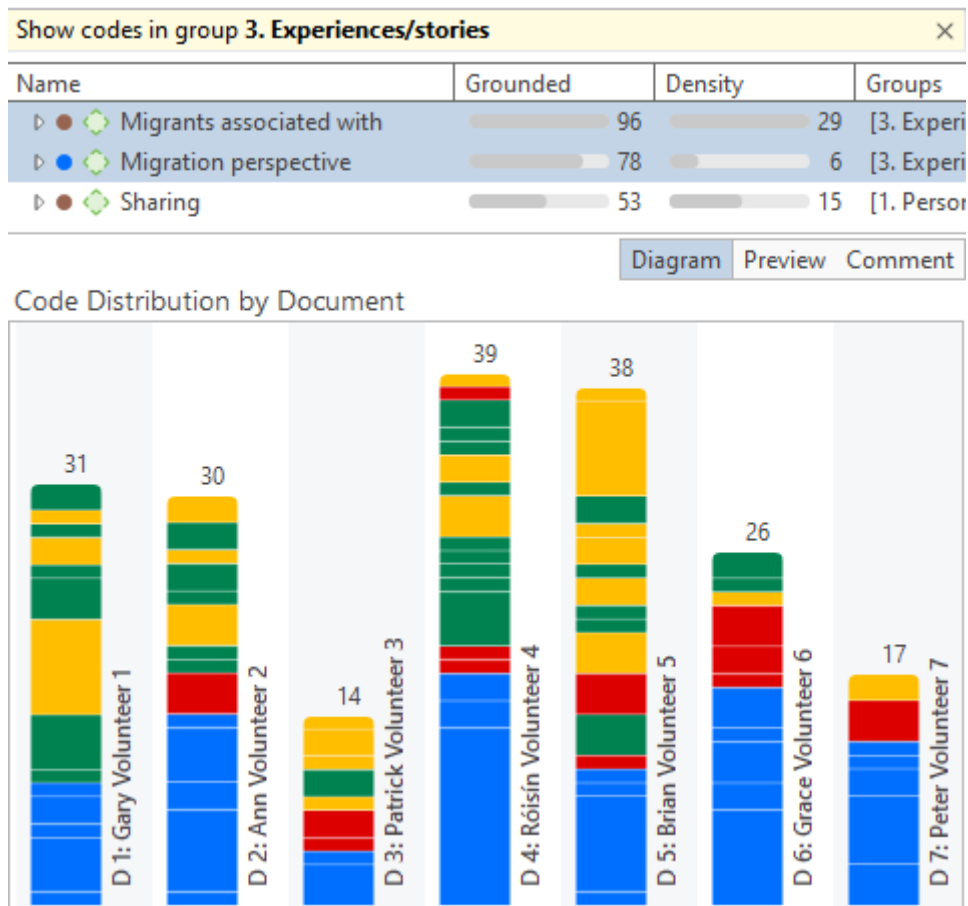


Figure 7. Distribution of Experiences and Stories codes

Negative associations were stories of migrants who were going through struggles, for example as being a refugee, having to deal with discrimination or being vulnerable because they did not speak the language well. One of the volunteers explained how she was being careful with choosing topics for conversation in the classes:

*“The thing is, I do believe that it's important, to gain the trust of people, you know. Because they have been traumatised enough. And I also recognise the fact and, you know they're coming in to a different culture, different country. We speak differently, we think differently, we've different values, you know what I mean?”* (Interviewee 4, 2023)

In this example, the volunteer talks about gaining trust, thereby emphasizing a sensitivity that comes with a cultural barrier. Even volunteers who tried to avoid emotional conversations, had noticed a lot of every day struggles in the lives of migrants, as explained in this example from another interview:

*“Yes, I don't like talking about the war, about the war in Ukraine. Because it can be very upsetting, for them. You know so I, at the start of the class I usually ask them is there anything they want to talk about since I saw them. You know, so they talk about how difficult it is to get their passport renewed. The Ukrainian embassy in Dublin only has very small staff, that's a major difficulty for them to get their passports renewed, I hear them talking about that if they need to go to the dentist, sometimes they need to fly back, because the dentist here is too expensive.” (Interviewee 2, 2023)*

Even though the organisation had advised to avoid emotional subjects, and focus on practising daily conversational English and small talk, some people found the personal stories to be the most interesting. In the below example, a volunteer talks about how a personal story impacted him:

*“Uhm, the one that really got me was when they were showing me, now I'd seen pictures on the TV and stuff but.. A moment that really got me was when they were showing me the photos on their phones, and like, she's in the photo! Like it's not a photo off the internet. The girl standing beside me is in the photo, and there's nothing, nothing left of her home. Nothing, their car riddled with bullets, that hit me!”*  
(Interviewee 3, 2023)

Other volunteers also noticed that some migrants have a hard experience, especially when the volunteers were spending more time with the people outside of the English classes. One of the volunteers went to a social welfare office to help filling up an application and he explains how there was a lack of service that made it complicated for both him and the woman he was trying to help with her application.

*“I was down in the office one day, a social welfare office and was with this other girl [...] and we've seen this lady with a form, and she was filling up her form and she was, and as always she hadn't a clue, filling up the form with Google translate. And I told her and I said look it, I'm a volunteer here, can I help? And she was very weary of me, you know. And I said, look it, I've not interested in anything but she filling up the form. And we were filling up the form, then come down to her finances and I said, they want to know those, you look after those.. And the form is rubbish! Asking her about, it*

*is the same forms I fill up if I was looking for social welfare, asking about the, what my house is worth, the amount of my mortgage, the mortgage payments. Now it's completely irrelevant, right?"* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

The volunteer felt upset about the lady at the social welfare office not wanting to help, and even being weary of him trying to help someone who can't read the form. He then also explained how this form was completely irrelevant to the situation of a refugee, by asking about house and mortgage worth. Other respondents also talked about the vulnerability that comes with not speaking the language:

*"That's the biggest problem, lack of basic knowledge of language, really is debilitating I mean, you're at the mercy of everybody, an employer or.. and you really don't have easy access to anything! just ordinary services, I mean, you go for information but you can't ask for the information you know. Or you go somewhere and people assume, I suppose that's a thing I've learned as well, a lot of functionaries assume that everybody is the same, so they just give you a form and say: just fill that up and you're looking at this form and you can't read anything or.."* (Interviewee 1, 2023)

This vulnerability of not speaking the language was mentioned by several respondents, it results in a lot of problems for migrants when navigating through education, work and health services, most respondents had not noticed this lack in services before. Some people were surprised by how hard it could be to fill a form, attend a parent meeting at a school, to call a doctor when you or your child is sick, or understanding your rights in a workplace, some of these stories were real eye-openers to them. One of the volunteers told about how surprised she was by a woman in her class who is illiterate in her native language and is now learning English.

