



# Mayo Intercultural Action (MIA)

Promoting the positive effects of interculturalism in Irish society

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## Ailish makes a World of Difference

Congratulations to MIA volunteer Ailish Irvine who beat off stiff competition to win a Vodafone Foundation World of Difference award. MIA and Ailish were selected out of 150 contestants. Ailish will now be paid to work for MIA, the charity of her choice, for one year.

“I am extremely proud that the Vodafone Foundation recognised the valuable contribution being made by MIA”, Ailish said on winning. “I can’t wait to start work and hope I can make a difference to the lives of immigrants in Mayo.”

Ailish, a regular volunteer with MIA, has been teaching English to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in the County. She lives in Kiltimagh with her husband, Ted, and their three children.

This is a well-deserved acknowledgement of Ailish’s dedication and passion for her work.



Photos: Ali Laredo



## St. Patrick’s Day Parade

The world community made its presence well and truly felt in Castlebar on March 17 when nearly 150 people marched, danced and drummed behind the MIA banner in a colourful show of international goodwill. Waving flags made over previous weeks in MIA-led workshops, representatives from at least twenty countries wove their way through the streets. There were men, women and children from: Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Egypt, India, Nepal, Ireland, United States, Germany, Hungary, UK, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Congo, Algeria and Burma (Karen).

A big thank you to Trish and Mary for their work with the flag-making workshops and to everyone who helped out feeding the masses after the event!

## Speak Out! - International Women’s Day

*‘I feel like a bird in a cage, with broken wings. I feel I am in an open prison, though with no bars ... Hope is all that keeps me going. One day this wounded bird will fly again’*

The words of an asylum seeker in direct provision during the moving tribute to the courage, patience and good humour of women around the globe that MIA and Mayo Rape Crisis Centre staged for International Women’s Day. Fifteen Mayo women, from a variety of different countries and cultural backgrounds, faced a packed audience in the Linenhall Arts Centre and spoke about their desires, hopes and fears. After the powerful testimonies the event closed on a joyful note with singing and dancing from MIA’s Intercultural Singing Group, led by Brid Kivneen. Many thanks to the staff of the Linenhall for their support.

## Youth and Diversity Day: A Resounding Success



On Sunday 6th April more than 120 young people came together in the Social Services Centre, Castlebar, to celebrate being young, alive and different. Prompted by the year that’s in it - European Year of Intercultural Dialogue - and organised by Mayo VEC Youth Office along with

MIA, Castlebar NYP, Foróige, No Name Club, Youth Information Centre, Mayo County Library, MTSG and Louisburgh CDP, there were drumming, hip hop and art workshops and a chance for young people of different nationalities and cultures to stand up and let the world know what it’s like for them to be young and living in Mayo. The energy and optimism generated that afternoon could have powered the national grid.

## MIA Celebrates Africa Day



*‘It reminds me of when I lived in Africa. I love being among African people. They really know how to celebrate.’*

That was how one local participant summed up the Food Fair, song and dance organised in MIA’s offices to celebrate Africa Day on Saturday 24th May.

A huge crowd sampled food from Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Algeria, Morocco, South Africa, Egypt and Zimbabwe.

The MIA Intercultural Singing Group performed and generated such energy that everyone joined in the singing and dancing.

The event was part funded by the Irish Government through Irish Aid. A big thanks to Castlebar Fair Trade Group for their contribution on the day.

Naisc Nua was set up in 2006 to help people living in Mayo who have refugee status or who have been granted leave to remain in the country, including the parents of Irish-born children, to achieve meaningful integration in the life of the County through training and employment. This is a joint initiative with Meitheal Mhaigheo, funded through Pobal under the Dormant Accounts scheme.

## Naisc Nua contributes to Community Platform

Mayo Community Platform is made up of 12 community development organisations in County Mayo that come together to address social inclusion and anti-poverty issues. The group meets every second month in the MIA offices. Naisc Nua/MIA is one of three members of the strategic planning/steering group which was involved in setting up this platform.

Barriers to integration and to accessing education, training and employment are key priorities of this group. Naisc Nua has given a presentation on these issues and continues to give regular updates and inputs concerning refugees and people with residency or leave to remain. It also identifies models of good practice in relation to these target groups so that each organisation can replicate and implement programmes in their geographical area. The platform also made an in-depth joint submission to Mayo CDB for the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies (LAPSSIS) which is currently in process.

## NAISC NUA/MIA AND THE MAYO FORUM FOR IMMIGRANT LIAISON COMMUNITIES

This forum is coordinated by the County Development Board (CDB) and brings together a wide range of regional and local agencies, community groups and immigrant representatives. Its aim is to promote and facilitate successful integration of immigrant communities in the County. One of MIA's recommendations in its research document *Building a Diverse Mayo; a report of immigration, integration and service provision (2006)* was to establish such a forum.

