

Migrant Destitution

Migrant workers who lose their jobs, or whose contracts have ended, may end up on the streets, as most have no immediate right to full welfare benefits, may have been living in accommodation tied to their job, and have probably underestimated the local cost of living.

With no means of support they can quickly become destitute.

EMBRACE NI on the street

In 2006, EMBRACE working alongside several Belfast churches and community organisations who work with homeless people, set up the 'on the street' project.

This initiative raises awareness of migrant destitution and offers a positive response through the donation and distribution of clothing, bedding, toiletries and foodstuffs to those on the street and in hostels, both local and migrant people.

In addition the EMBRACE Emergency Fund finances short term hostel accommodation and, where needed the means to return to the home country.

It has been observed that with early support it is relatively easy to get destitute foreign nationals back into jobs.

Local charity EMBRACE, is a group of Christians from different denominations, working together to promote a positive response to people seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority ethnic backgrounds living in Northern Ireland.

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Contributing factors

- Some employers do not pay the legal minimum wage to foreign nationals.
- Many are paid low wages for the type of work they do and need to send money home to families.
- If living in tied accommodation, the loss of a job may lead to homelessness.
- People who lose their jobs are often entitled to little welfare support.
- Homelessness makes it almost impossible to obtain and hold down employment.
- Workers here on visas are not entitled to homelessness advice.
- Foreign rough sleepers can be subject to harassment and intimidation.
- Destitution can lead quickly from an ordered life to multiple social and medical problems.
- The language barrier makes an understanding of forms and regulations an additional problem.

Migrant workers from the EU A8 Accession states (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) are particularly vulnerable, and Northern Ireland initially had the highest % of migrant workers from the EU A8 accession states of anywhere in the UK.

- They pay a £90 registration fee when they register for employment.
- They need one year of uninterrupted employment to become entitled to the same benefits as local people.
- Those not entitled to benefits are not usually able to access free hostel beds.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

Matthew 25: 35-36