

**Research Symposium: Asylum, Migration and Community - bridging  
research, advocacy and activism through creative and socially engaged research**

**A UCC Refugee Week signature event**

**Wed 11<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

First panel: **Care for asylum seekers: understanding how care is enacted,  
experienced and sustained in current societal contexts.**

**Dr Zana Vathi, Adjunct Professor, ISS21/Migration & Integration Research Cluster**

**Title of presentation:** Care for asylum seekers and refugees and anti-immigration riots in the North West of England.

**Abstract**

Refugee settlement and integration remain highly contested across Europe. Particular points of tension include prolonged waiting periods for asylum decisions, the transition from asylum seeker to refugee status, and the uncertain pathways through which integration unfolds thereafter. As state provision has increasingly receded, responsibility for care has been redistributed across local authorities, third-sector organisations, and private individuals, making multi-stakeholder approaches essential for understanding how care is enacted, experienced and sustained.

The rise of the far right and anti-immigration sentiment and action have posed significant challenges to this fragile infrastructure. In this contribution, I discuss care for asylum seekers and refugees following the 2024 anti-immigrant riots in the North West of England. Drawing on the perspectives of academics, policymakers, practitioners, and refugees in the region, I identify four interconnected themes: care as practice vs. care as system; navigation of bureaucracy and everyday struggle; empowerment, autonomy and transitions; and hostility, stigma and emotional labour. Care emerged primarily as a relational, everyday practice that operates despite, rather than through, formal systems. The central challenge is the limited capacity in the face of opaque and often hostile bureaucratic structures and environmental trauma. Balancing immediate support with longer-term empowerment is widely recognised as essential, yet much depends on stable forms of support that are rarely institutionally guaranteed.

As the riots heightened emotional labour and risk for asylum seekers and refugees and frontline workers alike, fracturing locally embedded care infrastructures, we cannot address care from singular perspectives. In their aftermath, given the significant consequences for social wellbeing and community relations, concerted efforts among stakeholders, including the receiving communities, are essential, if we were to engage with care in a dialogical and sustainable way.

**Biographical details**

Zana Vathi is Adjunct Professor at University College Cork (Ireland), affiliated with the Institute for Social Science in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (ISS21). She holds a PhD in Migration Studies (Sussex, 2011) and has been doing research in this field since 2005. Zana's work focuses primarily on migrants' multi-scalar inclusion and integration in Europe and beyond. She is author of *Migrating and Settling in a Mobile World* (Springer, 2015) and *Return Migration and Psychosocial Wellbeing* (Routledge 2017), and numerous articles, working papers and reports in the field of

migration. In 2012, she was the recipient of the Maria Ioannis Baganha Prize for the best doctoral dissertation in the field of migration studies in Europe. In the period of 2019–2021, she acted as Research Coordinator of RET-MIG – Revisiting Return Migration in Shifting Geopolitics – an international research initiative and network funded by IMISCOE – Europe’s largest network of scholars in the area of migration and integration.

## **Responses**

**Dr Yasmine Ahmed, School of Society, Politics and Ethics, UCC and ISS21 Populism and the Rise of the Far-Right Research Cluster.**

### **Biographical details**

Dr Yasmine Ahmed is Lecturer at University College Cork. She is co-chair of the ISS21 Populism and the Rise of the Far-Right cluster under ISS21 – the institute for the Social Science in the 21st century. Yasmine also directs the MA in Trauma Studies, a joint program in collaboration between Sociology and Criminology at UCC, ACE - Adults Continuing Education in UCC and WAVE Trauma Centre, a cross-community victim group supporting victims of the troubles in Northern Ireland. Her primary research focus is on the far-right, its recent developments globally and in Ireland and how it is talked about and perceived in and out of the Terrorism Studies literature. Her most recent publication is an edited volume “The far-right in Ireland: rise, activities and international links” (Bristol University press, 2025).

Dr Amin Sharifi Isaloo, School of Society, Politics and Ethics, UCC and chair of School of Society, Politics and Ethics, UCC.

### **Biographical details**

Dr Amin Sharifi Isaloo is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology & Criminology at University College Cork. His fields of interests include race, ethnicity, migration, nationalism, development, politics, religion, arts and culture focusing on sociological and anthropological interpretations of symbols, images and ritual performances. His recent peer-reviewed publications are '*Walking as Critical Pedagogy*' (2025 - Co-authored), 'Migration, liminality and place: Migration walk as critical pedagogy' (co-authored 2025), 'Dryness of Lake Urmia in Iran and Its Impact on Farmers Displacement' (2025), 'Racism and the far right' (2023), 'Liminality in the Direct Provisional system - Living under extreme rules and conditions' (2020), 'Liminality and Modern Racism' (2021). He co-chairs the ISS21 Populism and the Rise of the Far Right research cluster at UCC.

