Action Group for Irish Youth

The Action Group for Irish Youth is a registered charity which aims to promote the interest and welfare of emigrant Irish youth in London. AGY services the London Irish Youth Forum which facilitates an exchange of information between agencies and provides an update on contemporary Irish community issues. It also publishes information for young Irish people and their advisors; it provides consultancy services and undertakes action research.

Federation of Irish Societies

The Federation of Irish Societies exists to promote the interests and welfare of the Irish community in Britain through the media of culture, welfare, education and youth activities. Through its Community Care Committee and its Development Co-ordinator it aims to co-ordinate the work of front-line agencies within the voluntary sector in Britain, to assist them in enhancing the quality of their services, and to raise awareness of the needs of the Irish community throughout the British statutory and voluntary sectors.

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As well as providing ongoing management and administrative support for the Standardised Information System (SIS), AGY and FIS

collect and aggregate agency data
produce quarterly and yearly tables
supervise the preparation of annual reports
organise training and ongoing support for agencies participating in the system

AGY and FIS promote the Standardised Information System among Irish agencies, and fundraise to support the ongoing costs of the system and the related development needs of agencies.

October 1997
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Summary Findings

- This report outlines the services provided by Irish agencies participating in the Standardised Information System (SIS) for the period October 1995-December 1996. It provides a profile of Irish service users and their particular service needs. It also raises some of the issues arising from the experience of various forms of harassment, domestic violence and various health issues.

- SIS is being developed into an information system which captures the diverse service provisions offered by Irish agencies and identifies the multiple needs of Irish service users. It requires continuous support, at an individual agency level and also in relation to managing the ever increasing SIS data base centrally.

- Recent SIS data suggests that there are two main groups of service users:
  1. A large group of middle aged to older Irish people, settled in Britain for more than 10 years, who seem economically and socially marginalised and come to Irish agencies for assistance.
  2. A group of young people, under 25 years, who have recently arrived in Britain and are in need of support in seeking accommodation and employment.

- In the 15 month period described in the report, almost 4000 Irish users approached the agencies participating in the SIS, 47% of whom were women and 53% men. A large proportion, 42% of users, fell into the 25 to 44 age group, followed by 26% in the 45 to 64 group, 17% in the under 25 and 15% in the over 65 age group.

- Some 45% of Irish service users have lived in Britain for over 10 years, another 8% have lived here all their lives. A quarter of users have lived in Britain for less than a year, including those just visiting at the time of the interview.

- SIS distinguishes three service areas for the purpose of analysis: advice, support and material support services. Advice on housing and welfare benefits are the most important areas of advice. Apart from various group activities, counselling, identification and repatriation issues are prominent amongst the support services. Material support offered includes food, clothing and financial assistance.

- Some of the service areas reflect the gender and age specific service needs of Irish users; for example, women tend to require support on family matters such as maintenance or childcare care problems while more men request support in relation to identification issues. Younger people tend to come for advice on employment while older people seek help for health related problems.
a quarter of Irish service users experienced some form of harassment. 7% of Irish women and men experienced racial harassment. Other forms of harassment such as neighbour harassment or police harassment may be variants of racial harassment. There is evidence of homophobic harassment amongst Irish lesbians and gay men and 14% of Irish women face domestic violence.

About a third of Irish service users report some kind of health related problem; 18% of users report having a physical disability, 16% mention mental health issues and 15% have a health problem that limits their activity.

In terms of the economic situation over half of Irish service users describe as unemployed (54%), only a small proportion are in paid work (13%). 16% are retired, 9% permanently sick and 7% are full-time at home or carers with 2% being students.

Homelessness is a situation faced by one in five users, a proportion that increases to 35% for young people. A high proportion live in privately rented or local authority (LA) housing. Overall 62% of users live in temporary accommodation.
Introduction

This report updates readers on the development the Standardised Information System (SIS) for Irish Service Providers, an information gathering system that informs about services provided by Irish agencies in London, Manchester and Merseyside. The data collected by agencies participating in the SIS is fed into a collective database at regular intervals and provides the much needed information on service users and their particular service needs.

In the first part, the report gives a brief account of how SIS was initiated and developed, and how it provided an opportunity to raise issues of concern to the Irish community based on sound data. This part also sketches some of the positive developments in service provisions and the wider awareness of the diverse experience of Irish people living in Britain.

The second part of the report provides a brief profile of Irish service users, describes service provisions and their particular relevance to Irish people.

In the third part, issues that arise from the data analysis are discussed in terms of the impact they have on the lives of Irish people living in Britain such as harassment, health, unemployment and housing.

The final part concludes with recommendations that need action either by individual statutory or voluntary bodies or in partnership with other agencies within and outside the Irish community.

The information in this report is the result of much commitment from Irish agencies participating in the SIS and, in particular, the front-line workers who collate the information that is fed into the SIS. It is also the result of the generous time offered in sharing the experience and knowledge held by Irish agencies that is reflected in this report, including the recent research studies that have highlighted the various issues that the Irish community aims to tackle.
1. How SIS developed

The Standardised Information System (SIS) for Irish Service Providers was conceived in 1992 by the Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY) and the Federation of Irish Societies (FIS) in response to the apparent necessity to better understand the service needs of Irish people living in Britain. A computerised system was devised that allowed individual agencies to monitor their service delivery while also providing the opportunity to bring together information for a wider analysis of the service needs of Irish people.

A pilot study conducted in 1993 demonstrated the potential for such an information system. This was presented in the AGIY/FIS report 'Developing a Community Response, the Service Needs of the Irish Community in Britain' (Kowarzik, 1994). Issues arising from the report formed the basis for a conference organised by the Association of London Authorities in March 1995 urging local authorities and other mainstream service providers to monitor services to Irish people and respond more appropriately to the specific needs of Irish service users.

In October 1994 twelve Irish service providers decided to embark on this new way of data collection. It is the commitment and determination of those agencies that made the SIS into a viable system which brings together the vital evidence of the many problems and issues that agencies have already identified.

The widespread experience of harassment, the serious housing need, the worrying extent of health problems, the difficulty in accessing the benefit system are issues emerging from the SIS data. Irish agencies address many of those issues, and indeed have ever increasing experience in responding promptly to the multiple service needs of the community. However, they work in an environment where legislative changes, long-term effects of unemployment, and, sadly, continuous racial harassment and discrimination of Irish people cause considerable hardship in parts of the Irish community.

A number of the agencies have drawn on SIS data to support funding applications based on sound statistical evidence of the services they deliver and a profile of the users they serve. They also made use of the data in their annual reports.