*"Uhm, I'm also surprised that some of the people, that are in the class, they don't even know how to read and write in their own language. They can't read or write in their own country, I thought that day was finished, I thought everybody knew how to read and write, you know. And these are all women, that can't read or write in their own country, so that is a huge eye-opener for me."* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

At the same time, a lot of positive stories were also associated with language, as the Language was seen as the most important step to ‘take off’ and let migrants progress in work and education. Volunteers said they enjoyed seeing people progress quickly but they would also miss people who stopped attending because they had started a job, education or moved away.

*“You know and then there are other students, who get jobs. And then they are learning in the job, and they don't need to come. You know, so like everybody has a different story, and sometimes you wonder how they're doing, you know. You're just curious, I hope they're doing okay.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

The respondents were very positive about their students and surprised by their motivation to progress. The volunteers with a teaching background mentioned how much more motivated these students were than the youth they used to have in their classes. This was also put into a cultural perspective, in which one respondent ascribed this to cultural difference as well:

*“Yeah, so it is very tough. But the other thing I'm really impressed by is how well so many people have, if they are determined, how fast they learn, and how fast they improve [...] They are highly motivated you know, when I was a teacher, I mean children, kids, teenagers you know, they weren't so. Well some would be highly motivated but some weren't. But it shows the importance of motivation, if you really want it, if this is an essential for you, you learn pretty fast you know. I think in the west now there's this problem that teachers have to try and encourage the people to learn rather than.. Whereas in another countries people are eager to learn yeah?”*  
(Interviewee 1, 2023)

In a lot of the stories, migrants were described with positive associations such as being thankful, innovative, highly motivated, hardworking and of benefit to the economic and cultural aspects of society. Respondents were also very conscious about the increasing immigration trend. As one of the former teachers explains, she became aware of the increasingly diverse classes in schools but had not recognised such a development yet in the workforce:

*“Well, no.. I can tell you for about the 1st 30 years of me teaching I could count on one hand the number of people from other nationalities out of thought, nobody from outside the country. [...] now, we're getting more used to it, but we're not quiet there. You know, in most places, even in the workplace, and in schools interestingly enough in schools, this is the thing I have been watching, no foreign teachers. We're all Irish. And no teachers of colour, with darker skin, which you'd also not see. Now I think there are one or two in Dublin, but I'm talking about here, in any schools I know in this area, and I know a lot of schools in the area and a lot of teachers, and I haven't come across any, you know?” (Interviewee 6, 2023)*

Later, the volunteer explains that it is because the young generation of migrants is still mostly in schools, whereas migrants that do have a teaching degree have obtained it abroad and will have a hard time to get it recognised and become a teacher in Ireland. She then proceeds to explain her view on how representation of migrants in schools could help their acceptance in other positions in society, which was something she had started noticing:

*“The'll only have been getting to leaving cert, so they haven't come out, which means that children don't come across them. You know, they're not exposed to them as being people of authority. From that point of view, they're not standing at the top of the classroom. I mean, that's the person they see as authority in the school you know, the person standing at the other side of the desk, and they're not seeing that, yet! It will come. But it's, it's slow you know. Which does make for an interesting.. Just, it's just when you start watching.” (Interviewee 6, 2023)*

Other volunteers were also aware of an increase in immigration, especially following the wars in Syria and Ukraine, when asking about trends in immigration, one volunteer explained that there had always been a flow of immigrants, even though there were usually more people emigrating, but there have been larger groups coming from particular countries recently. This also led to an increased diversity in the community and more awareness about differentiation, as not all migrants were treated the same way. Some were of the opinion that the Ukrainian people got treated better than other refugees and migrants, as becomes clear from below examples:

*“Yeah, I think too, also since the war, in Ukraine, I think that has been a huge eye-opener to people living in Ireland, you know, because they see how difficult it is for those people. [...] Syria, we had a lot of migrants from Syria. But it always felt like that was so far away. But Ukraine, is on our doorstep, you know, and there is more news about Ukraine, so yeah.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

*“Yeah, even between the two groups. Like between the Brazillian and Ukrainian groups it’s kinda, well the Ukrainian people got their PPS number coming straight in, whereas the Brazillian coming in, and their still waiting for their PPS number. [...] I mean we have been doing letters for people from the LMETB to say that they need a PPS number to do the English course, so we’re hoping that will get the PPS numbers through a bit faster. But everything is going so slow, everything!”* (Interviewee 3, 2023)

In both these examples, the respondents explain how migrants are differentiated, although this might not be their own view. In both cases the differentiation is explained from a more generalised perspective, like ‘Irish people’, ‘the news’, or ‘the government’ and its lack of services, as in the case of the PPS number. All in all the respondents had learned a lot of things about people from different countries, and especially about what it is like coming to live in Ireland from a different country. This definitely changed the outlook of some respondents, and lead to both awareness of negative as well as positive aspects.

*“One lady that comes, her daughter has a chronic health problem, and she needs to go to a hospital in Dublin, it’s called Crumlin hospital, and my daughter was a nurse in Crumlin, and it’s a very old hospital okay? So I said to the lady: Oh it’s a very old, horrible hospital. And she said: ‘No, Ann, no it’s a great hospital. So her opinion was that it was better than what I thought.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

### 5.2.2 Changes in perspective through volunteering

Although stories of migrants were abundant, changes in perspective through volunteering were mainly the result of particularly impacting stories. There were three main themes identified from the changes in perspective. The first of these themes was already briefly mentioned in the previous subsection and is related to learning about different people. Another theme that got highlighted was changes in perspective regarding the volunteers’ own

community, culture and country. The last theme focuses on changes in perspectives about stigmatisation and cultural barriers between Irish people and newcomers.

When asking about what the respondents learned from their encounters with migrants, some of them expressed changes in perspective that would challenge the narrative dominating society or the media, by showing how they got a better understanding of the people behind the stories. In the below example, a volunteer explains how he got more aware of the minor differences between people:

*“Yes, well I suppose it gives a much greater insight into the.. areas that people have come from. I mean you get this superficial understanding from the press or from reports.. I have become more aware of all the minor tensions”* (Interviewee 1, 2023)

The volunteers met different people who all had their own stories and opinions, increasing their awareness about the diversity among migrants. One respondent was very surprised about how some of the Ukrainian people had varying opinions on the war, especially when some of them told him they did not trust Ukraine’s president.

*“Interesting, right? They don't trust him, Zelensky has promised that there would be no war with Russia when he got elected. You see some of the alternative sides, I asked one of the girls, folks is Zelensky corrupt? And I got a very fast ‘yes’, I hadn't the question asked. Yes! [...] I was surprised. I thought that he'd be a hero. Like in Ireland, there was a guy called Michael Collins, right, and he was just, like lord almighty you know. I thought Zelensky was being the same, even people who didn't vote for him would have row in behind him. But I was surprised to hear that.”*  
(Interviewee 5, 2023)

By getting to know the students, the volunteers started empathizing with their stories which broadened their perspective, most volunteers mentioned how migrants are often misunderstood. This could result from the perspective of having gained a better understanding of the situation that migrants are in, thereby challenging the dominant perspectives surrounding them. One of the respondents explained how she thinks there naturally seems a barrier with people from other countries, and how she learned through her experience that there are actually a lot of relatable things among people.

