

## **Abstract**

This exploratory study researched childminding services in the west of Ireland, specifically operated by providers who have recently settled in Galway from western African countries. It is hoped that the results will lead to an understanding of the working lives of these women, including a detailed picture of their services, the development and ongoing operation, and the role they play with the families they encounter.

Home based childcare is the traditional form of childcare for both rural and urban communities in Ireland. It is cost effective, flexible and responsive to families' and communities' needs. Childminding continues to be the most popular choice for parents of school age and preschool children in Ireland today. This is in spite of a decade of large scale funding programmes directed, for the most part, at larger, centre based childcare services.

The research process involved a qualitative methodology, included semi-structured interviews, followed by surveys, of the participants. Three key themes are explored, as follows: entry into childminding, including motivation and the pathways taken; issues and concerns of discrimination and the determination of the women involved; and the often unrecognised family support that is taking place within childminding settings. The findings are analysed in terms of relevant current research on similar topics, with recommendations for future research, changes to practice, policy and funding programmes being made.

The results of this research find immigrant women to be dedicated to providing high quality childminding services, despite the number of challenges faced by them. They are active in availing of supports to improve their service and increase their profile as professionals within the sector. The majority of participants see their service as not just caring for the children but offering practical and emotional support and encouragement to parents, as well.