SIS is managed by a Steering Group made up of representatives from AGIY and FIS which meets regularly to review and improve the SIS. They also use the SIS information to demonstrate the achievements as well as the gaps in service provisions.

The recent SIS data suggests that, in particular, young people continue to arrive in Britain and need support in finding housing, employment and
training opportunities. The forthcoming AGNY/Kilburn Irish Youth Project survey of young people suggests that many arrive in the hope of finding appropriate employment with some seeking further training. This is also reflected in the SIS data which shows that two thirds of young people have lived in Britain for less than a year; 45% of those seeking advice on employment are young people and many approach agencies for help with accommodation. Yet, the restricted housing market leaves many homeless. 35% of young service users describe themselves as homeless, another 17% live in hostels or B&B.

There is also a substantial middle to older age group who struggle for fair and equal treatment in British society. 45% of Irish service users have lived in Britain for over 10 years, another 8% have lived here all their lives. Many face some form of exclusion from the labour and housing market and feel the effects of long-term unemployment or low income. Two thirds of the 25 to 44 age group are unemployed, and many older men, in particular, experience homelessness. They require support in accessing mainstream services or in dealing with changing personal circumstances. For example, a quarter of advice to the 25 to 44 age group relates to seeking accommodation, and 11% of advice has to do with income support or housing benefits. Over one in five users in the 45 to 64 age group describe their status as permanently sick and many in this age group seek advice on health related problems.

In September 1997 SIS moves towards the completion of the third year of data collection. During these 3 years many things have happened, some as a result of having SIS data available. The possibility of illustrating to mainstream service providers, and funders in particular, the diverse and multiple service needs of the Irish community have resulted in better collaboration and financial support. More local authorities have shown commitment to monitoring the service they provide to Irish people, although targeting and delivering services remains an issue.

2. Moving Forward

In reviewing the voluntary sector in Britain, the Centris report ‘Voluntary Action’ (Knight 1993) provides a comprehensive analysis of the Irish voluntary sector. It emphasises the specific nature of the Irish voluntary sector, in particular, the culturally sensitive service provisions and the multiple service needs of Irish service users. Looking at the Irish voluntary sector in the mid 90's suggests that Irish agencies have targeted particular service needs, such as support with mental health issues, and developed more responsive services amidst a climate of uncertainty over funding.

Initially, the changing funding environment, in particular the shift in local authorities funding arrangements from grant giving to service agreement in the early 90's, increased pressures
for many small voluntary agencies, especially those addressing the needs of the black and ethnic minority communities (Black and Ethnic Community Care Forum, 1992). Many could not easily 'repackage' their services to fit the requirements for service agreements which resulted from the introduction of the Community Care Act 1990.

Yet, what looked like a threat to many of the Irish front-line service providers appeared to have been turned by many into an opportunity for accessing resources for much of the social care and support provided to their service users. This should not deflect from the fact that raising sufficient funding for core activities remains a continuous struggle for many agencies who would rather devote their time to servicing their users than expend much effort on convincing funders of the value of their services.

There is evidence too, that discussions and awareness raising of sensitive issues within the Irish community such as the extent of domestic violence, the invisibility of Irish lesbians and gay men, the seriousness of mental health problems often linked to alcohol and drug misuse, have resulted in supportive responses and actions.

Some Irish agencies now have specialist workers addressing mental health issues and provide a network of support for those affected by mental ill-health. The SIS data shows that one in five of Irish service users mention mental health issues and need assistance. Irish agencies have responded with the provision of professional counseling services which now make up 15% of the support services they provide.

Service users with an alcohol problem now have access to service provisions that respond in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way, a service much needed according to the SIS data. For example, 16% of men and 4% of women report alcohol use and many of these men and women approach the agencies for support.

Meanwhile, new research is highlighting the specific experience of Irish people in terms of health (Walls P, 1996; Pearson, M., Madden, M. Greenslade L.1991), the criminal justice system (AGIY/FIS et.al1997) and the various forms of anti-Irish racism that remain widespread in British society. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) report 'Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain' (Hickman M. and Walter B. 1997), launched in June 1997, highlights the extent to which discrimination and harassment affects the lives of Irish people in Britain, an issue which will be addressed in part 3 of this report.
3. The Need for Continuous Support

Progress is being made towards addressing and supporting the many concerns that the Irish community faces. Networking and bringing together information contribute to a better understanding of what is needed and how to go about meeting that need.

Of course, continuous funding has to be made available to sustain the developments that have been initiated. The loss of important service providers such as Positively Irish Action on AIDS (PIAA) creates gaps that can not easily be filled by existing Irish agencies. Although some have started to train staff and acquire the specific knowledge required to provide appropriate services for Irish people affected by HIV/AIDS, building this expertise will take time.

The CRE report provides a valuable information resource and much evidence which suggests that the needs of the Irish community are far from being met by mainstream services and other providers. A significant barrier is the anti-Irish racism still present in British society, preventing many Irish people from taking up the opportunities that exist. Much education and awareness raising has to take place amongst British institutions and citizens about the effects that anti-Irish racism has on Irish people living in Britain. These are important steps towards creating a truly multi-cultural society where people are respected and have equal access to resources and opportunities.
This section presents information extracted from the SIS data set. It briefly looks at the characteristics of Irish service users in terms of gender, age, sexuality, employment and housing status and length of residency in Britain. It also provides an analysis of the diverse services that the agencies participating in the SIS provide and the specific service needs that different user groups present.

The sample of Irish service users described here is largely self selected in that most users approach agencies on their own initiative. They visited the agencies for advice and support in a 15 month period between October 1995 to December 1996. This represents a follow up on the previous annual report to Irish agencies covering the period of October 1994 to September 1995 which is referred to as ‘the previous year’.

It should be noted that the sample of Irish service users and their characteristics are not representative of the Irish community as a whole. It is also important to recognise that the SIS data does not distinguish between Irish born in the Republic or Northern Ireland as tends to be the case in official statistics. The question service users are asked is one of ‘ethnic identity’ and includes second and third generation Irish people born in Britain who identify as Irish. This means that the data is not easily comparable with statistical data from the Census or other government statistics. However, the substantial size of the SIS data set in itself is of considerable value and assures a high degree of reliability in identifying service patterns and capturing some of the experiences Irish people encounter.

1. User Profile

While most services provided by participating agencies are open to people in the local community, the majority of users tend to be Irish people. 88% of service users identify as black or white Irish or Irish Travellers. Of the Irish Travellers seeking advice and support two thirds are women. The remaining users belong to various ethnic communities including English, Scottish and Welsh.

The data discussed below relates to those users who identify as Irish or Irish Travellers which applies to almost 4000 users in the 15 month period. It is derived from user records collected and inputted into the SIS.

