



Information Paper:

Migrant Workers:
Useful Terminology and Challenging Myths

Designed for the Dungannon, Cookstown and
Craigavon areas.

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About Animate

ANIMATE is strategic partnership project working on migrant worker issues across the Dungannon, Craigavon and Cookstown district council areas. The lead agencies are Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council and the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) who run a Migrant Worker Centre in Dungannon, where the project is based. The other project partners are the Housing Executive, Cookstown and Craigavon Councils, the Education and Library Board and Health and Social Services bodies.

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Further information and copies of this paper are available at:
www.animate-ccd.net

Context

Migrant Workers can be defined as persons who migrate to another country for the primary purpose of work. There are increasing numbers of migrant workers in the local area filling in skills and labour shortages in the local economy in sectors such as food processing, nursing, medicine, engineering and other industries. In addition amongst the local population it is unusual to find a family who do not have relatives who are, or have been, a migrant worker to the US, England or elsewhere.

Migrant workers are one category of migrants and there are a number of other categories for example students, refugees, persons migrating for family reunification etc. All of these groups are part of the broader minority ethnic population, which includes many persons who are not migrants. The first section of this paper looks at terminology in the area.

Not all migrant workers have had positive experiences and unfortunately some have faced racism and hostility. As with other forms of prejudice this is often built around stereotypes and myths. This paper therefore attempts to challenge and breakdown some of the more common myths. Above all our starting point is the fundamental human rights of all human beings. Migrant workers are people not economic commodities, whose presence should not be reduced to extracting their labour, and have a human right to dignity and not to face prejudice regardless of what work they are doing. In reality despite the fact many sectors of the economy are now dependant on inward migration to sustain development often prejudice is based on economic and other misconceptions which need to be challenged.

Useful terminology

The following information has been prepared due to recurring requests for information on definitions of useful terminology. The paper covers formal definitions of terms such as 'migrant worker', which are technical terms and are often used without recourse to their definition.

Migrant Worker

'Migrant worker' is therefore a technical term and not an offensive term. The term only can be offensive if it is misapplied to a person who is not a migrant worker, for example a member of the Chinese or other black or minority ethnic community born locally and is not a migrant worker. Words have meanings and connotations and the use of some terms (albeit unwittingly) can cause offence. To this end we have also included a section on 'problematic terminology'.

A lay definition of a Migrant Worker is *'a person travelling to a country they are not a national of for the primary purpose of work'*.

Effectively migrant workers are persons who travel to another country for work. Migrant workers are therefore a migration category; there are other migration categories listed page 5.

Migrant worker is a technical term defined in international and other legal instruments. For example take the following definitions:

European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers:

"migrant worker" shall mean a national of a contracting party who has been authorised by another Contracting Party to reside in its territory on order to take up paid employment"

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families:

"migrant worker" refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.

Migration for Employment Convention C97:

"Migration for Employment" A person who migrates from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his (sic) own account and includes any person regularly admitted as a migrant for employment.

In the local area there have both been emigration of migrant workers (local people leaving to work in the US or elsewhere) and more recently inward migration to the area from other parts of the European Union and beyond.

In Northern Ireland there are a number of categories in domestic legislation of people who fit the international definition of migrant worker. These are:

- Citizens of the **European Union / European Economic Area** (see page 6) and Switzerland who have freedom of movement and do not need visas or permits.

- For nationals outside the EEA there are migrant workers on **Work Permits**. Employers not employees apply for work permits and they are only available when there is no person locally (or within the EU) to do the job.

- There are also a number of other migration schemes for migrant workers for example the *Highly Skilled Migrants Programme*, *Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme* and other programmes.

The names of the above categories are subject to change as there are plans to reform and simplify the system.

In the relation to the south of Ireland the domestic categories of migrant workers do differ:

- **EU/EEA/Swiss nationals** (as above)
- There are employer held **Employment Permits**
- There are **Work Authorisations** (for nationals of countries that do not need a visa)
- There are **Work Visas** (for nationals of countries that do require visas)
- There are employer permits for Turkish nationals.