**Chair: Professor Maggie O'Neill, Director of ISS21 and Collective Social Futures, UCC**

### **Biographical details**

Maggie O'Neill is Professor of Sociology & Criminology and Director of the Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st century and Collective Social Futures, University College Cork. Maggie has a long history of working with people seeking asylum and refuge and marginalised communities to create change, using arts based, biographical, participatory and policy relevant research methods. Maggie is Vice President of the European Sociological Association and an elected member of the Royal Irish Academy. Her latest co-authored books with colleagues include *Criminal Women: Gender Matters* Policy Press and *Walking as Critical Pedagogy*. Routledge.

Second panel: **Palestine transnational solidarity, research, advocacy and action**

**Dr Munawwar Najim, Associate Professor at the Islamic University of Gaza. She is also a researcher affiliated with University College Cork through the Advancing Children's Rights Research Network (ACoRN).**

**Title of presentation:** Resilience in Crisis: The Role of Palestinian Women in Social Responsibility and Educational Leadership During the 2023–2025 War — An Autoethnographic Perspective.

**Abstract**

This presentation draws on autoethnographic research conducted during the 2023–2025 war in Gaza to examine the role of Palestinian women in social responsibility and educational leadership amid institutional collapse and mass displacement. Speaking from within Gaza, the paper explores how women educators and community leaders sustained learning, psychosocial support, and social cohesion in the absence of formal educational systems. Framed through a critical resilience lens, the presentation challenges dominant portrayals of women as passive victims and instead highlights their agency, leadership, and ethical responsibility in contexts of protracted violence. The paper contributes to broader debates on education in emergencies, gendered leadership, and the intersections of research, advocacy, and solidarity.

**Biographical details**

Munawwar Najim is Palestinian and an Associate Professor at the Islamic University of Gaza. She is also a researcher affiliated with University College Cork through the Advancing Children's Rights Research Network (ACoRN). Her main interests include children's and women's rights in conflict settings, crisis education, and the empowerment of displaced and marginalized youth. Her work draws on feminist and autoethnographic approaches to document lived experiences of education, care, and leadership under conditions of war, displacement, and scholasticide in Gaza.

**Dr Kathy Glavanis-Grantham, Staff together 4 Palestine and local Cork solidarity movement.**

**Title of presentation:** From Ramallah to Cork: Palestinian Solidarity Across Space and Time.

**Abstract**

Drawing upon my personal connection to Palestine over the previous 44 years, I will highlight some of the crucial links between knowledge and activism in advocating for justice and liberation in Palestine. As a population living under a regime of apartheid and settler colonialism which has resulted in one of the largest and longest-standing refugee problems in the world, I will reflect on how my emersion in Palestinian society while at Birzeit University in the 1980s has informed my involvement in Palestinian solidarity work in Cork. I will identify some of the challenges of continued activism and suggest what sort of solidarity is necessary at this crucial historical juncture in Palestinian history.

**Biographical details**

Dr Kathy Glavanis holds a BA History from Occidental College a MA in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton and a PhD Sociology and Social Anthropology from the University of Hull. She studied Arabic in Princeton and the American University of Cairo, Arabic Studies Abroad. Kathy lived in Egypt for 5 years, studying Arabic, Arabic literature and carrying out field work in rural Egypt, examining relations of cooperation amongst small peasant households, for her PhD.

She worked as Middle Eastern Librarian at the University of Durham and taught Arabic and social anthropology there. From 1982 to 1991 Kathy taught at Birzeit University in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology in the West Bank. While there she was on the research board at the Palestinian Human Rights Research Centre in Jerusalem and was part of several development projects focusing on income generation for rural women.

From 1991 until 2012 Kathy was a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University College Cork. During that time, she taught a range of courses, including the Sociology of the Middle East. Since 2012, she has continued to teach in various Adult Continuing Education Higher Diplomas, where the case study of Palestine has been highlighted.

Kathy has been active in the Cork Palestine Solidarity Campaign for 20 years and served as its co-chair 2023-24. She is also an active member of the UCC staff committee, Together4Palestine, which formed in October, 2023.

**Tea Surina, Palestine solidarity activist, Martino Zibetti, no-border activist and PhD student at UCC.**

**Title of presentation:** (Dis)connecting modes of violence and resistance in Croatia and the Balkans --- border abolition, anti-fascism, and Palestine solidarity.

