

Society here is changing and many local people are confused as to who the newcomers are and why they are here. This leaflet hopes to sort out some of that confusion

## Did you know?

- The UK hosts only about 2% of the world's refugees.
- Most refugees from war zones or areas of civil unrest flee to neighbouring countries, often the poorest in the world.
- In 2008, Pakistan hosted the largest number of refugees, 1.8million.
- In 2007 the UK approved just 14% of the Iraqi asylum applications it received. Sweden approved 98%.
- There are around 1,650,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria.
- In the early 18th century Irish people were seasonal migrants on the coast of Newfoundland, working in the fisheries for the summer and returning home in the autumn.
- At least 70 million people throughout the world are thought to have Irish ancestry
- In 2007/08 an estimated 27,500 people came to Northern Ireland to live and 21,700 left.
- The unemployment rate in N Ireland for May-July 2009 was estimated at 6.7%, lower than the UK average of 7.9%, and 11.6% in the Irish Republic.



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This project is funded by  
Belfast City Council's Good Relations Fund.  
For more information on  
Belfast City's services and  
support available to migrant workers,  
please log onto:  
[www.belfastcity.gov.uk/migrants](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/migrants)

## EMBRACE NI

*Building a Welcoming Community*

**EMBRACE** is a group of Christians drawn from different denominations, working together to promote a positive response to people seeking asylum, migrant workers and people from minority ethnic backgrounds in N Ireland. EMBRACE seeks to reflect gospel values, and equip the Church to fulfil its call to welcome the stranger, by providing information, training and resource materials, and acting as a channel to assist those in need.

**EMBRACE On the Street** raises awareness of migrant destitution and facilitates practical help for individual people. Homelessness charities make specific requests for goods such as clothing and bedding, and EMBRACE organises collection through a rota of churches.

**EMBRACE Emergency Fund** is used to provide vital emergency assistance to destitute foreign nationals and people seeking asylum, where no other means of support, either statutory or charitable is available.

### Thinking of Joining Us?

If you are not already a member of EMBRACE, please consider joining us. Subscriptions are £10.00 annually per person and £20.00 for groups. Please write to us at the address below.

### Making a Donation?

If you would like to make a donation towards our work please send a cheque, payable to EMBRACE. Your support is greatly appreciated.

### For more information contact us:

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Migrants | People Seeking Asylum | Refugees

# WHO'S WHO? WHO'S HERE?



## People Seeking Asylum & Refugees

### Q Who is an asylum seeker?

A A person who is looking for a safe place outside her/his own country. People seek asylum if they fear persecution in their own country because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, social group or political opinion.

### Q What is our obligation to people seeking asylum?

A The UK signed the 1951 UN Convention Relating to Refugees and has agreed to allow people to enter the country to apply for asylum here. They have a legal right to be here while their application is considered. Equally, anyone from this country may seek asylum in any other country that has signed the convention.

### Q Who is a refugee?

A Someone who applies for asylum, and is successful in being granted refugee status. 'Refugee' is also sometimes used as a general term for people who have been displaced from their homes through persecution, civil unrest and war.

### Q Do many people come here to seek asylum?

A No, only around 200 people came between April 2008 and March 2009, for example, and many applications are unsuccessful. Estimates suggest that there are only about 2000 refugees currently living in N Ireland.

### Q Do they beg in the streets?

A It is unlikely that anyone you see on the streets is seeking asylum; however, asylum applicants lose their benefits if their applications fail and some are forced into destitution.

### Q Do people seeking asylum come here because of our benefits system?

A They have come here to escape persecution and have to apply for benefits from the UK Border and Immigration Agency because they are usually not allowed to work. The allowance for a single person whose asylum application is being considered has just been reduced to £35.15 per week, plus accommodation support.

For more detailed information read *Forced to Flee: Frequently Asked Questions about Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Northern Ireland (3rd Edition)* published by the Refugee Action Group and available from EMBRACE and at [www.embraceni.org](http://www.embraceni.org)

## Migrants

### Q Who is a migrant worker?

A Someone who leaves his or her country to work elsewhere. The term is usually applied to people who do not plan to remain permanently in another country. If a person from Lisburn goes to Canada or Dublin to work for the summer, he or she is a migrant worker.

### Q Who is an economic migrant?

A An 'economic migrant' is the same as a 'migrant worker'. The term is sometimes used in a negative way, for example, to question people's motives.

### Q Who is an immigrant?

A All people coming into the country to work are immigrants, but the word is usually applied to people who intend to settle and integrate here. People who are born here are not 'immigrants'. Many minority ethnic people have lived here for generations.

## Migrant Workers

### Q Who is entitled to work here?

A The main categories are:

- People from the European Economic Area do not need permission to come here and work. In the same way, anyone with a British or Irish passport can freely go to Spain or Germany, for example, to seek work. (The EEA includes pre-2004 EU states plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.)
- People from the 8 EU Accession States, such as Poland or Lithuania, are free to come here but must register for most jobs, paying a one-off £90 fee. They are not entitled to most health and welfare benefits until they have registered and worked here for an uninterrupted 12 months. (People from Bulgaria and Romania need permits for most forms of work, even though they have joined the EU.)
- The immigration system favours people from Europe, unless they are rich or highly skilled. Employers must register as sponsors and apply for permission to employ people from outside the EEA, from countries such as India or the Philippines. Sponsors must demonstrate that the post cannot be filled by the domestic labour force.
- Foreign Students studying here on a full-time basis may work part time.

### Q How many people work here without proper papers?

A Nobody is sure but one Home Office estimate was around 2000; most enter the country legally but overstay work permits or visitors' visas. Some are deceived by people traffickers.

### Q Why is there so much migration today?

A There has always been migration. People migrate for different reasons. Anyone from N Ireland is likely to have relatives abroad, because people left here in the hope of improving their lives. People now come here because declining birth rates in industrialised countries mean that there are less young people joining the work force and so incoming workers have been needed to fill gaps in the market.

### Q How many migrant workers come here?

A Figures are slow to emerge, complex and hard to interpret but it is reckoned that between 2004 and the middle of 2007 26,000 more people came to Northern Ireland than left. Recession has reduced the numbers coming here.

### Q Do we really need migrant workers?

A Migrant workers tend to come here because they hear of job vacancies. We have had skills gaps and labour shortages, especially in hospitals and nursing homes, food processing, farming, IT and service industries.

### Q Do they cost us money?

A There are costs because of increased pressure on medical, education and housing services, but migrant workers pay taxes and national insurance like the rest of us. They obviously contribute to the local economy by buying necessities and paying rent etc.

### Q What about jobs for locals?

A Migrants often do jobs that employers have not been able to fill. Some migrant workers may have displaced local workers but it is up to employers to be fair. If they pay people less than the minimum wage, they are breaking the law. Unemployment was at its lowest when migration was at its height.

EMBRACE is grateful to the Refugee and Migrant Project of the Irish Bishop's Conference for devising the concept of this leaflet. Their *Who's Who* leaflet for the Irish Republic is available from the Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Tel: 01 5053157 Email: [refproject@iecon.ie](mailto:refproject@iecon.ie) <http://www.catholicbishops.ie/publications/38-refugees/1017-whos-who->