Other Migration / Non Migration Categories:

There are a number of other migration categories and terms some of which are outlined below:

Refugee: In lay terms, a refugee is a person seeking sanctuary from persecution. In terms of international law, however, a refugee is defined, under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UN Convention), as a person who *"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country"*

'Asylum seeker' is a term used by governments to indicate someone has applied for refugee status and they are still waiting for a decision.

Student: A person who migrates for the purpose of study.

There are also other categories of migration for example persons who migrate to settle in a country, or migrate to be reunited with family, or migrate to their partner's country of origin.

-An *immigrant* is someone who migrates to a country.
- An *emigrant* is someone who migrates away from a country.

Given that migrants will have a different nationality to the host population, migrants will be part of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population. However the **Black and Minority Ethnic population** will also include local minority ethnic people who are not migrants (e.g. Irish Travellers, the established Chinese community etc) but may identify themselves as a **minority ethnic group** due to a shared language, culture or ethnic origin.

Countries in the European Union

European Union

There are currently 25 countries in the European Union namely:

Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK

European Union A8 Countries

Eight of the ten countries which acceded to the European Union in May 2004 have been referred to as the 'Accession 8 or A8' countries. They are:

Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia

Future European Union Countries

Bulgaria and Romania are due to join to the EU on the 1 January 2007. A number of other countries may join in the future including Croatia, Turkey and others.

European Economic Area

The **European Economic Area** incorporates the 25 countries of the **European Union** plus **Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway**. By special arrangement nationals of **Switzerland** also have freedom of movement.

Problematic terminology

There is some terminology that is problematic. This is sometimes as it is simply a collective label that can be used in a dehumanising way for example "***These people***".

On other occasions the term used will not cause offence but is just used in a misleading way – for example the term "***Ethnic communities***" is misleading as it refers to everyone rather than any specific group. Everybody belongs to an ethnic group. There are minority ethnic groups, but also majority communities are majority ethnic groups. There are also terms that have no reason to be offensive but are just not technical terms, e.g. 'economic migrant' for 'migrant worker'. Below are some problematic terms:

Illegal immigrant: This is a highly problematic term as the use of the term illegal stigmatises and criminalises a person, who is not a criminal but is often doing nothing more than wanting to work, normally a commended value when applied to the majority population.

The term is also technically incorrect and often misused as a stigmatising label. No one can be an 'illegal immigrant' or be themselves 'illegal'. Whilst someone can be conducting an act that breaches immigration rules or working without authorisation this does not make the actual person themselves 'illegal' – Article 6 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states "***Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law***"

A preferable term for someone working without authorisation to do so is an 'unauthorised worker', the terms undocumented worker and irregular worker have also been used. Also many workers who do have the legal right to work are denied the entitlement through: poor advice and information; being misled by exploitative rogue employers/agents; or delays, mistakes and arbitrary decisions by the Immigration Service. Also if someone works without authorisation it does not mean they have entered the country without permission. Many Irish migrants to the US have entered the country as visitors and then taken up unauthorised work but did have permission to enter.

"The Portuguese"

This could be problematic as this collective term does not capture the range of national identities there are within the 'Portuguese and Tetum speaking migrant worker population' (a more accurate term in the local area). National backgrounds include Portugal, Brazil, East Timor, Cabo Verde, Angola and elsewhere.

"Influx":

The term 'influx' is often used in the tabloid press and elsewhere to indicate a significant inward migration. It can be problematic as the word 'influx' can insinuate an uncontrollable flow of an inanimate object and is therefore not an ideal phrase to be applied to people.

Definitions of Racism

Racism is related to inequality, discrimination and disadvantage on the basis of ethnic difference. The ideology of racism is around the supremacism of one 'race' to another.

There are a number of definitions of racism and racism is often a much broader concept than it is thought to be. Racism is not just physical attacks, this represents the tip of the iceberg, it is much more broadly related to attitudes. The recent definition of racism emerging from the report into the murder of Stephen Lawrence in London (the Macpherson report) was:

"...conduct, words or practices which disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin."