As well as sitting on the steering group, Naisc Nua and MIA are also represented on each of the forum's working sub groups. These are: employment and training; intercultural activities; education; information and service provision; health and accommodation.

Naisc Nua/MIA's coordinator, Thérèse Ruane, chairs the training and employment sub group. Through this subgroup, Naisc Nua is putting in place a programme of activities: information evenings and seminars on employment rights,

education and training opportunities in the County and specific training programmes for ethnic minorities. All these events are organised in partnership with relevant organisations and are advertised in the local press as well as through MIA's mailing list.

In addition to its driving role in the Mayo Forum for Immigrant Liaison Communities, Naisc Nua and MIA are represented on other regional bodies such as the Social Inclusion Measures Working Group of Mayo CDB and Mayo Citizen Information Services. Nationally, Naisc Nua and MIA are represented on the Western Alliance of Refugee Support Groups and Integrating Ireland and makes regular presentations at local, regional and national level at conferences organised by, for example, NCCRI, Pobal, Amnesty International and Sonas mainstreaming group.

Naisc Nua and MIA are constantly developing and strengthening links with an extensive range of other relevant organisations.

## Building Links



**Meet 'n' Greet Morning:** Travellers and Asylum Seekers come together in MIA to share experiences.

## Information Evening: IRP Bill



Continuing a series of information nights hosted by Naisc Nua/MIA, in January Aki Stravrou, director of Integrating Ireland, spoke about the government's proposed

*Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill*. Previous information nights have included talks on the situation in Palestine and the plight of the Karen people in Burma.

The meeting was called to make people aware of the implications of the proposed Bill for asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers and their families, as well as for Irish nationals. It aimed to give an overview of the content of the Bill, including such vital areas as long-term residency, access to protection, the right to marry, family reunification, undocumented workers

and the highly criticised detention of asylum seekers or undocumented migrants.

More than 60 people came to the MIA offices to hear Aki Stravrou pinpoint those sections of the Bill which, in his opinion, represent the greatest threat to the rights and freedoms of immigrants to Ireland. He encouraged everyone present to lobby local and national representatives to ensure that essential amendments were made before the Bill passed into law.

In his concluding remarks Mr Stravrou said: "Immigration and integration are among the biggest issues facing Ireland today and nobody should want this to be an opportunity lost by the Government to establish a workable, fair and forward-looking immigration and protection system."

The Bill is before the Dáil at the moment.



## Leadership Training

Naisc Nua/MIA organised three days' leadership training for Support Group members in Ballyhaunis and Kiltimagh, facilitated by Noirin Clancy. Training was also provided on the issue of domestic violence by Akidwa, the Dublin-based African women's network which was set up in 2001 to promote equality for African women living in Ireland. Akidwa will be delivering training for men around gender violence in the near future.

## Jobs Club



Following the success of the Jobs Club held last January, another was run in June in the Naisc Nua/MIA offices. The Jobs Club is facilitated by Jackie Brennan from Meitheal Mhaigheo and took place from 10 am to 1 pm, Monday to Friday, over a period of three weeks.

The Jobs Club is a unique opportunity for people to gain skills and expertise in CV preparation, interview skills and how to go about looking for a job. It greatly benefits people coming from other countries, helping them to gain insight into the jobs market and to understand how things work in Ireland.



## Youth Activities: *'Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh siad'*



*Participants enjoying the three day youth camp.*

Thanks to the vision and energy of a group of mothers living in the Old Convent, the support group in Ballyhaunis and MIA have taken a lead in youth activities in the town. A three-day youth camp was organised at Easter for youth from the Old Convent and the local community, in conjunction with the Neighbourhood Youth Project, Castlebar. A Youth Information Evening was held in Ballyhaunis on Wednesday 25th June last. Representatives from the No-Name Club, Foroige, MIA and the Youth Officer from Mayo VEC attended, with a view to setting up a No-Name Club and Foroige Club in Ballyhaunis.