#### **Abstract**

This talk explores the intersection of border violence, legal advocacy, and transnational solidarity through the lens of the Croatia–Bosnia border. Drawing on close collaboration with a lawyer working directly with asylum seekers, it examines the legal obstacles, systemic pushbacks, and human rights violations faced by people attempting to enter the EU. The presentation situates these experiences within the broader political and social climate in Croatia, highlighting a recent rise in anti-migrant and anti-Muslim racism and the role of media narratives in shaping public hostility.

By connecting border practices to wider structures of racialisation, securitisation, and exclusion, the talk reflects on how solidarity movements — including Palestine solidarity activism — can respond across borders. It considers how legal work, grassroots organising, and public advocacy intersect, and what transnational solidarity can look like in practice when confronting shared systems of oppression.

#### **Biographical details**

##### **Tea Surina**

Tea Surina is a Palestine solidarity activist based in Rijeka, Croatia, whose work focuses on media, education, and grassroots organising. She began her activism in 2024 while living in Cork City, where she was involved with the Cork Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Since returning to Croatia in 2025, she has been part of the formation of Free Palestine Rijeka, working alongside activists from the Free Palestine Initiative Croatia and other organisations. Her work includes social media coordination, public education, and collaboration with the BDS movement to

develop apartheid-free zones in Croatia. She is currently studying marketing and branding, with plans to establish her own company in 2026.

### **Martino Zibetti**

Martino Zibetti is a no-border activist and PhD student at University College Cork involved with 'Solidarity Line Croatia' and 'No Name Kitchen'. Using 'militant research' methodologies, Martino focuses on resistant migrant makeshift camps in border cities across the former Yugoslavia, and the new forms of racialised urbanism that are emerging in the region. Martino's research has appeared on *Antipode*, *Current Issues in Migration Research*, and *VOLUME 65*, with works forthcoming in the *Journal of Borderland Studies* and *Urban Planning*.

**Chair: Dr Angela Flynn, School of Nursing & Midwifery, UCC**

### **Biographical details**

Dr Angela Flynn is a Lecturer in the School of Nursing & Midwifery in UCC. She is a former Chair of the University of Sanctuary Working Group and is a UCC representative for Scholars at Risk (Ireland). Angela has a keen interest in the issue of academic freedom and is a former President of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT). Along with Professor Kieran Keohane and Mr Paul O'Donovan, she spearheaded a novel university-wide module on academic freedom here in UCC. She also leads the Cork Sanctuary Runners group.

### **3rd panel Bridging research and activism with women seeking asylum through creative and socially engaged methods**

**Dr Bahriye Kemal, School of English and Digital Humanities, UCC**

**Title of presentation:** Women Writing Syria

### **Abstract**

The focus will be on my work with Syrian activist women intellectuals, scholars and creatives between Türkiye and Syria. I will discuss our co-produced projects, grounded in community engagement and creative methods to navigate the experiences of revolution, displacement, war, and the current impending genocide.

### **Biographical details**

Bahriye Kemal is a postcolonial scholar and an activist/ advocate for displaced communities. She is a London-born Cypriot to Muslim refugees from Cyprus, which has set the foundations for her interdisciplinary research and activism. Anchored in postcolonial literary studies and histories, her work crosses into sociology, ethnography, and geography of everyday. She has published widely on postcolonial, partition, spatial and displacement studies. She is co-founder of multiple community networks and NGOs in the UK, Cyprus, Turkey and Syria.

**Dr Naomi Masheti, Cork Migrant Centre and Dr Angela Veale, School of Applied Psychology, UCC.**

**Title of presentation:** Forum Theatre as 'Activism' with Immigrant Mothers-Bridging parents, practitioners and policy makers

**Description:** Forum Theatre (FT) developed by Augusto Boal as a collective creation was used to create a space for dialogue between immigrant parents, professionals and policy makers to

explore trajectories of children from an immigrant background to child protection and seek how to disrupt such trajectories. This presentation explores the role of immigrant parents as activists and how FT as 'activism' can be used to communicate experiences and challenges that immigrant parents may face and to highlight their strengths as members of their new communities.

### **Dr Naomi Masheti**

#### **Biographical details**

Dr Naomi Masheti is a Psychologist and Program Coordinator at the Cork Migrant Centre, a Psychosocial wellbeing and Integration Hub at the Nano Nagle Place Cork. Her work is conceptualized within a culturally- informed psychosocial model of health & wellbeing used in humanitarian settings. Naomi was the recipient of UCC 2020 Athena SWAN Equality Award.