The report also said that the motivation for racism does not always have to be intentional stating:

"...ignorance could be the cause as much as bigotry, and well meaning insensitivity as much as white supremacism".

There is also the concept of institutional racism which recognises that not all persons and groups have the same capacity to be racist. Institutional racism was defined in the above report as:

"The Collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes or behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping, which disadvantage minority ethnic people."

The most authoritative definition of racism comes from the United Nations (UNESCO) this definition, as follows, has been adopted in the Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland (2005):

"Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which base value judgements on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation and is contrary to be the moral and ethical principle of humanity.

Racism includes racist ideologies, prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory behaviour, structural arrangements and institutionalised practices resulting in racial inequality as well as the fallacious notion that discriminatory relations between groups are morally and scientifically justifiable; it is reflected in discriminatory provisions in legislation or regulations and discriminatory practices as well as in anti-social beliefs and acts; it hinders the development of its victims, perverts those who practice it, divides nations internally, impeded international co-operation and give rise to political tensions between peoples; it is contrary to the fundamental principles of international law and, consequently, seriously disturbs international peace and security."

Article 2(1) and (2) of the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice, 1978.

Other Useful Terms

There are many other concepts and terms that are used in relation to migrant workers or more broadly black and minority ethnic groups (see page 6 for definition). These include concepts such as interculturalismⁱⁱ, and integration.

Integration is a concept that is often used in the context of racial equality. There are many different definitions of integration a handbook on integration produced by the European Commissionⁱⁱⁱ identifies a number of core dimensions or elements in integration that include:

- The **facilitation of equal opportunities in the labour market** for migrants through removal of barriers to equal participation (given as equality of access to work contributes to better overall living conditions)
- The **'socio-cultural sphere'** - increasing the interactions of migrants with local persons in the social, civic and political sphere. Integration being a **two way process** of social integration which involves action migrants but also involves action and challenging the attitudes of recipient populations; the handbook also concludes "*the active participation of immigrants rests on rights and obligations being brought in line with those of nationals.*"
- The development of **certain skills** of migrants, including areas such as language proficiency and knowledge of the host society – but only in the context when there is a possibility of attaining and actual opportunities to use such skills.
"*Integration is conceptualised as beyond a simple state v individual migrant relationship but a process of partnerships between a broad range of official and civil society actors in which political leadership against racism and the role of employers, the media and local communities is also referenced.* (EC 2004 p10)".
- The overall goal of **'self sufficiency'**: governments seek to enable immigrants to lead an independent life concerning housing, jobs, education, social networks and participation in society'

The outdated concept of **'assimilation'** (basically all migrants should abandon their own language, culture, practices and should take on those of the local population) has largely been superseded by concepts of integration.

Challenging common myths and stereotypes about migrant workers in the Dungannon, Cookstown and Craigavon areas

The following pages detail some of the more common myths and stereotypes against migrant workers in the local area and provide the information with which to challenge them.

Myths and stereotypes can demonise migrant workers (or any other group) as they generate prejudice and a climate of hostility that can lead to discriminatory, insulting or aggressive behaviour against the group. It is necessary to challenge the untruths that inform racism.

It is the human right of everyone not to be subject to prejudice and hostility regardless of what work they are doing or what contribution they are making. However many of the myths are based on false economic arguments and there is a need to challenge and deconstruct them. The following pages attempt to do this along with looking at other key stereotypes.

Myth 1: “The migrants are taking our jobs”

- **Migrant workers are not ‘taking’ other peoples jobs. This is this wrong in the context of equality of opportunity and migrant workers having the right to work here.**
- Also it is also the case that most migrant workers in fact work in sectors of the economy where there are **skills or labour shortages**, this means jobs there are no local people to do.
- Within the local area **unemployment rate is in fact around 2%** (Source DETI^{iv}). This is not to say there are no ongoing issues over inequality, this is still a key issue for many groups in our society, including many migrant workers.
- **From the point of view of economic sustainability the economy needs both migrant labour and spending power.** The Irish Central Statistics Office has just released statistics indicating that the (southern) Irish economy needs an extra 45,000 migrants every year to sustain economic growth, official statistics in Scotland show the country needs just over 30,000 a year to preserve age balance of population given the aging population^v. Here there are similar economic and demographic trends.
- At a **local level** this is also evident. Take the case of the **local food processing industry which is now dependent on migrant labour**. If there was no migrant workers these industries would not have enough staff and may well relocate overseas devastating the local economy. The jobs in the factory would go as would jobs in agriculture who supply the factory with produce, along with loosing all of the additional tax revenues and additional money spent by migrant workers in local shops and services. Clearly far from “taking” jobs migrant workers are saving, maintaining and creating a wide variety of jobs.