*“You know there is a fear factor with people from other countries, you don't know anything about them. But they're the same, we're all the same. [...] And I think the classes have taught me that, but we're the same, but we all have our own little stories, you know: traditions, culture, family life, work life, so in the class when they talk about their families and their culture, I am taking all this in and, you know I'm learning so much about what it's like to be Ukrainian, what it's like to be Brazillian, you know so, I'm learning lots.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

As well as gaining a better understanding of people from other countries, the volunteers also learned things about their own country and culture as experienced by migrants. A lot of respondents mentioned how surprised they were about everyday things that Irish people seem to take for granted. As an example, they found out Irish people can be very positive about the weather. Often, the volunteers would describe the weather as warm, and some of the students would get confused as they had never experienced temperatures below 10 degrees in their home country. The volunteers were also surprised by the migrants' appreciation of the quality of Irish food. This outside perspective led to some respondents getting new insights in their own day to day life, sometimes lighthearted and sometimes in a more serious way.

*“Another thing I suppose, I personally would be an agnost or an atheist, I wouldn't be religious. But for example for people from Syria they assume that you, everybody is religious or that everybody belongs to, you know is a Christian here because you live in a Christian country. So thats sort of, I'd never thought about you know that that's taken for granted that you must be religious or if you're not religious you would be bad.”* (Interviewee 1, 2023)

One of the volunteers explained how he became aware of the cultural determination of social activities, and how some social behaviour is distinctively Irish:

*“It's more, you're more aware of how you're different, uhm, then you would.. You know when you live some place all your life you assume that everywhere is the, the same you know. The same approach, the same culture you know. For example things like drinking, you know, for Irish people the Pub, is sort of central to life. Ukrainian people tell me you know: No, we socialise at home, we might drink at home, dance at*

*home, but a lot of Irish people wouldn't even think of drinking at home because, you know.” (Interviewee 1, 2023)*

When asking respondents if they had learned things about their own culture and community, respondents also mentioned that Irish people can be narrow minded:

*“You do, and that's the scary part. What you learn from your, about your own community is how narrow we are. You know, as Irish people, very insular you know, we live in this little Island, how tight knit it is in some ways.” (Interviewee 6, 2023)*

Although some respondents mentioned that Irish people can be narrow minded, xenophobe or ignorant in relation to different cultures, this was often ascribed to a found lack of understanding of people from different cultures.

*“So I just wish that people would take on board, as we say here, they're not hangers on, you know, they're not here for what they can get. They're not, they're not a threat, you know, they're ordinary people with the same problems, same issues as us really. But on a greater scale of course” (Interviewee 4, 2023)*

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

This section has provided an insight into the experiences and migration perspectives of respondents in relation to their volunteering, with the aim to answer the second research question posed in Chapter 2: *What experiences do people have from volunteering with migrants, and how does this influence their perspective on migration?*

The respondents shared plenty of stories about migrants they had met through the classes. The majority of stories told about migrants in Ireland had positive or neutral associations. None of the respondents shared negative experiences of themselves with migrants, only a few mentioned that migrants they met experienced negativity from other people, and there seemed to be an overall awareness of the struggles experienced by migrants in daily life, which accounted for most of the negative associations.

Most of the respondents explained how at least one of the experiences obtained since starting to volunteer in the English classes had impacted their perspectives. These changes in perspective were not all clearly related to migration itself, as was expected. Even though some stories were described as ‘striking’, ‘eye-openers’ or ‘standing out’, there was little reflection

on how experiences and stories, specifically from volunteering, had led to changes in perspective. Therefore, a ‘migration perspective’ seemed to be apparent for people, but not clear cut. Most volunteers had numerous encounters with people from different countries from before they got engaged in volunteering, as well as experience with immigration and emigration in their family, thus making it hard to ascribe changes in perspective solely to recent experiences. The changes in perspective mostly came down to general insights in people and culture. For some respondents, these experiences led to changes in perspective, whereas for others it would more so broaden or confirm an already existing perspective.

More so than migration perspectives, an important topic that did change people’s view was the surprise about the lack of public services in their country, especially in accommodating migrants. Respondents found themselves to be confronted with how bad some parts of the system work for more vulnerable people, combined with a rise in the costs of living (COLC), which puts an increasing amount of people in an economically vulnerable position. Overall, this topic recurred more in the conversations than the stance towards migration.

### **5.3 Community and Society**

This section will focus on the third and last sub question as presented in Chapter 2: *‘Do volunteers share their experiences with other members of the host community, and how?’* This section will focus on if and how the respondents share their experiences with people in their community, and also analyse the respondents’ presentation of that community. The first subsection (5.3.1) will describe the social and political climate as to not isolate the community and provide a wider context. The second subsection (5.3.2) will further explore the respondents’ view on the local community and their personal narrative. In the third subsection (5.3.3) the focus will be on whether and how volunteers actually share their experiences in the community, followed by a conclusion (5.3.4) with a reflection on the last sub question.

#### 5.3.1 Social and Political climate

As described in section 1.4, a public and political debate about migration in Ireland has recently emerged which is of major importance, as it changes the context in which the research takes place. The community is not an isolated place or group and like the individual people in it, is affected by wider societal developments, both national and international. It is therefore important to understand in what social and political climate the volunteers operate.

Such developments were frequently mentioned topics in interviews with the respondents. As described in the previous section, respondents referred to international developments like a rise in conflicts and increased immigration, and were increasingly aware about the role of the government and its services. Respondents were also aware of the current political debate and the national as well as local anti-immigration protests.

When talking about the recent anti-immigration protests, one of the respondents explained how he sees this development:

*“And I think, what we’d call the far-right, well what everybody calls the far-right, I think they’re starting to get a bit of a grip, they’re starting to kinda gain traction, uhm. I mean you’ve seen them out protesting in town and you see them out in Dublin city centre. And you see them with the stupidest of signs, it’s always like ‘Ireland is for .. the Irish’ or ‘Ireland is full’, you know that kind of air. ‘House the Irish first’ or, ‘why aren’t we housing the Irish first?’, you know they’re silly, silly things! But I think they are starting to gain a bit of traction, unfortunately, especially in villages.”*

(Interviewee 3, 2023)

The respondent clearly states that he does not agree with the rhetoric brought up in the protests, and finds it unfortunate that the far-right sentiment is growing. Another respondent explained the following about the situation in Navan:

