

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Information Update 2006

EMBRACE NI

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Introduction

Our first information update in 2005 gave a brief outline of the situation relating to minority ethnic people, immigrants and those who seek asylum in Northern Ireland. It also included suggestions for Christians who want to make this a more welcoming place for incomers. Since then there have been changes in legislation, the patterns of immigration, and the numbers of people seeking asylum. There have also been major changes in arrangements for immigration detention. This document aims to help people to understand these changes, while retaining material from the 2005 update where it is still relevant and accurate. It also points you towards additional sources of information, often by references to web-sites.

Please keep this as a document to refer to. Immigration and asylum law and procedures are complex and change frequently, so, although we have tried to be as accurate as possible, bear in mind the possibility of over-generalisation or inaccuracy. Similarly, the areas, spheres of work and conditions of migrant workers are also subject to change. We try to keep our members updated about major changes through our newsletters.

Inevitably, this document highlights problems experienced by migrants and minority ethnic people: this year, for example, we have added a section on the destitution experienced by some migrants who are not entitled to benefits. However, we do not want to emphasise these problems in a way that makes it difficult to see people as individuals with varied gifts and strengths as well as vulnerability, just like the rest of the population. We hope that this booklet will not lead to migrants or minority ethnic residents being seen as victims, but help us to ensure that all people are treated with dignity.

EMBRACE is a voluntary group of Christians, from different denominations in Northern Ireland. Our primary role in EMBRACE is to provide information and resources for Churches and individuals, in order to help make this a more welcoming place for minority ethnic people, including residents, migrant workers and people who have been forced to flee from other countries. We want to help to build a community that has moved beyond racism.

Members of EMBRACE are active in providing information, leading workshops and giving talks to members of the Christian community here, and others. We are also involved in a number of activities that support refugees. These have included befriending, advocacy, transport, and providing food for social events such as picnics. These activities involve collaboration between church congregations, refugees and people seeking asylum, and other voluntary and statutory groups. Other practical initiatives include setting up a resource library in City Church, Belfast.

Please let us know if you have experience in building positive relationships with members of minority ethnic groups that we could help you to share with other people.

Migration

Although we have always had small numbers of incomers, over the centuries people living on the island of Ireland became used to migration as a one way process, with thousands of people leaving for the New World, never to return. The last few years have seen change. In the south, labour shortages and dramatic economic expansion have attracted returning Irish exiles and people from other countries. In addition, links with other parts of the world have made Ireland a possible haven for people who feel forced to flee from their homes, or to seek economic security. The Troubles and high unemployment insulated the north from these forces until recently, but we now have a society that needs additional workers.

The 2001 census indicated that there were 26,600 people in Northern Ireland, including children, who were born outside the UK or the Irish Republic. (Bear in mind that these figures do not include people who were born in this country and who are members of minority ethnic groups.) It is likely that these numbers have expanded. People come here for exactly the same reason as our young people still leave: for better employment prospects and better salaries. Most migrant workers are employed in the academic, agricultural, food production, hospitality and catering, and health sectors.

While we see growing numbers of immigrants, many come for a short time in the hope of improving their lives and then leave, just as many of our young people return. The numbers registering with GPs between 1992 and 2001 indicate that, during this period, 1300 more people left than arrived here (*Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland*, p.46). Some people from other countries, however, make this their permanent home and we have a gradually increasing number of minority ethnic people living among us.

Changing patterns of migration

Migrants who came to the United Kingdom following the Second World War tended to come from countries in the British Commonwealth or others where there had been British or Irish influence. They were drawn by the expanding economy but also by their knowledge of the English language and were familiar to some degree with the local culture.

The first wave of more recent migrants here included a substantial number of Portuguese speakers who have come here since 2001, to work in the food processing industry. At the same time, staff shortages in the health sector have led to staff being recruited in the Philippines, South Asia and, to a lesser extent, Africa.

European Union enlargement in 2004 has coincided with economic expansion here and people from Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (the A8), and Cyprus and Malta, are now entitled to come here and work. It is not easy to be precise about numbers, but between April 2004 and July 2005 applications for National Insurance numbers in Northern Ireland were received from 12,962 people from the A8 countries, with the largest number, 6,169, from Poland and the second highest, 3013, from Lithuania.

Whereas earlier immigrants tended to come to our cities, the latest migrants are more widely spread. These are some examples:

- Portuguese speakers (from Portugal and its former colonies) in meat processing factories in Dungannon, Portadown, Ballymena and Coleraine.

- Healthcare workers in Belfast and elsewhere come from the Philippines, India, Malaysia, and other countries.
- Latvians and Lithuanians working on mushroom farms.
- There have been Albanian chicken catchers in Co. Armagh.
- The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme included workers from Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine in 2003.
- Italian and Portuguese workers were involved in construction work at Ballylumford power station.
- Many 'Indian' restaurants employ people from other countries such as Bangladesh.
- People from the Baltic states working in the Co. Down fishing industry.