Myth 2: " 'they' are costing the country money"

This is also **factually incorrect** the opposite is the case.

- For the UK the British Home Office calculates that when you subtract money used in benefits and public services etc from tax contributions migrants provide an annual **surplus** of around £2.6 billion to the economy^{vi}

Effectively migrants are financially supporting the rest of the population.

Northern Ireland Example:

Just one factory (O'Kanes in Ballymena) calculated that in just two years their migrant worker staff had contributed: £624,998 in National Insurance, £1,562,496 in Income Tax and had pumped an estimated £2.2 million in spending into the local economy.

Myth 3: " 'they get everything on social security"

Fact:

-Most migrant workers are not eligible for most benefits.

This is despite paying full taxes and is a serious issue as it leaves many workers vulnerable without any safety net when falling sick or losing work.

- **Non-European Union migrant workers** are normally **not eligible** for any benefits.
- Nationals of eight new countries that joined the European Union in May 2004 (**Poland, Lithuania and others**) have restrictions placed on them **preventing access** to most **income related benefits**.
- Citizens of Portugal and other **pre 2004 European Union** countries are the only persons who have technically similar civil rights to benefits as British and Irish citizens. But there are extra restrictions and in practice EU migrant workers often face additional barriers in obtaining benefits they are entitled to.

No one 'gets everything' on benefits. All benefits have their own criteria, which have to be met by any applicant.

Myth 4: "The migrants put down the wages"

- There are many trends within the economy that change wages. The driving force behind inward migration is **unmet demand for labour**, there are other factors including **skills shortages** in sectors of the economy.
- **No employee, migrant or local, makes a decision to pay themselves less. This is a decision made by employers.** Decisions are made to increase profits or within the framework of having to compete at lower prices, or both.
- There clearly have been cases of the **unlawful exploitation** of migrant workers. Migrant workers have civil rights in employment– it is **illegal** to pay less for doing the exactly the same job as someone else on the basis of their nationality. Industrial Tribunals have upheld this right in cases where workers have been paid less. It does not have to happen – and would be minimised as long as everybody works to enforce existing employment rights. Where there have been cases of exploitation it is clearly absurd to blame the victim for them – both in the case of the exploited migrant worker and others who then are expected to work for less. This is clearly a decision made by a rouge employer or agent. As long as there is action to defend the right to equality of treatment for migrant workers in employment everybody's rights will be protected.
- There is also are clearly practices within many sectors of the economy that are geared at cutting costs, deskilling and creating cheaper pools of labour, through Sub Contracting or other practices. It can often impact on more economically vulnerable groups within both the local and migrant population. It is clearly absurd to blame the workers themselves in these instances. It is also **selective** to pick cases of less favourable terms and conditions in areas migrant workers have worked in and claim they are a pattern of 'cheap labour' or 'displacement' for which the migrant workers are responsible.
- There are changing patterns and more complex phenomenon in many areas of the economy to where this could also be applied. For example, it could be argued that shopping in supermarkets has had the effect of pushing down prices paid for agricultural goods and hence wages and conditions in retail, food production and farming. However nobody would blame the checkout staff for this or subject them to prejudice or attacks. It could be argued that the supermarkets are to blame, or a lack of regulation - or the consumer.