*“Ma Dwyers is on the Dublin Road, it’s a BnB, and in the last couple of weeks it now has migrants. There was a protest there, they were protesting that there was only men, and there were rapists in Ma Dwyers, this is what they were saying. So one of my friends, somebody she knows, went to visit Ma Dwyers, and met the ladies and their children in Ma Dwyers, and was talking to them and they were lovely people. And she came back and she wrote on Facebook that she had visited Ma Dwyers and that there was women and children in it, and that they were lovely, and that there was no rapists and it was not just men.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

In this example a friend of the volunteer went to visit the international protection applicants accommodation in the town in order to debunk myths or ‘fake news’ about accommodating migrants. Such tensions in the community also led to concerns about polarisation, and

respondents tried to describe the demographic composition of those protesting against immigrants and understand their reasoning:

*"There's also kind of a fear. You know, there's a fear of these people coming in, "who are they? what do they want?" And then sometimes in the lower socioeconomic section of society, you would find that they would be blaming them for taking their jobs. But they would be looking at it from that way, you're taking our money, you're taking our houses." (Interviewee 6, 2023)*

*"For example we have a travelling community in Ireland, they were nomadic originally but we call them travellers, they're recognised as an ethnic group. But I noticed some of the protesters some of the young people, were young travellers with their ponies and things. And I think their attitude is, a bit frightened of, if all these other people come will there be anything in the cake for us, you know? [...] No, but most Irish people would be very sympathetic to (migrants). I mean, some people would say it's a bit of a class thing you know, that those who have houses and are well off, are quiet tolerant and those who are struggling, you know are not as tolerant." (Interviewee 1, 2023)*

The protesters were mostly described in terms of disadvantaged groups and people of lower socio-economic status, feeling threatened by the influx of immigrants. None of the respondents knew anyone personally involved in the protests, nor associated with anyone who would hold perspectives about migrants similar to those uttered in the protests.

Although the respondents did not agree with the protesters, they did show understanding for the reasoning behind it and acknowledged and the emergence of the far-right. Some respondents believed that the sentiments brought up during the protests are a natural human reaction by those who feel threatened, others explained that this development is in line with the upcoming far-right in Europe:

*"I think anybody who maybe is conspicuously different may attract negativity. But then it's the same with local, I mean young people or kids will tend to mock anybody who looks a bit, a bit different you know. I think there's an element of that in it." (Interviewee 1, 2023)*

*“But then again, you see, Ireland is probably, you know, differing races coming to Ireland is a new thing, so you know maybe, maybe that will develop after generations, that people start giving out about resources for everyone you know. And say “oh, they're getting everything and we're getting nothing”, you know that's, that happens everywhere, I would imagine you know”* (Interviewee 7, 2023)

However, the emergence of protests was mainly ascribed to the trend of increased immigration in the past decades, fueled by a housing crisis, and more recently by the 2022 cost of living crisis (COLC), followed by more recent increases in refugees, mainly from Ukraine.

*“And it's not unfounded, it's understandable. As you know, we have a major housing crisis here, major. And we have had a housing crisis long before. We had people in direct provision, or people from different countries, you know, migrants. But it's, I suppose because people feel so ill-treated, you know. That their children are living in rented accommodation and they can't get houses, they can't afford them. It's human nature, I suppose, uhm, you know, to kick the cat, literally, you know to blame someone else. Yeah, yeah, I would, it's quite interesting”* (Interviewee 4, 2023)

The above respondent explains how she thinks the reaction to blame other people is “human nature” as a result of people feeling ill-treated. At the same time, she argues that the root of the problem is actually the housing crisis, and the problems with accommodating both migrants as well as Irish people. The argument of the housing crisis was brought up by all respondents as being an important driver of the current tensions, there was also a general consensus about tensions in society resulting from the failure of government policy, in the housing sector as well as in healthcare and immigration policy.

*“Now, there is a problem in Ireland of, again there's no point in people saying so there isn't, I mean we have a big lack of housing, uh, and health services are poor. And I can understand, [...] people like, who are worried about maybe if they have no house for their children or something. So, yeah it is hard and we have to try and help everybody”* (Interviewee 1, 2023)

In the above example, a volunteer explains his understanding of the concerns of people, and acknowledges that there is not done enough to help everybody. Some of the volunteers also emphasised how the government does not show the same understanding for these problems in society, but on the contrary is worsening the situation.

*“No, no, the government actually making it worse because the government, instead of coming out addressing the problems with them, with the people, the ordinary people, to call them all racist, right-wing, extreme right-wing racists. I don’t know who these right-wing racists are because, there’s no right-wing party in Ireland. The poor parts in Ireland are all left. And the right-wing party, if there was, they wouldn’t be getting. Maybe there are right-wing parties but they would get 1%? It’s 1% of the vote, right you know what I mean you know? So for the government it’s very easy to adapt if the government were honest with people. And my experience in business, if there was a problem if you have a problem, you admit the problem straight away, you don’t try to make the problem does not exist, right?”* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

Overall, the respondents described the far-right as an extremely small and marginal part of society, arguing that historically the populist voices have been concentrated on the left of the political spectrum. In the above example, the respondent critiques the government for not listening to the concerns and demonising the protesters on the contrary, thereby making it harder to accommodate these people’s needs. In the below example, another respondent explains about the political situation and argues that the protesters are simply trying to find a way to put people up against the government:

*“Now there are, there is an extreme right-wing party here and, I mean they’ve been, they were opposed to coal, they were opposed to the EU, they are opposed to everything, and just whatever happens to be, because now the big issue is refugees, and they’re on that bandwagon you know. I mean, they don’t really care about, but it’s a good way to put people against the government, against the establishment. Though we’re fortunate in Ireland that the populist parties tend to be very tolerant as well, you know, progressive in.. You know Sinn Fein would be the biggest opposition party, they’d be sort of left of center but they would be, would support, you know looking after refugees. So there’s a very small voice, extremely small on the right, you know.”* (Interviewee 1, 2023)

Another volunteer shared her opinion about the protests while talking to a group of volunteers and students during the classes, the volunteer clearly states that she sees people from different countries coming to Ireland as something positive:

*“Only recently there’s different groups, people from different countries, it’s brilliant! It gives you a different outlook. If you hear about the protests.. That’s not Ireland!”*  
(Fieldnotes, 2023)

When mentioning the protests she says “That’s not Ireland”, implying that the things you hear from the protests should not be generalised and are not a good representation of the opinion of most people in Ireland and to show a ‘different side’ to it.

Interestingly, all respondents had an opinion about the protests and the people involved into it, but distanced themselves from making hard judgements or even knowing anyone involved. This leads to the conclusion that the respondents opinions about these tensions are for a large part based on the media and public debate, rather than direct contact with people being involved in the protests. In the next subsection, this will further be explored at the local level, to understand what opinions and possible tensions the respondents actually encounter in their communities.

### 5.3.2 Community

To understand whether and how the volunteers share their experiences with people in the community, it is important to better understand the volunteers’ personal perspective of the community and social interactions therein, as this will shed more light on the respondents narrative in relation to that community. Whether the volunteers share their experiences with other people in the community and challenge negativity about migrants largely depends on their social network and the perspectives they will encounter therein.