Below is a brief summary of the characteristics of Irish service users who visited agencies between October 1995 to December 1996. It shows that:

- 47% of all users are women and 53% are men.
- The 25 to 44 age group is the largest group of
users with 42%; the 45 to 64 age group represent 26%; the younger, under 25 age group make up 17% of all Irish users; and the 65 plus group make up 15%.

Most users identify their sexuality as being heterosexual (96%), some 2% identify as lesbians or gay men, less than 1% identify as bisexual and another 1% are undecided about their sexuality.

Some 45% of Irish service users have lived in Britain for over 10 years, another 8% have lived here all their lives. A quarter of users have lived in Britain for less than a year, including those who are just visiting at the time of the interview.

As a measure of a sustained connection with Ireland SIS asks about the return visits to Ireland over the previous 3 years and found that 61% have not returned in that period, but that some 24% have returned twice or three times and another 15% returned 3 or more times to Ireland.

A majority of users describe as single. 52% fall into this category with 36% of women and 66% of men using that description. Another 14% of women and 1% of men are single parents, a figure that increases when looking at people with children only. Of the women with children 38% are single parents compared with 7% of men with children who have single parent status.

### 1.1 Age and Gender

Current SIS data shows a shift towards the older age group since the previous year which is likely to be caused by the inclusion of previously unrecorded group activities offered by Irish agencies. Although this does not radically affect the distribution of the age groups, it has changed the proportion of women and men towards a greater proportion of women who now make up 47% of all users compared with 53% men (Table 1).

#### Table 1: Age and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 44</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>1627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 or over</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>2068</td>
<td>3904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the previous year this was 42% for women and 58% for men. This can be explained by an increase in the proportion of women in the over 65 age group which is also the user group more likely to take advantage of the group activities on offer.

It is worth noting, though, that according to various research sources identifying migration pattern of Irish people in Britain, Irish women are more strongly represented amongst migrants. According to the CRE report Irish women outnumber men by 112 to 100. (These figures relate to Irish born people only, Hickman M. and Walter B., 1997, page 33). This means that SIS data statistically underrepresents Irish women.

Chart 1 shows the distribution of women and men according to the age group they fall into. There are more women in the under 25 age group and the 65 plus group, while more men than women fall within the 25 to 44 and 45 to 65 age groups.
Chart 2 presents the quarterly record of first time users according to their age group. It shows that the stream of users fluctuates in each quarter over the 15 month period. While there is a drop in the proportion of the 25 to 44 age group in the 2nd quarter of 1996, at the same time the proportion of the over 65 age group rises. This is caused by recording of group activities for older people and therefore is a matter of record keeping rather than a dramatic change in the user population. This group declines towards the last quarter of 1996. The under 25 age group tends to be a more consistent user group and the 45 to 64 group shows a slight increase towards the end of the last quarter. The fluctuating patterns may be less relevant to the collective SIS data analysis, but could be useful to individual agencies in identifying those patterns for planning of their service delivery.

The following section describes the four main age groups in terms of their characteristics and some of the age specific service needs.

1.2 The under 25 Age Group

Users in the under 25 age group tend to be single, are more likely to be unemployed, 78%, a figure that increases to 87% for men; 11% of young women and 8% of young men are in paid work; amongst the young women 11% are fulltime at home or carers, 9% are students, compared with 3% of young men.

Over a third of young people are homeless (35%), this figure increases to 40% for young men compared with 29% for young women. Another 21% of young men live in hostels or B&B, this compares with 13% of young women.

Chart 3 below shows that almost two thirds of young people have lived in Britain for less than a year including those just visiting. Another 10% have lived in Britain their whole lives. The remainder have been in Britain for more than a year. As this group tend to be recent arrivals they are also least likely to have returned to Ireland, only 8% have returned to Ireland on 3 or more occasions within the last 3 years.

In terms of their service needs seeking accommodation and employment as well as getting advice on benefits are the most important
areas of advice. Assistance with identification and repatriation are amongst the support services most required and more young women make use of counselling services.

1.3 The 25 to 44 Age Group

The 25 to 44 age group are the largest age group amongst service users. In terms of personal status they are likely to be single. It is the group most likely to have children, a third of users, and a significant proportion are single parents, 36%.

For women with children in this age group the figure rises to 47%.

The level of unemployment is considerably higher with 65% compared with the 54% for the whole sample; 16% are in paid work; 9% are fulltime at home or carers, most of whom are women.

Homelessness is above the whole sample with 28% compared with 21% for all, another 9% live in hostels or B&Bs. 21% live in private and another 21% in LA housing.
As can be seen in chart 3 above the proportion who have arrived in Britain less than a year ago is 27% compared with the total of 25%. 29% of users in this group are likely to have lived in Britain for more than 10 years, another 9% have lived in Britain their whole lives. They are more likely to have returned to Ireland in the last 3 years on 3 or more occasions (19%).

In terms of advice services many seek advice on accommodation, 25% of all advice, 6% of advice relates to mental health and 11% on income and housing benefits; a noticeable proportion of advice concerns disability allowance, 3%, and incapacity benefits with 4%.

1.4 The 45 to 64 Age Group

This age group is more likely to be married or live with a partner, 24%, a similar proportion are separated or divorced, 23% compared with 13% of the whole sample.

Fewer in this age group are unemployed, 46% compared with 54% for all; 13% are in paid work; this group is most likely to describe themselves as permanently sick, 22% compared with 9% for all. 30% live in LA housing, another 21% in private accommodation, 11% describe themselves as homeless, another 7% live in hostels or B&B.

This group tends to be resident in Britain for over 10 years, this applies to 77% in this group, 5% have lived in Britain their whole lives (see chart 3 above). A small proportion, 8%, have been in Britain less than a year. This group is likely to have returned to Ireland in the last 3 years for 3 or more times, 16%.

In terms of advice, 18% of all advice relates to seeking accommodation, some 6% of queries relate to physical disability, 6% to mental health and another 5% to alcohol misuse. 10% of advice has to do with income support or housing benefits.

1.5 The 65 plus Age Group

A large proportion of this group, that is 81% describe themselves as retired.

Many are widowed, 33%, another 33% are single and some 26% are married or live with a partner. This group is more likely to live in owner occupied housing, 31% compared with the 9% for the whole sample; another 33% live in LA housing; 16% live in the private sector.

Most users in this group have lived in Britain for over 10 years, 81%. Another 10% have lived here their whole lives. Links to Ireland remain important for some as one in ten are likely to have returned to Ireland on 3 or more occasions in the last 3 years.

