

## EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Ireland

### 1 INTRODUCTION

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Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

### 2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

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*Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.*

**Fáilte Isteach** ('Welcome' in Irish) is a community project involving predominantly older volunteers welcoming migrants through conversational English classes. Fáilte Isteach was established in October 2006 by Third Age in response to the observed daily difficulties new migrants were experiencing in their integration into the local community due to a poor understanding of English. Following its success as a pilot project in a small rural community, Fáilte Isteach was launched nationally in late 2008. From the inaugural class in Summerhill involving 12 volunteer tutors and 7 students, Fáilte Isteach has grown to reach the current 750 volunteer tutors supporting 2,200 migrant students.

Fáilte Isteach aims to achieve the following:

- provide the necessary language skills to migrants in a student-centred, welcoming and inclusive manner;
- establish a network of Fáilte Isteach groups in communities throughout Ireland;
- involve older volunteer tutors and recognise their skills, expertise and contribution to the community;
- promote greater integration and achieve a new sense of community spirit, by forging new friendships and facilitating learning among and about different cultures.

## 3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

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*Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.*

No other citizen's initiatives than the Fáilte Isteach was identified in Ireland. None emerged during the 2015 'refugee crisis'.

## 4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

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*Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.*

Volunteers at Fáilte Isteach are Irish nationals of retirement age.

## 5 INNOVATION ASPECT

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*Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.*

The project provides the needed language skills to new migrants in a student-centred, welcoming and inclusive manner, while involving older volunteers and recognising their skills, expertise and contribution to the community. Fáilte Isteach demonstrates the value of older people remaining engaged and contributing in their own community. Fáilte Isteach also plays a role in the championing of local integration through interconnecting well established, well-known and respected members of local communities with their newest members.

## 6 ADDED VALUE

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*Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.*

Due to lack of statutory provision for English language support in Ireland, this area was left entirely in the remit of community groups and NGO's. There have been several locally based initiatives providing free or low-cost language lessons to the migrant population. Those initiatives rely on professional external teachers who offer structured courses to the participants aiming at enhancing their language skills. Fáilte Isteach model delivers basic language skills that are useful in day to day tasks, such as shopping, banking or visiting the doctor. By involving local and well established resident in the initiative, this model enhances the participants' intercultural competencies on both sides. It also improves the learners' knowledge of local and state affairs and enables them to navigate through the state systems. Similarly learners' social links and employability are benefiting from taking part in this initiative.

## 7 IMPACT

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*Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.*

This initiative improves integration at a local level but hasn't gained a vast state recognition. Much more could be done to promote this model as a multidimensional and low cost integration practice.