### **Dr Angela Veale**

#### **Biographical details**

Angela Veale is Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Psychology, UCC researching the psychosocial effects of violence, post-conflict social reintegration, migration and globalisation on children, youth and families. She is a member of the UCC Sanctuary Committee. Her research explores parenting in a new culture and creative activism, and she is currently engaged in a co-designed project with Cork Migrant Centre & Cork CYPSC on disrupting trajectories of immigrant children to child protection see

<https://read.bookcreator.com/guSBqW1ERhYQ6QkVnWY5EhrL2ez1/ujf7Q688QKiJU7v3UGxsiQS>

### **Apalang Ater, MSc student in Sustainable Development, Agri-food and Co-operatives at University College Cork, and an Education Pathways Ireland Scholar**

**Title of presentation:** Stakeholder engagement and storytelling at Kandaakiat Organization for Women Empowerment and Development- Uganda

#### **Abstract**

Through my experience in community-led initiatives, stakeholder engagement and storytelling at Kandaakiat Organization for Women Empowerment and Development- Uganda, I see my role as one of building bridges — connecting women's lived experiences to broader systems of support and advocacy, and ensuring that the methods we use not only raise awareness but genuinely activate participation and collective action positioning these women as resilient and self-reliant active members of the community.

#### **Biographical details**

Apalang Ater is an MSc student in Sustainable Development, Agri-food and Co-operatives at University College Cork, and an Education Pathways Ireland Scholar. With a background in Governance and International Relations, Apalang brings over two years of hands-on experience working with refugee women and communities in Uganda, where she supported the formation of savings groups, led capacity building, and used storytelling to amplify women's voices through her role at Kandaakiat Organization for Women Empowerment and Development. Her research and practice sit at the intersection of community empowerment, social engagement, and sustainable development, and she is passionate about exploring how creative methods can

activate meaningful change for women seeking asylum with an objective of seeing them self-reliant and resilient.

**INTERACTIVE EXERCISE led by Dr Siobhan O’Sullivan, School of Applied Social Studies, UCC.**

**Chair: Dr Siobhan O’Sullivan, School of Applied Social Studies, UCC**

**Biographical details**

Siobhan O’Sullivan is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies and Coordinator of the Bachelor of Social Science International at UCC. She specialises in community-based mixed methods and participatory research with adults and children from a diversity of backgrounds, on key social issues including housing and regeneration, climate change and sustainability, widening educational participation, and tackling social inequalities. She represents the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences on the UCC Sanctuary Committee.

**Fourth panel: Educational Setting as Places of Inclusion for Refugee Children and Young People**

This panel explores the critical role schools and educational settings play in supporting refugee children’s and young people’s integration and inclusion into their new communities. Shirley Martin examines how schools can actively facilitate friendship formation among refugee children, while Aine Lyne presents insights from the Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration Project (EDNIP) in Limerick. Through research findings, practical strategies, and lessons from frontline practice, this session addresses the challenges refugee children face in forming connections, the barriers within school systems, and evidence-based approaches to creating inclusive environments where all children can belong. A facilitated discussion will explore implementation strategies and next steps for educators and practitioners.

**Dr Shirley Martin, School of Applied Social Studies, UCC**

**Title of presentation:** The Role of Schools in Supporting Refugee Children's Friendships

**Abstract**

Schools play a central role in supporting refugee children’s friendships, which are critical to integration, wellbeing, and inclusion. Research consistently shows that peer friendships enhance refugee children’s emotional and psychological wellbeing, foster a sense of belonging, and act as a protective factor against bullying, racism, and social isolation (Fazel, 2018; Samara et al., 2019; Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Schools provide key spaces for social interaction and opportunities to form friendships with both migrant and native peers, particularly through inclusive classroom practices, teacher support, and access to formal education (Hek, 2005; Palaiologou & Prekate, 2023). Cross-ethnic friendships facilitated within school settings further promote empathy, reduce prejudice, and strengthen social integration (Miklikowska, 2017; Boda et al., 2021). This paper explores existing international research on the role of schools in fostering refugee children’s friendships and examines implications for educational policy and practice.

**Biographical details**

Shirley Martin is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies and Co-Director of the BA Early Years and Childhood Studies at UCC. She specialises in children and social policy, with

her research grounded in critical and innovative discourses on childhood and an extensive interdisciplinary, community engaged profile. Shirley's main research interest is children's wellbeing, with particular focus on early childhood studies, child and youth participation, and processes of integration and inclusion for migrant background children. -Director of the BA Early Years and Childhood Studies at UCC. She specialise-engaged profile. Shirley's main research interest is children's well-being, with particular focus on early childhood studies, child and youth participation, and processes of integration and inclusion for migrant background children.