Seeking accommodation remains an issue for this group and comprises 12% of advice; 4%
compared with 2% of advice for the whole sample relates to council tax; 6% of advice is on physical disability and 6% on mental health. Some 12% of advice relates to income support and housing benefits.

2. Service Provision

Quantifying the diverse and extensive services provided by Irish agencies presents a problem. Although information extracted from the SIS suggests that an impressive 25,000 service activities have been provided over the 15 month period, some elements of service delivery remain invisible or simply unrecorded. Because of time pressures or the nature of enquiry not all services provided are entered into the system. It is also true that the quantity measure does not correspond to the time spent with a user, nor does it reflect the quality of relationship that many front-line workers offer, which often has developed over a period of time.

Responses from agencies suggest that much of the increase in advice and support work was caused by external factors such as changes in legislation. The introduction of the incapacity benefit in April 1995 to replace the invalidity benefit has meant that users previously entitled to the latter benefit are now having to go through reassessment of their entitlement with some being denied the new benefit. This means agencies dealing with such cases, often have to go through lengthy appeal procedures taking up more time and effort. The Housing Act (1996) has made access to housing more difficult and agencies have to advocate on behalf of their users to ensure that entitlements to public housing are honoured. Some of this additional work created by legislative changes is illustrated by the following two case studies taken from the Annual Report of one of the agencies participating in SIS (HCCC, 1996/97).

Jane appealed for incapacity benefit when she became too ill to continue working. Her claim was turned down because the medical advisor deemed her to be capable of working. She approached our advice service and was supported in her request for a review of this decision. Following liaison with the Benefit Agency, a report was submitted which resulted in the original decision being overturned. (p.8)

Mary is a woman in her forties who was referred to us by the Local Authority. She was eight-and-a-half months pregnant at the time and was fleeing domestic violence. She had approached Housing emergency to apply for rehousing and was refused a service three days in a row. I met her in a distressed state, asked to speak to the supervisor and an application was made. Her application was refused on the grounds that she had contact with her violent partner in recent months. We sought legal advice and she was placed in temporary accommodation the same day. (p.23)
While those legislative changes bring up some administrative problems, for example reassessment of benefit entitlements etc., hidden behind the many refusals to benefits or access to housing lies the often discriminatory practice of statutory agencies. Institutional racism may present itself as an ‘identification issues’ which means Irish people are required to provide more extensive documentation about their identity than a British citizen. This issue has been highlighted in the report ‘Identity Crisis’ (AGIY 1993) and is one that continues to exists according to the SIS data.

Having outlined some of the causes which have increased the workload for agencies, it is evident that the service analysis derived from the SIS, although reflecting a good part of the agencies’ work, does not capture the whole picture of service delivery that Irish agencies offer.

2.1 Volume of Services

The SIS distinguishes three service areas for the purpose of analysis. The first is advice giving including advice on housing, welfare benefits, discrimination, health etc. This tends to generate the greatest volume of work amongst the service providers in this sample. The second area concerns support services and almost exclusively relates to the very specific service needs of the Irish community such as identification issues, help with repatriation, funeral arrangements and culturally sensitive counselling services. The third area relates to material support such as providing food, clothing or furniture. Chart 4 shows that of all services provided:

- 63% relate to advice services
- 28% relate to support services
- 8% relate to material support

A noticeable change on the previous year is the shift from material support to providing more advice and support services. In part, this shift is caused by the considerable amount of case work that agencies face due to the legislative changes outlined above. There is also some under-recording of material support services as the pressure of time forces workers to offer help in a less formal way, that is without having users personal details recorded, as is the case for most of the advice and support work. This is not to diminish the importance, and indeed need, for material support which helps people through a period of extreme hardship.
The following section describes some of the service patterns over time. The possibility to use SIS data to trace the volume of service provision over a period of time may not be so significant for the collective data analysis. However, it may provide a useful tool for individual agencies in their forward planning identifying peaks of particular service aspects and the less intense times of user contact.

Another point to emphasise here is the presentation of the SIS data on services in two distinct ways. On the one hand, service categories are expressed in relation to all services to reflect the importance each service has. As each advice service category include repeat visits, it reflects more accurately the volume and in some way intensity of service delivery.

On the other hand, it is useful to know the proportion of users that require a particular service and allows for a more accurate picture of gender and age specific differences. For example, while advice on housing to both women and men is close in terms of all advice given, 27% and 28% respectively, when expressing the proportion of women and men requiring advice on housing, the difference is significant. 25% of women and 38% of men require advice on housing. This suggests that more men need advice on housing, but that in terms of all advice areas, housing advice is as important to men as it is for women.

2.2 Service Patterns over Time

Chart 5 below shows the volume of service or number of services provided in each quarter and reflects the gradual increase in service provisions from the 4th quarter in 1995 to the peak in the 3rd quarter of 1996 leveling off in the last quarter of 1996. Both the 4th quarters of 1995 and 1996 reflect a drop in the services towards the end of the year when most agencies close offices over the Christmas period. While advice and support services rise steadily up to the 3rd quarter of 1996, material support remains at a fairly even level.

2.3 Advice services

Advice giving remains the most important service area with 63% of all services relating to advice. 57% of all Irish service users requested advice of some sort in the given period. Altogether 15,717 pieces of advice were provided at a first or subsequent visit over the 15 months.
Advice on housing and welfare benefits are the two most prominent areas of advice making up over half of all advice services. Table 2 presents the importance each advice category has in relation to all advice provided. For example, it shows that both housing and welfare advice make up 27% each of all advice services. Other areas of advice concerns employment 5%, education 2%, finance 4%, family services 3%, discrimination 4%. Advice on welfare benefits and health, making up 27% and 16% of all advice respectively, show a small increase over the previous year.

Chart 6 right shows some of the difference in services sought by women and men. The main advice areas such as housing and health, and to some extent welfare benefits are close, on others they diverge substantially.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice category</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>2384</td>
<td>4310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1083</td>
<td>1384</td>
<td>2467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare benefits</td>
<td>1791</td>
<td>2473</td>
<td>4264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family services</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other advice</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>1007</td>
<td>1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>7256</td>
<td>8461</td>
<td>15717</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For example, advice on family matters and discrimination are more likely to be requested by women, while men tend to request advice on welfare benefits and employment. For women the figures for family services and discrimination are 5% and 7% respectively and compare with 2% and 1% for men. A high proportion of advice on discrimination relates to advice on domestic violence issues. Another 12% of all advice relates to a range of queries.

Chart 7 below presents the proportion of users requiring a particular service and shows the differing service use of women and men.

