

### ***MICaRD launches in Belfast***

Dr Ruth McAreavey (Queen's University, Belfast) and Dr Gary Bosworth (University of Lincoln)

The new international MICaRD research network launched with a workshop hosted by Queen's University, Belfast. Following on from a joint evening reception with the Trans-Atlantic Rural Research Network (TARRN), the workshop was attended by a mix of researchers and practitioners working on issues concerning migrant workers in rural economies. A panel of experts was asked to present short, provocative introductions and a very fruitful and wide ranging discussion followed.



***From left to right:***

***Prof. Mike Woods, Aberystwyth University***

***Dr Ingrid Machold, Federal Institute for less Favoured and Mountainous Areas, Austria***

***Dr Ricard Morén-Alegret, Autonomous University of Barcelona***

***Dr Lise Nelson, Penn State University, USA***

***Dr Philomena De Lima, University of the Highlands and Islands***

The first key theme that emerged was that the label 'migrant worker' actually encompasses many different individuals. In Wales, Mike Woods' study identified "gap year students", "guestworkers" (whose intention is to stay for 2-3 years before returning home) and "settlers". Among "settlers" it is often assumed that female migrants simply follow their husbands but Mahdieh Zeinali's (University of Lincoln) PhD research is uncovering highly skilled female entrepreneurs too. This theme was developed by Ricard Morén-Alegret as he described how migrants can be drivers of economic change in certain types of rural location while also presenting challenges for effective service delivery.

The modern migration phenomenon while raising many of the questions of the 1970s has distinctive traits. Migrants are settling in all types of regions, they are not all passing through "gateway cities", many are settling in rural and non-urban destinations. David Brown (Cornell) observed that with the increasingly diverse origins, legal contexts and opportunities for social mobility, some find an "up escalator" but many are unable to achieve economic or social mobility.

Lise Nelson explained that in the USA opportunities for migrant workers are emerging out of processes of rural gentrification. This reveals the precarious nature of migrants' situations, especially as most are undocumented and the labour market is very segmented. Migrant precarity is

exacerbated further when qualifications are not recognised or undervalued – a common occurrence in Austria where Ingrid Machold found that many migrants considered themselves to be over-qualified for their jobs.

Philomena de Lima raised questions about the macro-forces that are driving contemporary migration patterns – the fact that certain capital markets demand a low wage and flexible workforce and also that consumers are creating demand for particular products. Many employers consider migrants as “good workers” and “compliant workaholics” and this contrasts with evidence of discrimination and the lack of recognition of skills and qualifications. One might argue that some employers deliberately perpetuate a strong work ethic among migrant workers who are less confident or empowered to rely upon human rights and labour market regulations.

In concluding, Mary Gilmartin noted that the distinctiveness of the rural setting for migrant workers needed to be understood. She also reminded us of Ravenstein’s Laws of migration, particularly that for every flow there is a counter flow. In a world of “planetary urbanism”, where rural economies are evolving along new trajectories, the role of diverse migrant patterns that permeate rural economies and the challenges faced at the individual level are of growing interest to researchers. In order to progress the debate, we need a clearer appreciation of when differences between people and between places matter the most and how these differences create challenges and disadvantages. These provide the foundations for our next event in Belgrade in September and the theme for ongoing research among the network.