The words we use... We can properly refer to, for example, the Indian, Chinese or Jewish 'communities' but incoming people from some countries are small in numbers and dispersed, so the word 'population' or 'group' may be more appropriate. Some people understandably also feel uneasy at always being defined as part of a 'minority' ethnic group.

Some of the Languages Now Spoken in Northern Ireland:

Albanian, Arabic, Bedawiye, Beluchi, Bengali (or Bangla), Bosnian, Bulgarian, Cantonese, Creole, Croat, Czech, Dutch, Edo, Estonian, Ewe, Farsi, Flemish, French, Fujianese, Ga, Greek, Grushi, Gujarati, Hakka, Hausa, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Kannada, Kanta, Korean, Kutchi, Latvian, Lithuanian, Malayo, Malayala, Mandarin, Marati, Mina, Mirpuri, Oriya, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Pushtu, Romani, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Sindhi, Sohosa, Spanish, Sylheti, Tagalog, Tamazight, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu, Swahili, Telugu, Twi, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Yiddish, Yoruba, Xhosa.

Questions asked about migrants and refugees

Q Who is an asylum seeker?

A Someone who has a well-founded fear of persecution by reason of their race, nationality, social group or political opinion, in their own country, and seeks refuge in another country.

The words we use... The term 'asylum seeker' is now regarded by many people as a depersonalising term of abuse, often associated with the word 'bogus'. In EMBRACE, we try to use the phrase, 'person seeking asylum'. Similarly, the broad-brush term, 'illegal immigrant' is better replaced by the more objective words, 'undocumented person'. How can a human being be illegal?

Q Who is a refugee?

A Someone who applies for asylum, and is successful in being granted refugee status, under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to Refugees. 'Refugee' is also the general term for all people who have been displaced from their own countries by persecution, war and civil unrest.

Q Who is a migrant worker?

A Someone who leaves their country with the intention of seeking work elsewhere. In practice the words are usually applied today to people who do not intend to remain permanently in the host country.

Q Who is an immigrant?

A This term has been applied to all people coming into the country to work, but it is now often applied to people who intend to settle and integrate here, as opposed to being a more temporary 'migrant worker'. It is important not to view people who are born here and part of long-established ethnic communities and populations as 'immigrants'.

Q Who is an economic migrant?

A Anyone who moves from their home country to improve their economic situation can be termed an 'economic migrant'. This term is sometimes used in a derogatory way, for example, to throw suspicion on people's motives in seeking asylum. In fact, poverty and economic deprivation, as well as violence, are tools of those who persecute individuals and groups of people. Most economic migrants simply seek a better life for themselves and their families, as many people from Ireland have done for generations.

Government Immigration Policy

Every country seeks to protect its borders and monitor who comes in and out of the country. Any expanding economy will also need additional workers. Immigration policy is a power that is retained at Westminster and the title of the Government's 5-year plan, *Controlling our borders: making migration work for Britain* reflects an emphasis on security and having the right people to fill labour and skills shortages. It focuses on internal interests rather than the needs of people who have been forced to flee from their homes, or of people forced to look for work because of poverty.

Immigration is regulated by laws passed in the Westminster parliament, and historically its regulation has been very complex. There are 80 different schemes which allow people into the UK to work, and in March 2006 the government announced its intention to replace all the different work permit and entry schemes with a single system based on points. They plan to have 5 tiers:

Tier 1: highly skilled professionals, including doctors, scientists and entrepreneurs

Tier 2: skilled people with job offers such as medical workers and tradesmen

Tier 3: low-skilled including people such as contract workers in catering and construction

Tier 4: students from other countries

Tier 5: temporary workers, youth mobility to cover sports people, professional musicians, cultural exchanges and working holidays for young people.

An advisory board will inform the Home Office so that entry points can be adjusted to reflect skills and labour shortages. As part of new control measures, some short-term workers will have to lodge a bond on entry, refundable on exit, and employers will face large fines for each illegal worker.

The Government hopes that there will no longer be a need for many low-skilled workers from outside the European Union (EU). This may cause problems for some of our traditional areas of migration from the developing world. For example, minority ethnic catering establishments may struggle to find suitable employees. Similarly, Asian doctors, who have been traditionally an important part of the health service may no longer find it easy to get permission to work here.

There are some concerns about these plans:

- They will effectively discriminate against poorer, less well qualified immigrants who need the opportunities more, and who could make a real difference to their families and the development of their home countries by the money they send home.
- Attracting skilled people can be a brain drain on developing countries. It underlines the detrimental effect of 'selfish' immigration policies which do nothing to address people's underlying need to migrate. And of course the vast majority of people would rather stay at home with friends and family than be forced to leave home in search of work.

4 Million health workers needed: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said that there is a chronic shortage of health workers throughout the world. This has a knock-on effect on preventive medicine for children, pregnancy care and access to treatment. The WHO says life expectancy in many poorer countries is half of that in rich nations. Western countries need to be careful not to 'poach' workers from these countries. In fact international funding may be necessary to help some countries to find, train and retain sufficient healthcare staff.