For example, 31% of users need advice on housing; for women this figure is 25% and for men 38%. Although 31% of users require advice on welfare benefits the figure for men is substantially greater with 40% of men needing such advice compared with 23% of women. Another significant difference between women’s and men’s advice needs relates to discrimination. While 7% of women receive advice services in relation to discrimination issues, largely to do with domestic violence, only 2% of men ask for advice on discrimination.

Below the different service use by particular user groups are briefly outlined to indicate some of the disparate experiences people face at different stages in their lives.

2.3.1 Users with Children

While advice on housing and welfare benefits remain the most important areas of advice for users with children, the need for advice on family matters is much higher for both women and men in this group, a pattern also identified in the previous year. For example, 9% of advice to women relates to family services and 7% for men compared with 5% for all women and 2% for all men in the sample. Also significant is the advice on childcare issues which forms 4% of all advice sought by users with children.

2.3.2 Age Group

Some service requests appear to be age specific as is illustrated in chart 8 opposite. This is followed by a brief description of the advice needs for each age group.
Advice on employment and education is an important advice category making up 16% of advice. More young men than young women require such advice. Health advice appears to be of less importance to young people, but still 8% of advice relates to health. Such health advice largely covers advice on mental health (30%) and advice on alcohol and drug use (30%). Some 4% of all advice refers to advice on repatriation. Although discrimination is not an area of advice too prominent amongst the advice services to this age group, it may be important to recognise that almost half of this advice concerns domestic violence issues.

For the 25 to 45 age group, both health and welfare advice has increased over the previous year to 16% and 23% respectively (from 13% and 21%). For women in this age group advice on discrimination, largely relating to advice on domestic violence issues makes up 6% of all advice compared with 1% of advice for men. Men's need for housing advice makes up 33% compared with 29% for women.

For the 44 to 64 age group, discrimination remains an important advice aspect for women with 6% advice compared with 7% for all women. Advice on housing remains important to men with 26% which is the same for all men. Men in this age group need advice on welfare.
benefits, 32% compared with 29% for all men and slightly more users need health advice, 19% compared with 16% for all users.

The 65 plus age group shows a greater need for advice on welfare benefits; health and housing remains an important issue for this group with 20%. They also request more advice on finance, 7% of this age group compared to 4% for all.

2.4 Support Services

The support services are an important group of services because they largely address issues that are specific to Irish service users and often require a sustained service support with much advocacy and organisational matters to deal with. For example, identification issues may involve obtaining documentation from Ireland; helping a user with repatriation may require making contact with housing authorities in Ireland.

Table 3 sets out each of the support categories as a proportion of all support services.

Over the 15 month period more than 7,000 support services were offered to Irish users at a first or subsequent visit representing 28% of all services. Altogether 42% of users needed such support.

This includes support that is provided through group activities such as women's groups, alcohol support, luncheon clubs for Irish Elders, carers' support, culturally sensitive day care, and homeless group. Group activities have only been recorded in the SIS format recently and they now form a substantial proportion of support services, that is 41%, and are significantly more important for women than men as chart 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service/support category</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repatriation</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing person</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>751</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>1072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creche</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Activities</td>
<td>2356</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>2889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>1460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>4598</strong></td>
<td><strong>2511</strong></td>
<td><strong>7109</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
below illustrates. 51% of all support services to women relate to group activities compared with 21% for men. Services that are either not widely available or not much used are creche facilities for users with children and may be a service area requiring development.

Counselling services and identification issues remain important support services with 15% and 8% respectively. Counseling provisions, although more likely to be accessed by women, have become a more important service aspect for men. For men they make up 13% of support compared with 16% for women. Identification issues also remain an important service area for men (16%), less so for women (4%). Support with repatriation, 4% of all support services, has remained at the same level compared to the previous year. It is a service more likely to be required by men, 7% of support services to men and 2% to women. Chart 10 presents selected categories of support services and the proportion of users receiving the particular service.

2.4.1 Users with Children

There is a considerable shift for users with children towards counselling services, which make up 32% of all support services for users with children compared
with the 16% in the previous years. Also important for users with children are accommodation and identification issues with 14% and 15% respectively. There is also a significant increase for men seeking repatriation advice, a rise from 10% in the previous year to 14% of all support in the 15 month period.

2.4.2 Age Group

Chart 11 shows the services in a way that identifies their particular relevance to users in a specific age group. A brief description of each group’s support service needs is presented below.

For the under 25 age group identification issues are the most needed support services with 21% for this age group compared with 8% for all. Advice on identification issues are particularly relevant for young men making up 26% of all support services sought by young men. Also accommodation, repatriation and travel are services more frequently used by young people compared with the whole sample. There is a noticeable increase in the use of counselling services by young people, in particular amongst young women; 14% of support to this group relates to counselling.

For the 25 to 44 age group the most significant difference is the greater use of counselling services, especially by women. 44% of support to women relates to counselling compared with 16% for all women. This represents a significant increase over the previous year.
for the 45 to 64 age group counselling for both women and men in the 45 to 64 age group is the most important support service with 24% of services relating to counselling compared to 15% of all.

for the 65 plus age group a substantial support service for the over 65 age group are the group activities which make up 68% of all support services for this group. Counselling remains a significant service provision while other areas of support seem less important.

2.5 Material Support

Material support services make up 8% of all services. 12% of all users required such support. 3,265 pieces of material support were provided in the 15 month period. These consist of support with food (30%), financial support (21%) and clothing (17%). Less than a third of all support services related to various material support provided such as access to washing facilities, household items or the use of the telephone.

Table 4 shows the type of material support provided in the 15 month period.

Material support for users with children is greater in terms of financial support, 30% compared with 21% for the whole sample. Material support appears to be most important to the young and less significant for the 65 plus group.

users in the under 25 age group tend to need help with food, 44% of all material support; 27% relate to finance.

the 25 to 44 age group’s request for material support tends to be slightly higher for financial support, 26% compared with 21% the whole sample.

for the 45 to 64 age group help with clothing is more important, 28% of material support relates to clothing compared with 17% for all.

for the 65 plus group food, clothing and financial support become less important, but a variety of other material support remains vital.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material support category</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>767</td>
<td>1261</td>
<td>2028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This part presents SIS data on the experience of harassment, health, unemployment and housing, important issues that have been addressed in various research on the Irish community in Britain and are tackled daily by Irish agencies. The SIS data serves to highlight and quantify some of those issues.

For example, a quarter of service users reported experience of some form of harassment; two thirds mention concerns about their health and mental health issues in particular; over half of service users are unemployed and in need of support in reentering the labour market; 62% of users live in a temporary housing situation, one in five are homeless. The pressing need for change is evident.