When asking about migration perspectives in the respondents’ social network, it becomes clear that people socialise with different groups in the community. However, in some regards there is a pattern of dominant perspectives in the communities under study, for example when it comes to the differentiation of migrants. Some of the volunteers explained certain migrants are welcomed more than others, both through state legislation, as found in earlier examples of government services, as well as in the community:

*“So, I think, the Ukrainians are probably treated better, than the Africans. So I think there might be a different story, people are trying to help the Ukrainians because of the war. Maybe the Africans, Nigerians, they may not be treated as well, I don't know.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

In this example, the volunteer says that Ukrainians are treated better as a result of the war that's going on. When asked about refugees from other countries, the reasoning for this was explained in more detail:

*“Ukraine, are our neighbours. Syria, we had a lot of migrants from Syria. But it always felt like that was so far away. But Ukraine, is on our doorstep, you know. [...] there is more news about Ukraine, so yeah..”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

The volunteer explains that people are more welcoming to Ukrainians as the conflict is more nearby and Ukrainians are considered ‘neighbours’. Another volunteer explains how the recent anti-immigration protest are clearly not targeted towards the Ukrainians:

*“They have yeah, they have different.. The Irish people would have very differently attitude towards the Ukrainians than they would be to, to the people who are being (targeted), with the protests in Dublin. They're very differently attituded. It's because they feel that a lot of... The feeling, I think of the people is that these people are coming here as economic migrants, not as.. People from Ukraine are coming because their houses.. for their life. They're coming as economic migrants, some of them were coming to abuse the system, there's a perception they come to abuse the system, like the people who are tearing up their passports, right. And, I've seen last week, for instance, there was an incident in Dublin where there's fights, there's a row between Georgians and people from Algeria or something, and five of them brought to hospital, you know what I mean, that type of thing you know, that's what, we don't need that. Plus the pressure on the housing system, the pressure on the medical, the hospital system in Ireland is terrible.”* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

The volunteer explains that “there is a perception” of migrants coming for economic reasons, to profit from the system, and at the same time put pressure on the housing situation and medical system, especially when hospitalizing people as a result of fighting. The volunteer

then contrasts this with an example of a group of Ukrainian people participating in a local parade:

*"Now last week, the Saint Patrick's Day right, last Friday. And the Ukrainians marched in Dundalk, very small bunch of them actually, see but 5% of them, right? And where I was, they clapped when they passed by, people clapped at them, you know so. And they weren't clapping there before, they just clapped. I mean fantastic bands passed in the parade, but they clapped the Ukrainians, right. Now they.. There are protests in Dublin, right? But it is my belief, because I've, I've never been at any of protests obviously, but it is my belief that the protests are, uhm, not aimed at the Ukrainians. The media, suggesting they aimed at Ukrainians."* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

In this example the volunteer explains that to his own surprise, the people standing and watching the parade clapped solely for the Ukrainian people who were participating. Then again, explains the protests are not aimed at Ukrainians and concludes by saying that the media suggests the protests are also aimed at the Ukrainians. This leads to the assumption that there is a discrepancy between the perspectives of the respondents and that of the wider society and the media.

Multiple volunteers explained how anti-immigration sentiments are more so rooted in the government not handling migration well enough, causing people to get frustrated. In the below example, a volunteer explains how he thinks people did not really have a problem with refugees coming in, but more so with the government's policy of not taking enough action to regulate it:

*"Uh, I don't think there was actually a terrible antipathy towards taking people in from uh. From Syria, when the war was on or from [...] Yemen. You know what I mean? If the, if the government came out and said okay, we're taking 3000 people from Yemen, right. That's the end of the story and we would not been taking them all, and we're, we're blah blah blah, and that's the story, right? [...] But it's like, pretending the problem doesn't exist. And then if somebody complains, oh you're a right-wing racist, that's just putting fuel to the fire."* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

The volunteer then proceeds to explain that critique on the handling of the government in this situation is immediately considered to be racist or right-wing, thereby frustrating people even

more. Another of the problematic government policies mentioned by multiple respondents is the Direct Provision system, in which migrants seeking international protection are sheltered in large scale accommodations across the country. These Direct Provision centres are particularly seen as problematic in small villages, because they have a big relative influence on the village population and social life.

*“But it is important the government handle it, and sort of.. I think there is this problem as well that communities are not consulted, at all. [...] let's say you're a little village down the country and suddenly there are 600 people around, nobody has discussed it with you. It would be better if they had bit of warning, get people organise a welcome you know, rather than.. Sometimes communities I think feel uh, things are being imposed upon them rather than they being invited to participate you know.”*

(Interviewee 1, 2023)

In this example, the volunteer explains how the random allocation of Direct Provision centres is done without consulting the local population, thereby creating a huge impact on the communities. According to the respondent, the government has not done anything to improve integration between the host community and the newcomers. Another respondent explained this problem in a similar way:

*“The resentment would be to other, to others, particularly males, young males coming in and that causes a problem, right. Because people feel that, well, males coming in, you know, if you, if you've got a small population and the government can have caused that, because what they done is, they're taking small villages about a 100 males into it, right. A small village and there's no consultation, and these guys are walking around in, in forms of five or six on the street there. See these six guys, strangers coming at them, and there are women walking down the street on their own.”* (Interviewee 5, 2023)

The presence of Direct Provision centres in small towns is believed to cause problems, especially as up until recently, residents of the centres were not allowed to work. One of the volunteers explained how through work, migrants have more chance to engage and contribute to society:

*“And, there was, it was a system here where people were kept in these centres for years rather than allowed to go out and work and contribute to the community you know. [...] But, the only problem is housing, and if you could get on top of housing, I think that would solve a lot. The health services are a problem but then a lot of people coming in are actually, for example there are many Ukrainians who are doctors, and with a little bit of training and language and stuff they would be a huge asset to.. In our hospitals a lot of the doctors are Pakistani or, a lot of the nurses are from the Phillipines so, without people coming in, a much bigger problem. And then for ordinary, I mean it's impossible for people maybe with a business, hotel to get staff at the moment. So, we need a lot more people in the country you know.” (Interviewee 1, 2023)*

There is a general belief among respondents that more cultural integration would benefit the community in several ways, not just economically but also socially.