## PHOTO GALLERY - GRIANGHRAIF



*L-R: Kate Donnelly (MIA steering committee), Trish Keane (student placement, Maynooth) and Thérèse Ruane (MIA coordinator).*



*A large number of Karen refugees climbed Croagh Patrick in May in solidarity with Tibet Support Group Mayo.*



*A great day out was had by young and old at Westport House in June. Six buses were laid on by MIA!*



*The Conversational English group in full swing in MIA offices.*



*Elzbieta Gizicka's young Polish pupils celebrate the end of eight weeks of Polish classes held in MIA.*



*Participants in an innovative drama project run by MIA pose for the camera with facilitator Noeline Kavanagh. The stories created by the group inspired Carmel Balfé of Fluid Theatre Company to produce a shadow puppet show which will be touring schools in the autumn.*

## NEWS FLASH - NUACHT

### MIA SCOOPS ANOTHER AWARD



Congratulations to MIA coordinator Thérèse Ruane on winning a World Refugee Day Award on 20th June. The aim of the awards is to highlight the positive contribution made by asylum seekers, refugees and local communities to promoting a better Ireland. "This is great recognition of the real difference MIA is making to the lives of refugees in Mayo," said Thérèse.

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### WELCOME BRIDGET!!



A big welcome to **Bridget Breen** who joins **Jackie Costelloe**, **Ailish Irvine** and **Thérèse Ruane** on the staff of MIA. Bridget and Jackie are employed under the Community Employment Scheme.

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### OICHE GAELIGE

A great night was had on **Oiche Gaelige** on June 6th with food, music and a céilí, organised by the Irish language group to celebrate a year of Irish classes. Maith sibhse - Lean ar aghaidh. "It is great to learn Gaelige to make stronger connections with my children, with Irish culture, to learn more about history of this country, to use it at work and also to have good fun, meet nice people and enjoy new experience. Thanks to our lovely teacher, **Laura**." (Olga from Ukraine)

## ...EVENTS..... IMEACHTAÍ.....ACTIVITIES.....RUDAÍ LE DÉANAMH...

Contact MIA to find out about arts activities, sports, family trips, things in the pipeline, especially family events over the summer..... Just contact the MIA office to find out: 094 9044511

### INFORMATION EVENINGS COMING UP:

- ▶ **Thursday July 3rd:** Unemployment Rights with presentations by National Employment Rights Authority and Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland. MIA offices, Castlebar @ 8 pm.
- ▶ **Thursday, 4th September from 4 to 7pm:** Information evening on education and training in preparation for work. Venue to be confirmed.

### ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS' IRISH LANGUAGE/ LABHAIRT NA GAELGE

- ▶ A trip to the Gaeltacht is planned for August.
- ▶ Classes will resume in September in the MIA offices, Castlebar.
- ▶ Thanks to Laura Heneghan for giving so generously of her time!

### CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH GROUP

- ▶ Are you a migrant? Do you want a chance to practise and perfect your English?
- ▶ The group meets every Wednesday night at 7 pm.
- ▶ Over the summer a number of social activities will be held.
- ▶ Big thanks to volunteers Ailish, Barbara and Dorothy.

### INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY MUSIC PROJECT

- ▶ Summer timetable: Wednesday nights at 8.30 to 10p.m. in MIA's offices.
- ▶ There will be some workshops in **Ballyhaunis** and **Kiltimagh** over the summer. Contact MIA for more info.

### CRAFTS CIRCLE



- ▶ Are you interested in sharing and learning crafts with others from different cultures and backgrounds? If you have a craft or skill to share or just want to come along and learn, this is the place for you.
- ▶ **N.B. The Crafts Circle is on a break for the summer.**
- ▶ **One-day workshops will be held from time to time during the break. See press and MIA emails for details.**
- ▶ **Normal times will be resumed in September: Tuesday nights from 7.30 to 9.30 in MIA offices.**

### DRUMMING IN MIA

- ▶ Following the success of our earlier drumming sessions, we are holding **drumming evenings with Anthony McNamee over the summer on Monday nights at 8 p.m.**
- ▶ All ages welcome, from beginners to experts.



## REFUGEE INFORMATION SERVICE (RIS)

The RIS provides a free and specialist information, advice, advocacy and referral service to asylum seekers, refugees and people with permission to remain. Support is available on issues such as the asylum process, residency, citizenship, family reunification, travel, education, social welfare, health, accommodation and language supports.

Outreach will take place each month in three venues:

- ▶ **MIA Offices, Castlebar.**
- ▶ **FRC, Ballyhaunis.**
- ▶ **Railway Hotel, Kiltimagh.**

For further information, please contact RIS at 091 532850 or Thérèse at 094 904 4511.

“His most important discovery? That there are many worlds. And that each is different... And one must learn about them because these other worlds, these other cultures, are mirrors in which we see ourselves better - for we cannot define our own identity until having confronted those of others - as comparison.”

*(Ryszard Kapuscinski (1932-2007) on Herodorus, the Greek historian who lived in the 5th century BCE)*

Newsletter compiled by  
Geraldine Mitchell.  
Go raibh mile maith agat.

## Mayo Intercultural Action

MIA + Naisc Nua  
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