1. Experience of Harassment

One of the issues that the SIS tries to highlight is the experience of harassment in its various forms. Each user is asked to indicate whether they have experienced any form of harassment over the previous 12 months. In fact, a quarter of users said that they had faced one or more types of harassment. The definition of harassment used here is broad and encompasses actions that are discriminatory. It also includes experience of domestic violence.

Table 5 below sets out the various forms of harassment reported by users in the 15 month period. Some users may experience multiple forms of harassment and therefore may have identified more than one of the categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of harassment</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial harassment</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobia</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic violence</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police harassment</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTA harassment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrassment by neighbour</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other harassment</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>1398</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In line with findings in the previous year racial harassment, domestic violence and police harassment are the forms of harassment most frequently recorded. The SIS introduced a category of neighbour harassment and this form of harassment makes up 13% of all harassment recorded. In some cases it represents a form of racial harassment, but service users have not identified it as such.

There are considerable differences, though, between the experience of women and men as shown in chart 12. For women domestic violence is the most frequent form of harassment, 32% of all harassment recorded; men tend to report police harassment including arrests under the PTA, amounting to 17% of all harassment.

1.1 Racial Harassment

Evidence on the extent of racial harassment and discrimination against the Irish community is accumulating with the recent CRE report (Hickman M., Walter B. 1997) providing substantial evidence of the various forms in which Irish people face racial discrimination and harassment. The AGIY/FIS et al report (1997) specifically highlights the unfair treatment of Irish people in the British criminal justice system supporting their findings with many case histories. The two cases studies below are taken from the report and serve as an example of the harassment some Irish people are facing.

Anna Kay who is 25 left a pub recently with a group of friends. Within minutes they were stopped by two dozen police in three vans and two cars. Later they learnt they were stopped on suspicion of carrying firearms. The woman was searched in the back of a police van. They found a beer glass which had been taken from the pub, she was arrested and charged with theft. All the other friends were released. At the police station she was stripped and put in the cell. She was released at 6.30 the next morning and charged with being drunk and disorderly. She pleaded not guilty, but three police officers gave evidence against her. The court were not told about the...
circumstances of the stop. The woman was found not guilty and the Magistrate hearing the case commented that “the police have been over conscientious in their duties”. She claimed she was approached later by the officers who told her not to let them meet her again because they would get her convicted next time.

Tom Donovan who comes from Cork is 47. His house was recently raided under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He has been stopped on several occasions by the police because of their suspicion that he has been involved in burglaries and bombings. He has been stopped four times in the last six months. On occasions his photo has been taken and he has been subject to identity parades. He has never been charged.

The SIS data adds more information on the extent to which racial harassment is present in the lives of Irish people living in Britain.

For example, 7% of women and men say that they have experienced racial harassment over the previous 12 months. Yet, this figure may represent only a small proportion of the real extent of racial harassment experienced. Many older Irish people tend to describe their experiences as ‘being treated badly because of being Irish’ and would not classify their experience as racial harassment or discrimination. 13% of all harassment relates to neighbour harassment which may conceal anti-Irish racism.

For example, a front-line worker reports that a family using the services was continuously harassed by their neighbours and found one day that the flat was searched by police because the neighbours had claimed that the family was hiding guns. Nothing was found.

Men are more likely than women to face police harassment. 5% of men report harassment from police and PTA arrests.

Chart 13 below shows the experience of racial harassment by age group and the advice that is sought in relation to the issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 13: Racial Harassment &amp; Advice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice on Racial Harassment [Total 152]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65 plus (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 64 (49.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64 (31.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users Reporting Racial Harassment [Total 284]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65 plus (6.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64 (23.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 (12.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Users in the 25 to 44 age group are more likely to report racial harassment. For example, they make up 42% of all age groups. Yet, in terms of reporting racial harassment the figure is 56%. Although many do seek advice, it seems to be the older age group, the 45 to 64 and the 65 plus that tend to come for advice on the issue.

While providing advice services on racial harassment is vital, there also seems to be a need for a network of Irish agencies to develop a common strategy for challenging the various forms of racial harassment and respond to incidents in a concerted action. Such strategy could be community based or operate at a regional and national level.

1.2 Domestic violence

The SIS data reveals that there are many Irish women who experience domestic violence and come for support to Irish agencies. The data provides some quantitative measures, but is unlikely to reflect the true extent of the problem. The problem is immense and many front-line workers in the Irish agencies are aware that there are many more women in the community that need help and support.

Domestic violence, an experience that affects mainly women, but not exclusively, is reported by 14% of women, a figure that rises to 24% for women with children. 32% of all harassment experienced by women has to do with domestic violence (see table 5). Domestic violence is reported by women in all age groups, but women in the 25 to 44 age group seemed to be more likely to be affected.

Chart 14 below shows that advice on domestic violence is sought by users in all age groups and matches closely the proportion of those experiencing domestic violence. An exception is the 65 plus group who appear less likely to seek advice on the issue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart 14: Domestic Violence &amp; Advice (%) of users &amp; advice according to age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advice on Domestic Violence [Total 352]</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 Plus (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 (10.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 44 (61.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64 (19.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users Reporting Domestic Violence [Total 282]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65 Plus (2.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25 (19.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 44 (66.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 64 (17.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Support structures for Irish women and children in this situation are developing. Sólás Anois, a project to raise awareness and support Irish women who experience domestic violence, set up in September 1993 and since its first refuge opened in October 1994 has supported 116 women and 199 children. Some Irish service providers have built links with the project, others need to be made aware of the services Sólás Anois offers.

Domestic violence is an experience that women from all communities face. While it reflects the unequal relationship between women and men in society at large, the issue has to be confronted within the Irish community itself. Support for women who feel threatened is available to some extent, but this form of harassment requires a change in attitudes towards and treatment of women.

1.3 Homophobic Harassment

Although the proportion of users in the SIS data who identify as lesbians and gay men amounts to only 2%-considered to be a gross underrepresentation-they are a user group who require specific service support due to the experience they have because of being a lesbian or gay man. 58% of users in this group reported the experience of homophobic harassment and 80% come to Irish agencies to seek advice on this type of harassment.

Amach Linn, the Irish lesbians’ and gay men’s network, was formed in 1996 to look at the experience of Irish lesbians and gay men in London and find ways of creating awareness of the discrimination and harassment from within the Irish community and in society in general of Irish lesbians and gay men. In particular, they seek to address the issue of poverty experienced by some lesbians and gay men because of restricted access to employment and housing.

While awareness of the problems faced by Irish lesbians and gay men is increasing, this is not always reflected in service provisions. With an active network of Irish lesbians and gay men the opportunity to raise awareness of these issues is provided.