*“And I think it's very important, in Ireland and in other countries as well, if newcomers are integrated and become part of the system. Otherwise you end up with problems like you have in Paris, or parts of Britain, where they form totally separate communities. Whereas if you, everybody's emerged into the community, I think it's good for the community obviously in which is it, but it is also good for the newcomers and everybody benefits I think in the end, you know.” (Interviewee 1, 2023)*

In this example, the volunteers talk about the situation in Paris or Britain where migrants form a separate community, which is deemed problematic. Integration and community engagement was a recurring theme among the respondents, in the below example, another volunteer also explained the benefit of better integration, and how language could help to achieve this:

*“I always think it's important to uhm, reassure these people, and in order to assist them to integrate into the community. I think they, I think it's important that they get basic communication skills, like approaching.. somebody in a shop. You know, if you want to purchase something, and the.. The way to address, you know, not to say ‘I want’, because if you say ‘I want’ to somebody, you won't get a very favourable*

*response. And smile, you know I always say smile. And, uhm, because I see if you smile, it breaks down barriers you know, with most people.” (Interviewee 4, 2023)*

In this example, the respondent describes how a small effort, like a smile, can break down barriers between people from different countries. At the same time, the respondent describes that it is important to reassure people and assist them to integrate, thereby emphasizing a responsibility for the host community in integration. When asking another volunteer about integration, he said that this could also be achieved by joint activities organised in the community:

*“I think there needs to be more cultural integration. I do think.. Like fun days or, or sport days, or.. Like we had a jogging thing with uhm, the sanctuary runners recently, and that was a community integration thing. But we need more than just that. Like events, even if we could get a couple of people from the Irish side, from the Brazilian side, from the Ukrainian side, even just to get up and sing a song or play guitar or, just to bring people together.” (Interviewee 3, 2023)*

First the volunteer explains how he was part of organising a successful sports event. He then elaborates how it does not really matter what sort of events are organised, as in the end it is more about bringing people together.

This subsection has aimed to describe the respondent perspectives on social cohesion and integration in their communities, as well as in other small communities in Ireland. Most of the respondents were aware about anti-immigration sentiments and also showed understanding toward the reasons for people to get frustrated. However, the respondents themselves generally explained these problems as a result of government policy failure, and the lingering housing and healthcare crises. Additionally, the respondents explained that the resentment in society towards migrants is targeted more towards some groups than others. In general, the respondents themselves seemed to be critical towards the current state of integration in society and towards the ongoing crises, but as opposed to anti-immigration protesters, see opportunities to improve the situation with people from different countries, and therefore put effort into assisting in community integration themselves.

### 5.3.3 Sharing experiences

The previous subsection has elaborated on the volunteers perspectives on integration of host community and newcomers, this subsection will further explore if and how volunteers share their experiences of volunteering within the host community. Volunteering with migrants is a form of intergroup helping behaviour, which according to the theoretical assumptions drawn in section 3.5, can result in more positivity towards migrants in the volunteers' wider social network. However, other authors have argued that positivity towards migrants in one's social network is more likely to be already present, being more so a determinant for intergroup helping behaviour. As shown in this section thus far, respondents tend to distance themselves from people with anti-immigration sentiments, especially those involved in the recent protests. Nevertheless, respondents came up with several examples of negative opinions towards migrants in their network. Some of the respondent chose to challenge these, where others tended to be subtle or careful when encountering such opinions as to avoid arguments. When asking about negativity in peoples own social network, one respondent explained it really depends on who you associate with:

*“You know, you see things that are reported in the paper but it's, it all depends on the people you associate with, and in in a lot of cases, people keep those opinions to themselves. They don't.. Now unless there's a right-wing on, but then I wouldn't be out in the pub to find them.”* (Interviewee 6, 2023)

The respondent first explains that she would be aware of negativity through the media, but that it is not apparent in her own network, and concludes jokingly that she is definitely not after meeting people with such opinions. She later nuances this by giving an example of “colourful language”, or swearing, and explains people tend to be careful as to when and around what people they will use certain language or express their opinions:

*“So they just, they avoid what you wouldn't like to hear, but they did actually apologise [for what they said]. So they, they would sense. Well, I mean, I would express quite clearly that I didn't have an issue with people from other cultures or other backgrounds. And it's the same I wouldn't have the problem with people with other religions, as long as I.. You know, we're all entitled to that.”* (Interviewee 6, 2023)

She then adds that she has no problem expressing her opinions about migrants herself. Another respondent also mentioned that people would be careful to share their negative opinions with him, as they know he does not approve racism

*“No, it's a different time, people are not as openly racist, I mean you don't know what people feel or think but, I think people would know my position on the view, but, circumspect about directly sort of complaining. You know I'm not sure what they might think.”* (Interviewee 1, 2023)

When asking whether the respondent himself shares positive stories and experiences from volunteering with migrants in his social network, he explains that he is not very keen on that. The respondent explains that he does not witness any negativity about migrants among people in his network, but he is not sure whether they have positive or negative opinions about it, as it is not often a topic of conversation. Although the respondent says not to actively share his experiences, he emphasises that people are aware of his opinions and are positive towards what he does:

*“I would say most people are not, I mean most of my friends know what I do and everything and I mean.. they are not wildly interested but they think it's a good thing to do you know. So most people would be positive.”*

Another respondent explains that she also does not come across a lot of racism, but that she is of the opinion that people should take a stance towards it when they witness it:

*“I haven't really, never to me! But, uhm, I haven't really experienced much in Navan of somebody being abusive to another person, from a different country, I haven't seen that. But I'm sure I will, you know, so.. Yeah so we all really need to say something, you can't just, you know if you see it you need to say something if you see it. Uhm, which I probably wouldn't have thought about before. I mean, I don't like conflict, I don't like fights, I don't like getting into vicious arguments with anybody, but you know.”* (Interviewee 2, 2023)

In this example the respondent explains that people should say something about it when they witness racism, and adds that this is something that she “wouldn't have thought about before

[volunteering]”. As a reason for this, she explains that she always preferred to stay away from conflicts and arguments. The volunteer later tells a story of an example of when she did confront people in her network, because she was disappointed with their exclusion of migrants in a crafts group:

*“There was one thing though, I used to go to a group. It is for ladies and it's a craft group, so there's sewing, knitting. So, I asked, would it be okay, for some of my Ukrainian ladies to come to the class? And they said no. And I said why? And they said: We don't know anything about them, we don't know how to speak to them, we wouldn't feel comfortable, so no they can't come. So I was very surprised and I stopped going. That's the only negative thing that I have experienced myself so far. I stopped going because I was disappointed, I thought they'd be more welcoming. It would be a great opportunity for a Ukrainian lady to do her craft and chat, you know talk English.” (Interviewee 2, 2023)*

The respondent used to go to this crafts group weekly, and decided to stop going as the group would not agree to her idea of letting Ukrainian people in to the group. When asking the respondent how she responded to the people in the group about this decision she explains that she got very mixed reactions:

*“The crafts class has been going for 20 years, most of the people in it are very old, like 70-80, I was probably the youngest person there, and I'm not young. So I have two friends that go, and I said to them: “I'm not going anymore”. One of them said to me: “I have to go for another while because..” She said: “I'm very disappointed too Ann, I'm very disappointed” but she [...] wants to make a memory blanket for her friend, so she needs the ladies in the group to help her, so she said she's going to keep going because she wants to finish this. And I said to her well, I'm not going anymore. And she says that's okay you know. But you see all these groups are ran by one, two, three people. And then, there's maybe 20 or 30 people there, but one or two people make all the decisions. So if you don't like it, you can go, you know..” (Interviewee 2, 2023)*

The volunteer explained that her friend was also very disappointed in the rest of the group, and agreed with the decision to stop going to the group, the friend however could not stop

going for a while as she had to finish a project for which she needed help. The respondent emphasised that it was not the whole group of 20 to 30 people not being welcoming towards the Ukrainian women but that it was only two or three people who would decide for the whole group, without consulting them.

