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**Cluster:** Population and Migration

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**Further Reading:** Maher, G. and Cawley, M. (2016). Short-term labour migration: Brazilian migrants in Ireland. *Population, Space and Place*, 22, 23-35. DOI: 10.1002/psp.1859

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**Read More About:** The [Population and Migration](#) cluster in the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Structural Change.

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## Short-term international labour migration: Brazilian migrants in Ireland

Short-term, low-skilled labour migration increased sharply during the two decades prior to the international economic recession of 2008, to fill deficiencies in local labour supply in developed countries. Ireland was one of the newer states to recruit labour internationally on a large scale between the late 1990s and 2008. Brazilian workers who were recruited initially for the meat processing sector formed a small component of this. They assume particular interest as a new migration stream over a great distance, which involved relatively short sojourns in Ireland for many. The study includes research in Ireland and in the areas of origin, following migrant return, and has a focus on small towns (Gort and Roscommon) which are under documented more generally in the literature.

### Research Findings

The research followed an ethnographic approach involving extended interviews with Irish community leaders and Brazilian migrants in Ireland and Brazil (65), questionnaire surveys with migrants in both countries (35) and observation in the study sites over 28 months.

The Brazilian experience in small towns in Ireland illustrates: (i) methods in which recruitment can take place over long distances to meet labour shortages; (ii) the operation of a dual labour market, especially as migration policy changed, and the negative implications for migrant workers; (iii) the agency which migrant workers can exercise even under negative economic circumstances. Local employers valued the contributions of the migrants in, inter alia, occupations that were not attractive to domestic workers. However, exploitation by both Irish employers and compatriots was reported, particularly as undocumented migration increased in the wake of policy change. Nevertheless, a number of circumstances operated in Gort, in particular, that afforded opportunities for occasional work to some of the undocumented.

### Policy Implications

The findings illustrate both positive and negative features of the interrelationships between economic conditions and immigration policy and its application. During the years of economic boom, employers in the study areas obtained work permits for non-EEA migrants with relative ease, to fill labour market vacancies. Enlargement of the EU in 2004 prioritised new EU citizens who had immediate access to the Irish labour market and reduced the need for workers from other sources, particularly the lower skilled. Some Brazilian workers returned home voluntarily and some who were undocumented, notably in Gort, continued to work for several years but in increasingly uncertain conditions. The findings raise issues of wider policy concern relating to longer-term implications of short-term labour recruitment.