2. Health Issues

The conference ‘The Health of the Irish in Britain’ organised by FIS with the support of the King’s Fund placed the issues of health firmly on the agenda. The CRE report (Hickman M. and Walter B., 1997) finds evidence in the Census 1991 of the greater proportion of Irish people with a long-term illness especially amongst the middle to older age group compared with the remaining white population (Figures relate to Irish born, page 62). ‘Researching Irish Mental Health’ (Walls P., 1996) is a study based in Haringey which shows a disproportionate amount of mental health issues affecting the Irish community.
The SIS data reveals that many users experience one or more health problems with over a third of service users mentioning some kind of health related issue. 18% report having a physical disability, 16% mention problems with mental health and 15% have a health problem that limits their activities.

Table 6 shows that of all health issues reported physical disability makes up 29%, mental health 26% and alcohol use 17% of all health related problems. These patterns are consistent with those identified in the previous year with a slight increase in those mentioning mental health problems and fewer users reporting alcohol use.

Again, some health problems are gender specific as chart 15 demonstrates.

For example, 31% of women’s health problems relate to mental health compared with 22% of men’s reported health problems. Expressed as a proportion of users both women and men experience mental health problems to a similar extent, 17% and 16% respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health problem</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical disability</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol misuse</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug misuse</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health Problems</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>992</strong></td>
<td><strong>1482</strong></td>
<td><strong>2474</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chart 16 below shows the extent to which advice is sought in relation to mental health issues by users in the four age groups. Both the under 25 and 45 to 64 age groups seem to make use of advice services on health in relation to their reported health issues, 8% and 31% respectively. In contrast, the 25 to 44 and 65 plus age groups seem to make less use of the advice services on mental health.

Often related to mental health issues is the misuse of alcohol. Alcohol use is largely a problem faced by men, 16% of men compared with 4% of women reported alcohol misuse. The progress report by the Irish Community Alcohol Service (Arlington Care Association, 1996) highlights the need for support for this user group. Because of racial stereotyping, alcohol users may find it even more difficult to get access to mainstream services. As one front-line worker explains "statutory agencies are not interested in looking at the causes of alcohol use, but are happy to use it as an excuse to deny a person a service".

Chart 17 presents the relationship between reported alcohol use and the advice sought on the problem. It shows that the middle and older age groups, the 25 to 44 and 45 to 64 age group,
are more likely to report alcohol misuse compared with the younger and 65 plus age group where fewer users mention this problem. Yet, in terms of seeking advice the 25 to 44 age group seems less likely to make use of advice on alcohol misuse. The reverse is true for the 45 to 64 group of whom 36% report alcohol use, but make up 43% of all advice.

For service users with an alcohol problem there are now more service provisions that respond in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way to this group. In spring 1997 a network of organisations joined together in the London Irish Alcohol Forum (LIAF) to build a broad based strategy for supporting alcohol users. They not only wish to develop and expand existing services but campaign for greater awareness amongst mainstream providers for services that are culturally sensitive, a concern that is particularly relevant because of the racist stereotyping of Irish people as ‘drunks’ and the effect such projections have on Irish people.

A small proportion of service users are affected by HIV/AIDS according to SIS records. As suggested in the introduction the closure of PIAA has created a gap in service provision. This matter was addressed in the ‘Post PIAA conference’ in October 1996 which aimed to seek ways of continuing the support to Irish people affected by HIV/AIDS.

The information presented here suggests that the health of the Irish community remains an important agenda item. While the recent research reports help to piece together a more comprehensive picture of the health and health care needs of Irish people in Britain, more locally based research is required for appropriate service development. For example, the Irish Community Care Manchester works in partnership with the local health authority in researching the health of Irish people in Manchester to be able to respond more sensitively to those in need of support for the various health problems they experience.

3. Unemployment

The economic inequalities experienced by Irish people in Britain are most visible in the level of unemployment in the community. The CRE report amongst others uses the Census 1991 to demonstrate the higher proportion of unemployment amongst Irish born men, which is 15% compared with 11% in the whole male population (Hickman M. and Walter B., 1997, page 50). Although the Census seems to indicate a lower unemployment rate amongst Irish born women, measuring women’s unemployment presents a difficulty because many neither register as unemployed nor describe themselves as unemployed when they remain engaged with caring responsibilities. The SIS data suggests that unemployment amongst Irish women is high too.
Amongst service users in the SIS data over half are unemployed. 54% of users are unemployed with a greater proportion of men than women describing themselves as unemployed, 63% and 43% respectively.

Table 7 below shows the employment status of Irish service users who visited the agencies in the 15 month period.

Users in employment (11%), self-employed (1%) and those on government schemes (less than 1%) have remained at a similar level to the previous year. Altogether 13% of users are in paid work. The difference between women and men in paid work, noted in the previous year, seems to have narrowed; in the 15 month period 13% of women were in paid work compared with 16% previously, while the proportion of men in paid work has remained at the same level with 10%. Those who are full-time at home or carers tend to be women with 9% of women being at home full-time and 4% being carers. The remainder of users describe themselves as retired (16%), students (2%), and permanently sick (9%).

Chart 18 opposite illustrates the gender specific patterns in terms of employment status.

The extent of unemployment in the Irish community is a concern that Irish agencies aim to address with advice services and support. For example, the Volunteers Scheme run by the Haringey Irish Community Care Centre (HICCC) provides an opportunity for those unable to find paid employment to develop and enhance their skills while building up the confidence to seek paid employment. The HICCC has operated the scheme over the last two years and reports that of the initially unemployed volunteers 57% found paid employment or went into further education after gaining some work experience on the project.

### Table 7: Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>1308</td>
<td>2102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Govt. scheme</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time at home</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently sick</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>1836</strong></td>
<td><strong>2065</strong></td>
<td><strong>3901</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A new initiative which aims to address the training and employment needs of the Irish community in London is the Irish Employment and Training Consortium. It was developed by three organisations, the Job Powerhouse, FIS and the FAS (UK) and has attracted the interest of some 20 Irish agencies who expect to participate in a network of guidance services on education, training and employment. The Consortium has received funding and the launch is planned for the autumn of 1997.

4. Housing

The housing disadvantage of Irish people in Britain has been well researched (Bridge Housing Association, 1996; CARA research reports; Hickman M. and Walter B., 1997; Randall G. and Brown S., 1997). Findings suggest that Irish people are twice as likely to live in rented accommodation, are represented above average amongst local authority tenants and underrepresented in owner occupied housing. Single Irish men tend to be more strongly represented in hostel accommodation. The Bridge House report (1996) on the largest hostel for men in Britain found that 41% of tenants are Irish.