Myth 5: " 'there is overcrowding in local schools now because of the migrants'"

- There is no problem of overcrowding; in fact there is actually a serious problem of falling enrolment in many rural schools. Inward migration and increased enrolment may actually save schools threatened with closure.
- There are local schools that are oversubscribed, which is different to overcrowding (overcrowding being when there are too many pupils in each classroom). Locally the schools that are oversubscribed are those where there are actually the least number of migrant workers.
- Even if there was overcrowding who would be to blame for that – the children? It would be a matter ultimately for government who plan and provide school provision. Additional people means additional revenue so this cannot be reduced to a cost issue.
- **It is the human right of all children to receive an education.** If there had been an increase in children due to an increased birth rate it is less likely the children would have been blamed. Blaming the 'migrant other' for problems of the system or planning is a dangerous phenomenon. This is not just the case in schooling but in relation to a range of services from housing to childcare and others.

Myth 6: "I don't mind 'them' being here but 'they' need to behave"

- Everybody has to behave themselves. All communities or populations local or otherwise will have some persons who play loud music or are otherwise anti-social. This is no more the case in the migrant than the local population.
- Individuals can only give themselves not a community with a bad name. If we victimise and label a community or group it creates prejudice that can lead to a climate of hostility. This is the case with many groups in society, for example labelling all young people as troublesome or all persons from a particular town as problematic.
- The stereotyping of a group of people as criminals has always been an easy way to demonise them. This has at times happened with migrant workers – for example racist stereotypes such as "they all carry knives" based on a handful

of real or imagined incidents that allegedly involved individual migrant workers. Imagine that if following an incident involving individuals in the local communities that people went round saying "all local people carry knives".

What can I do? Challenge the myths...

The above and other myths can demonise the migrant worker population and can contribute to a climate of hostility and racism. (regardless of whether the motive was actively malicious or through just not thinking things through.)

There are lessons from the historical experience of local persons who have migrated, who can forget the racist signs on properties in London proclaiming "No dogs, no Blacks, no Irish."

The way to defeat racism is with proactive antiracism and there are many examples of good work at community level and in the workplace. One practical way for each and everyone of us to be part of this is to challenge the myths with the facts each and everytime we hear them.

Next time you hear one of the above myths or stereotypes at work or elsewhere, challenge it with the facts.

ⁱ Taken from: **Forced to Flee: frequently asked questions about refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland** (Belfast: Refugee Action Group).

ⁱⁱ The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) defines an intercultural approach as: "the development of strategy, policy and practice that promotes interaction, understanding, respect and integration between different cultures and ethnic groups on the basis that cultural diversity is a strength that can enrich society, without glossing over issues such as racism. Interculturalism is now replacing earlier approaches such as assimilation and multiculturalism." The difference between interculturalism and multiculturalism is that interculturalism is a more interactive type approach recognising a different power differential.

ⁱⁱⁱ Niessen, Jan and Schibel Yongmi (2004) *Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners* (Brussels: European Commission Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security)

^{iv} Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment for Northern Ireland Monthly Labour Market Report for December 2005 lists the unadjusted claimant count rates for Dungannon and Cookstown council areas as 1.7% and 2% for Craigavon.

^v Central Statistics Office Population and Labour Force Projections 2006-2036 quoted in the Irish Independent. Referenced the need for 45,000 workers each year for the next 12 years, the current inward migration rates are around 35,000. Scottish figures are from the Office of National Statistics – quoted in *The Scotsman*, Monday 23 February 2004. Specific figures for Northern Ireland have not been calculated although the demographic and economic trends are similar.

^{vi} The Home Office report in 1998/99 concluded that persons born outside the UK (including migrant workers) contributed 10% more in taxes and national insurance than was used in benefits and public services boosting the annual economy by £2.6 billion (quoted by British Refugee Council). The figure is likely to now be higher. More recently in a publication entitled *Paying Their Way* the Institute of Public Policy Research (Sriskandarajah, Cooley and Reed, 2005) conducted a comprehensive piece of research on the fiscal contributions of immigrants in the UK. The main findings included immigrants make up 8.7% of the UK population but account for 10.2% of all income tax collected; each immigrant generates on average more government revenue a year compared to non immigrants and accounts for proportionally less government expenditure