Another respondent had a similar experience with a neighbour, where she did not expect them to be so negative about migrants:

*I was quite surprised, one day I met some neighbours, uhm.. We were out walking, my husband and I. And he was speaking to them first. And he actually informed them that I was working with people, you know in Direct Provision, or migrants. And, because I wouldn't have said anything! Now, there are very few people that I would tell, and you know, well I always find this, and dismay it. When you say to some people that you're working with uhm, people in direct provision. It's amazing the way their facial expression changes. Oh they wouldn't support it you know that was.. I'm trying, I'm searching for the right word to say that. They would be disgusted, maybe that's too strong of a word, but that's the word that comes to mind, you know? So I would be quite guarded on who I would inform.” (Interviewee 4, 2023)*

The respondent explains that she would be very careful about sharing the fact that she volunteers with migrants, and that whenever she does, she would see the judgement from people's faces and could not count on any support. In this scenario, she was not prepared for this, as she did not intend to bring it up, yet her husband did. When asking why she would not bring it up, she explains that she does not bring it up as she tends to avoid such uncomfortable situations.

*“So it's not the fact that I'm ashamed of it. It's just a fact of, I mean, I find it very difficult to comprehend because, you know, we were, and as you know our history, you know, the way we were uhm, ruled and dominated by the British, and abused literally. I find it very difficult to comprehend why people don't, you know haven't, embraced [acceptance].” (Interviewee 4, 2023)*

In another example, she also explains that not a lot of people would know about her volunteering and tells a story about a gym class where not herself, but someone else brought

up that she was volunteering with migrants, and to her surprise found a lot of support from the other people in the group.

*“Some people know, but others don't, I wouldn't broadcast it. And it's not the fact that I'm ashamed of it. I don't want to hear the vitriol or, you know, I do want to hear, “Oh, there's too many here” or “they should go back” and “we shouldn't have to take so many” and “We haven't got the facilities” and, I don't want to hear that! But, on the other hand, I did mention it, to a group that I am a part of, in a gym in Dundalk. And I had forgotten, of course. And one of the women came to me the other day. And she asked me in front of everybody: “Are you still working with the volunteers?” And I said, Yes, I am. And I said, you can, you know, you can do it too. It's not, it's not special people or anything like that. You know, I was quite surprised that she had remembered and that, the woman that came to me and said it to me, and people they say to me “oh, yeah, it's terrible the way they are being treated.” and then there was a general agreement, you know. Which I was delighted with, but I would pick. I would pick, who I would tell.” (Interviewee 4, 2023)*

Some volunteers explained that they became more vocal in expressing their perspective and challenging negativity as a result of volunteering with migrants, one of the respondents told a story about a confrontation with a friend:

*“Now, I don't pull them up on it because I don't want to get dragged into an argument. But, like I've had friends that made remarks and I'm kind of, shut the \* up will you, you don't what you're talking about, you've never met these people, you don't know their struggle.” (Interviewee 3, 2023)*

The respondent explains that he would not always react to such negative remarks as to not get dragged into arguments, and then gives an example of his response when he does. He then explains how volunteering with migrants has changed his attitude towards such confrontations.

*“And since I've joined Cultúr.. Like I was always kind of, you know.. everyone's equal, equal rights for everybody. Doesn't matter who you are, color, breed, race. Doesn't matter where you're from, you should be treated the same. And, I always had*

*that mentality and the people will be going on like ‘oh, all the immigrants coming in’ and you know ‘they’re all being housed’ and, usually I just go yeah, yeah, yep. But since I’ve started in Cultúr and I’ve seen people, and I’ve seen their struggle and, there’s a face to it now. Like I find it disappointing when people close to me start talking like that. I can’t understand, I feel, yeah just disappointed.”* (Interviewee 3, 2023)

This subsection has provided an insight into whether volunteers share their experiences and stories about migrants and volunteering, and why and when they choose to do so. It is not evident that the social networks of respondents are very positive towards newcomers. Rather, the results make clear that this is a sensitive topic, and that there is a fear of negativity around the topic of migrants. Therefore, some people are unlikely to share their opinions on the matter because they want to be careful when they don’t know people’s position, assuming they are likely to be negative, and thus keeping opinions to themselves. It was also mentioned frequently that the volunteers don’t like to be dragged into arguments, negative conversations or conflicts. Some respondents also think that other people in their network would not bring up conversations about migrants, either positive or negative, as they are aware of the volunteers’ perspective. In the instances where volunteers explained they did share their opinion or had confrontations, they were mostly among close social relations, like friends and family. There is no strong belief of an impact on the host community and volunteers prefer to avoid arguing or trying to change someone else’s opinion. However, they do speak up and share their opinions and experiences and for most of them, volunteering has increased their motivation to do so.

#### 5.3.4 Conclusion

This subsection has looked into the social and political climate of migration in Ireland according to the respondents, and to the perceived negativity about migrants in the communities of the volunteers to provide context to the communities in this study. It then described whether, and in what circumstances the volunteers share their experiences and challenge negativity towards newcomers, with the aim to answer the third research sub question: *Do volunteers share their experiences with other members of the host community, and how?*

All respondents were aware about the recent development of anti-immigration protests in Ireland and negativity towards migrants in society. Respondents seemed to understand that

people are frustrated with the current crises but they generally believe that this frustration should be aimed at government policy rather than towards migrants. Anti-immigration and far-right groups are still seen as a marginal part of Irish society, the protests are associated with economically disadvantaged groups and minorities like the travelling community. These developments were seen nationally and locally but for most respondents this did not seem like a threat. Most volunteers explained that within their community, or among the people they socialise with, negative attitudes are present, although not to the same extent as what is witnessed in the protests.

The majority of respondents explained that they were reluctant to share stories and experiences in their community about volunteering with migrants. Some people tried to prevent receiving negative remarks or wanted to avoid arguments, others explained that people would be aware of their opinion and that they would either agree or not be interested and thus did not bring it up from their side. Thus, volunteers in general did not actively challenge existing negativity in the community. Some respondents had confrontations with people in their community about the acceptance of newcomers, leading to a feeling of disappointment, as they hadn't expected this. To challenge this negativity, they did share their opinions and experiences, but preferably in a way that seeks to avoid confrontation, nor with a clear intention to influence the perspectives of others.