## **Áine Lyne, The Embracing Diversity, Nurturing Integration Project (EDNIP) Limerick**

**Title of presentation:** Nurturing inclusion and belonging in schools -EDNIP an example of practice

### **Abstract**

The Embracing Diversity Nurturing Integration Project (EDNIP) is a collaboration between five DEIS band 1 primary schools, Mary Immaculate College and stakeholder organisations. EDNIP aims to support integration and build inclusive school environments through a holistic intervention model that responds to increasing societal diversity in terms of nationality, ethnicity, culture, language and religion. While greater diversity has enriched schools and classrooms nationally, there are observed differences in the educational experiences of children from migrant backgrounds in comparison to their peers. The Children's School Lives study (Devine et al. 2025) found that children from migrant backgrounds are more likely to attend DEIS primary schools and to come from lower-affluence families. Further, primary school children from first generation migrant backgrounds were less likely than peers to report feeling a sense of belonging in school, making friends easily or being liked by other children at school.

The paper will present findings from recently published research on Phase 2 of EDNIP (Bourke et al. 2025) which indicate the project has significantly enhanced children's sense of belonging in school, strengthened friendships, and fostered cultural pride. Children reported valuing opportunities to use and celebrate their home languages and cultural heritage within school settings. Project activities such as intercultural days, STEAM clubs, sports coaching, and family trips provided enjoyable learning opportunities and facilitated greater social integration. The research also noted increased confidence amongst teachers in addressing diversity and inclusion within their classrooms.

However, findings also indicate that schools need guidance to support migrant families with high support needs and on fostering greater sense of belonging amongst migrant children and parents in the school community. Furthermore, research nationally highlights the urgent need for teacher training in antiracism, unconscious bias and culturally responsive pedagogy, in addition to the diversification of the teaching profession. As migration into Ireland continues and we witness the rise of the far right and anti-immigrant and racist sentiment, findings from this research are pertinent for all our schools and the wider educational community.

### **Biographical details**

Áine is the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Assistant Coordinator in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. She has worked with TED since 2018 previously for 5 years in the role of Embracing Diversity Nurturing Integration (EDNIP) Project Leader. She has worked in the areas of Education and Community Development in Limerick City for 20 years.

Underpinning all of her work is a focus on empowering individuals and groups to influence issues which affect them and their communities. Áine's PhD research focuses on cultural identity formation amongst school aged children in diverse settings. Research interests include social identity, cultural identity, migration, acculturation, equity in education, parent engagement in education and educational change.



## **Dr Gemma Irvine, Vice President of Equality & Diversity, Maynooth University**

### **Biographical details**

Dr Gemma Irvine is Vice-President for Equality & Diversity in Maynooth University, Ireland. Dr Irvine has responsibility for leading strategic change in ensuring equality, valuing and celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion. As well as access and widening participation, Dr Irvine has oversight of the Excellence in Exile portfolio including University of Sanctuary and Scholars at Risk, and Healthy Campus. Previously Dr Irvine was Head of Policy and Strategic Planning in the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Irish National Delegate for FP7/Horizon2020 programmes, and Assistant Director of the Irish Research Council (IRC). Prior to that Dr Irvine completed her Masters and PhD in Neuroscience in New Zealand before coming to Ireland in 2004 to work as a Research Fellow in Trinity College Dublin.

## **The fourth panel discussion will be chaired and facilitated by Michaela Alfred-Kamara, Cork Educate Together Secondary School**

### **Biographical details**

Michaela Alfred-Kamara is a secondary school teacher at Cork Educate Together Secondary School, where she jointly coordinates the Yellow Flag anti-racism program, working to create inclusive school environments for students from refugee, migrant, and minority ethnic backgrounds. She is a member of the Schools of Sanctuary and worked to secure a BelongTo Award for her work fostering belonging and supporting diverse student populations. She also works to coordinate Global Citizenship Education within CETSS focusing on integrating human rights across the curriculum. This resulted in CETSS achieving a Special Global Passport from WorldWise Global Schools. Originally from Sierra Leone and having migrated to Ireland in 2020, Michaela brings personal and professional insight to questions of integration and belonging. She previously worked as Education Officer at Anti-Slavery International, training educators internationally on human rights and inclusive pedagogy as well as working with refugee students from many countries whilst at Hendon School in London.