The SIS data, while not being representative of the Irish community at large, reflects similar patterns as those found in other research. It also identifies a large group of homeless people.

Users’ housing status in table 8 and chart 19 reflects broadly the patterns identified in the previous year with private and local authority tenancies and homelessness being a situation that two thirds of users find themselves in. There is, however, a small shift away from private tenancies to owner occupation. This may well reflect the longer term residency of older people in Britain, the group that has become more prominent in the sample compared to the previous year.

Private tenants make up 20% of all users, a drop
from the 25% in the previous year, and local authority tenants 23% compared with 24% previously. Over one in five (21%) are homeless, this remained at the same level. Homelessness is particularly severe amongst the 25 to 44 age group of whom 55% are homeless; it is also a situation many young people find themselves in. 35% of the under 25 age group describe themselves as homeless, a proportion that increases to 40% for young men and affects 29% of young women. Although homelessness is less severe in the 45 to 64 age group, still 14% are homeless. It should be noted though that according to Irish agencies this group, in particular men in the 45 to 64 age group are least likely to approach agencies for help with housing and can only be contacted through outreach work. Thus, the extent of homelessness may be even greater that the SIS data suggests and initiatives to address single homelessness must include the disproportionate experience of Irish people.

Also consistent with the previous year is the higher proportion of women in local authority housing, 28% compared with 19% of men, and the substantially higher proportion of men being homeless or living in hostel or B&B, 28% and 12% respectively. This compares with 14% of women who describe themselves as homeless and 6% who live in B&B.

The remainder live in housing associations, some

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8 : Housing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private tenant/lodger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority tenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner occupier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel/Bed &amp; Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caravan/Mobile home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7%, which remained at the same level to the previous year, owner occupied housing 9%, an increase from the previous 4%, caravans or mobile homes 1% (this is 2% for women), and 10% of users live in other kinds of accommodation.

A substantial proportion describe their housing situation as temporary. This applies to 62% of users, 38% are in permanent accommodation and reflects the disadvantage many Irish people face in the housing market. This substantial proportion of users in temporary accommodation also applies to users with children which means that there are many Irish children growing up in conditions of uncertainty and insecurity.
This report demonstrates the diversity and volume of services provided by Irish agencies and the multiple service needs of their users. The extension into more specialised areas of service delivery with an emphasis on a culturally sensitive approach, for example in counselling, advice on mental health and services to alcohol users, have created networks of support for those in need of assistance. However, funding pressures remain high on the agenda as Irish agencies struggle to meet the varied needs of the community.

While Irish people, in particular the young, continue to leave Ireland for Britain in search of jobs and new opportunities, there is a large, well established user group in the middle and older age bracket who require appropriate advice and support. Many of those are excluded from the economic and social life in Britain facing considerable hardship, even poverty.

Harassment of various forms, and racial harassment in particular, affect the lives of Irish people in Britain and are reflected in greater unemployment, reduced access to decent housing, denial of benefits and a variety of health related problems.

Improving and supporting the existing networks and agencies is vital. Engaging in and backing the newly developing initiatives such as the Employment and Training Consortium, the London Irish Alcohol Forum, Solas Anois, Amach Linn and others will provide some prospect for concerted action and opportunity for addressing the inequalities experienced by Irish people in Britain.

The recommendations below are aimed at statutory and voluntary agencies:

Local Authorities

▼ that all local authorities undertake ethnic monitoring, analysis and evaluation of Irish users of services and employees. That local authorities set targets and take corrective action on the outcome of this monitoring.

▼ that local authorities involve the local Irish community in consultation in the development of services, policies and strategies in particular on housing, economic development, community care and children.

Health Authorities

▼ that all health authorities should recognised the specific health profile of Irish people and include the local Irish community in their needs assessment and consult on the development of services, policies and strategies. This should be supported by making available funding for
research and projects and address the specific health issues of the community.

**Voluntary Sector**

▼ that all mainstream voluntary sector organisations address Irish community needs through monitoring, staffing, mainstreaming, supporting specialist service initiatives, partnership working with the Irish voluntary sector, consultation with Irish community and appropriate representation from the Irish community on the voluntary sector boards.

**British Government**

▼ that the Minister with responsibility for the Census and the Head of the Census at the Office of National Statistics (ONS) agree to include an Irish category in the ethnic group question in the 2001 Census

**Irish Government**

▼ that the Irish Government recognises the value and supports the services developed by Irish Service providers with adequate funding and resources the extension of the Standardised Information System (SIS) amongst Irish service providers.

**Trusts and other Funders**

▼ that funders recognise the established profile of Irish need and the value for money that funding Irish agencies provides for their resources.
Appendix 1 References


Appendix 2 List of Agencies Represented in the SIS Data

Haringey Irish Community Care Centre
Haringey Irish Cultural and Community Centre
Irish in Greenwich Project
Irish Community Care Manchester
Irish Community Care Merseyside
Irish Support and Advice Centre, Hammersmith
London Irish Centre
London Irish Women’s Centre

AGENCIES NOW ALSO PARTICIPATING IN SIS

Cara Irish Housing Association
Irish Community Alcohol Service
Brent Irish Advisory Service
Leeds Irish Health and Homes
‘Irish Community Services - Meeting Diverse Needs’ outlines the services provided by Irish agencies participating in the Standardised Information System (SIS), a computerised information system established in 1994 amongst Irish Service Providers.

The information brought together from various agencies reflects the diverse service provisions offered by Irish agencies and the multiple needs of Irish service users. The report builds on previous data presented in the report ‘Developing a Community Response - The Service Needs of the Irish Community in Britain’ and places new SIS data in the context of recent developments and research on the various issues that the Irish community aim to tackle such as experience of racial harassment, mental health issues, extensive levels of unemployment, lack of access to decent accommodation and experience of domestic violence.

The SIS data suggests that there are two main groups of service users: first, a large group of middle aged to older Irish people, settled in Britain for more than 10 years, who seem economically and socially marginalised and come to Irish agencies for assistance. Second, a group of young people, under 25 years, who have recently arrived in Britain and are in need of support in seeking accommodation and employment.

The report concludes that Irish agencies provide an important support structure and are becoming increasingly responsive in meeting the diverse needs of the community. Yet, wider awareness about the effects of harassment and anti-Irish racism on people’s life is needed to deal with the various forms of discrimination Irish people face. Only then can Irish people to fully express and share their rich culture in multi-cultural Britain.
Meeting
Diverse
Needs

commissioned by
ACTION GROUP
FOR IRISH YOUTH
and
Federation of Irish Societies

written by Ute Kowarzik

October 1997