## 6. Conclusion

This research has focused on the role of host community volunteers who support migrants in a local community development organisation, and their significance in contributing to social integration, challenging negative narratives about migrants, and increasing understanding within the wider host community. In this chapter, the insights and preliminary conclusions from the results will be summarised and discussed in relation to the theoretical assumptions in order to answer the overarching research question:

*“How do experiences of volunteers helping newcomers in the host community influence their perspective on migration, and how do volunteers share their experiences within the host community?”*

This study shows that motivations to volunteer with newcomers are diverse, multifaceted and can include reasons such as personal development, a desire to help other people, meet new people and to increase social integration. The motivations found in this study somewhat overlap with the motivations found in studies of humanitarian volunteering, such as wanting to help people in difficult circumstances. Another similarity is the ‘crisis-response’ found in some volunteers’ motivations, especially following the war in Ukraine. However, this is not the primary reason for people to get involved and most of the volunteers had been involved since before the war started. Additionally, in most cases volunteers do not portray migrants as victims, and the helping behaviour expressed is driven more so by a desire for social interaction and integration, rather than for the sake of helping ‘victims’, which further separates this research from humanitarian volunteering.

Although some volunteers expressed a desire for social change and advocate for more acceptance towards newcomers, there are no strong sentiments of opinion-based identification or political activism. Most volunteers do not see their social network as extremely welcoming or accepting towards migrants, nor extremely hostile. This also shows that motivations to engage are more intrinsic as opposed to external. The volunteers themselves showed particular interest in people and helping behaviour, which was reflected in their professional and social life. Their experiences with newcomers often positively influenced their perspectives. In most cases the experience of volunteering did not dramatically change the migration perspectives but did contribute positively to the volunteer’s perspectives, mostly by broadening or confirming an already existing positive perspective on migration. Volunteers

also showed increased respect for migrants and understanding for the needs of an increasingly diverse community.

Volunteers were aware of negative attitudes towards migrants in society but generally attributed this to peoples frustration with government policies being misdirected towards migrants. Due to the lack of social relations between volunteers and anti-immigrant protesters, one could argue that there is a form of ‘rural cosmopolitanism’ apparent among individual respondents in this study more so than in the community as a whole. Although the respondents do not seem to associate much with people holding extremely different ideas, they do recognise negative attitudes within their community and social network. There is however some reluctance in challenging these negative attitudes. While volunteers do share their experiences, often with positive results, their approach seems to inform people rather than change their opinions and they are usually selective as to when and with who they will discuss this. The actual impact of the narrative of the volunteer on other community members therefore still remains somewhat undiscovered.

What this study has made clear is the positive influence of the volunteers on the integration of migrants. The volunteers act as facilitators in this process by increasing connections and possibilities, both in a social context as well as in employment and public services. To help newcomers navigate their way through the community and services makes the volunteers important ‘mediators’ who contribute to broader understanding and acceptance of diversity. Although this is still mostly embedded within the framework of Ager and Strang (2008) with an emphasis on the active role of the migrant in the integration process, it also highlights the importance of citizen initiatives and community work in complementing government policies, both at the local and national level. It thus remains extremely important for governments to closely work with and support such initiatives, as they can help to identify where the system is lacking and provide opportunities to tailor services towards a more diverse public which is becoming increasingly important.

When reflecting on the process of this research, there are limitations that can be identified. The internship organisation provided an excellent basis for this research as it has been engaged in integration and community work for over 20 years. However, most volunteers that have been interviewed in light of this study have started in the past few years, partly due to the fact that the classes have only recently been set up in most towns. The composition of the volunteers also changed frequently, due to people moving out of the towns. As it takes time for a narrative to develop, this might have resulted in limited accounts of experiences and their impact on the wider community. However, the recent growth of the

organisation and its constant influx of volunteers is also proof of a successful formula. The amount of interviews turned out more limited than anticipated at the beginning of the research, snowball sampling resulted in few names but contact information was not received from the interviewees or the organisation due to the privacy agreement. Furthermore, it would have been interesting to conduct interviews with volunteers involved in different organisations and activities with a similar interest, although the aim of this research has not been to generalise among volunteers, it could have provided different insights. Still, it has been surprising how English language classes set up by one organisation can take very different forms in different locations, with some being more independent than others.

For further research in volunteering with newcomers, it is recommended to delve deeper into the social networks of participants. Especially when using a narrative approach, it would be very helpful to get a closer understanding of the social relations within communities, and to look both at the sender and receiver end of possible social impact. As the migration debate in Ireland becomes ever more important it is also recommended to critically research past and current policy inefficiencies and its effects on public opinion and social cohesion.

In conclusion, this research underscores the significant role of volunteers in promoting social cohesion and integration, challenging negative narratives and increasing understanding about migration within host communities. The experiences of volunteers contribute to more nuanced perspectives on migration, emphasising a need for continued community engagement and support for newcomers. Insights that can inform future policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing social integration.

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## Appendix 1 Interview guide

*Introduction:* Thank you for taking the time to participate and help with this research. I would like to record this interview. I will use the audiotape to be able to write out things carefully after the interview. If you are okay with this, I will start recording now.

\*record\*

1

Can you tell me something about yourself and your role as volunteer?

When did you start volunteering with Cultúr?

- Why did you choose to volunteer here as opposed to other organisations?

What did you expect it to be like when you started?

- Was this based on a particular experience?

Do you have experience with migration yourself?

- Do you remember when or why you got interested in migration (or working with migrants)?

3

Did you learn things that you didn't know about before?

Do you think that volunteering here with migrants has changed the way you look at migration?

4

Is it (migration) a topic that you often talk about with family, friends or other people?

- Do you ever tell stories about experiences you had as a volunteer?

Do you think people here [in place] are generally positive about migrants?

- Do you ever come across negative reactions about migrants?

2

Overall, do you like volunteering with Cultúr?

- Is it a bit like you expected?

How is your experience with the other volunteers and the organisation?

What moment in your time as a volunteer really stands out to you?

-

Is there anything else you would like to mention or share?

## **Appendix 2 Internship organisation**

The host organisation for the internship, Cultúr Migrants Centre, is a regional community development organisation based in counties Meath and Louth, working with ethnic minorities including immigrants, migrant workers, International Protection Applicants, and refugees. Alongside the thesis, the internships consisted of several research and policy projects on various topics. The internship lasted from October 2022 until May 2023, this thesis will be shared with the organisation to benefit their work in the future. The internship organisation has posed the original idea for this research, as they want to shed light on the Irish volunteers working with them for two main reasons. First, to be able to show evidence that the organisation is not just working for the interest of migrants as a ‘migrants-for-migrants organisation’ but serves the interest of the community as a whole, and thereby identify the impact the organisation makes not just on minorities but also on majorities in the community. Second, to gather more information about their volunteers in order to inform policy for retaining and recruiting volunteers in the future, and how to accommodate their needs and possible struggles.