For more see BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/health/4877376.stm> 07/04/2006

(For more detail on the government's plans see: BBC News 'Migration: How points would work' http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/!hi/uk_politics/4244707.stm 11/03/06)

In the meantime, a complex system of migrant entry schemes remains in existence.

Categories of Migrant Worker

These are some of the main categories:

European Economic Area Nationals do not need to ask for permission to move here to live and work. These include people from the European Union (EU), from the European Free Trade Area (including Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein), and from Switzerland.

Nationals from the New EU Accession States are entitled to freedom of movement in the other EU states, but must register with the Home Office when they take up employment. These include people from what are termed the A8 Countries, which joined the EU in May 2004: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. (Cyprus and Malta, who also joined in 2004, are not subject to these restrictions and are treated like states that joined previously.)

Work Permit Holders are foreign nationals from countries, other than those listed above. Permits will only be issued when the employer has demonstrated that they have been unable to fill the post in any other way.

Students from abroad (there were around 1300 in around 2001–2) are entitled to work part time. They often help as language assistants in schools.

Working Holidaymakers who are not recorded by immigration officials.

Permit-Free Workers include several categories, such as people working here temporarily, for example, as diplomats, airport staff, representatives of foreign firms, members of the foreign press, or clergy!

Undocumented Workers are impossible to quantify, but a couple of years ago the Immigration Service gave a guesstimate of around 2000 people. Most of them have probably entered the country legally and overstayed their work permits or visitors' visas.

The other side of migration: migrant workers from Latvia

Access to jobs in Irish agriculture, on both sides of the border, with higher pay rates than those at home, means that many children are left behind in Latvia, and are known as the 'mushroom orphans'. Because its population is small, Latvia is now forced to attract workers from other countries to fill the labour shortages created by so many people going to work abroad.

Social and Justice Issues Relating to Migrant Workers

These are only emerging but several are beginning to stand out:

Racist abuse and attacks.

- **The lack of regulation of agencies** who may charge large fees on the promise of high wages and good conditions, which do not always materialise.

- **The power of employers.** Work permits are held by employers, and someone losing a job cannot look for another one or seek benefit. If sacked, they face destitution and deportation.
- Contract workers may be supplied with **poor quality, living conditions.**
- All these issues are made worse by a **lack of access to interpreters** making it hard for people to communicate their difficulties, or to establish their rights.
- There is the possibility that local people may be disadvantaged by **the exploitative use of 'cheap labour'.**
- **Homelessness and destitution** if people lose their jobs, or are between jobs.
- **The information gap.** People who move from one country to another need clear information. What are my rights? What am I not allowed to do? What services are available?

The debate on protection for workers has already started in Northern Ireland and **Concordia**, a partnership group including business (CBI), voluntary groups (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action NICVA), trade unions (Irish Congress of Trade Unions), and farmers and growers (Ulster Farmers' Union), has produced a policy document challenging Government. *Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland: Meeting the Needs of Migrant Workers, their Families and their Employers*, March 2006, calls for the following:

(http://www.concordiapartnership.org/files/2006321115822__Concordia%20migrant%20w%20LR.pdf.)

- A specific Government minister responsible for migrant workers
- Annual forecasts with realistic predictions relating to the immigrant population
- A local public enquiry office for the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, and local advice and support centres for migrant workers
- The establishment of a skills advisory service
- Enforcement of regulations governing houses in multiple occupation
- A migrant worker emergency rehousing fund

Case Study

'In November 2005, STEP [a migrant worker support group in South Tyrone] was contacted by a young Latvian couple with an eight month old baby. Their employer, a recruitment agency, expected the family to share a room with a single bed in a three-bedroomed house in which six other Latvian men also resided. The couple were paying £120 per week for a room which was cold and damp. When they complained to their employer, they were told they would be evicted and lose their jobs if they complained again. STEP contacted the landlord and asked for the family to be moved to more suitable accommodation. The family were eventually moved to a two-bedroom flat, and stayed a short time before finding alternative accommodation with another agency.'

Concordia, *Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland: Meeting the Needs of Migrant Workers, their Families and their Employers*, March 2006, p.7. http://www.concordiapartnership.org/files/2006321115822__Concordia%20migrant%20w%20LR.pdf

The **Equality Commission** brought people together in 2004 to discuss the implications of migrant worker employment. A further conference, *Migrant Workers: Meeting the Challenge of a Diverse Workplace* was held in 2005. **Business in the Community** has published a **Voluntary Code of Practice for the Employment of Migrant Workers** (www.bitc://guide2migrantworkers.org.uk.)

The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) is no longer funded to give **Immigration Advice**. People should now be encouraged to ring one of the **Law Centre advice lines** Belfast (028) **90899350** or Derry/ Londonderry (028) **71262433**.

Migrant Worker Destitution

There is increasing concern about the suffering of migrant workers who lose their jobs here and end up on the streets. There have been a very significant number of people coming to Northern Ireland from some of the new states who joined the EU on 1st May 2004, especially those from the A8: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

- Compared to the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland has the highest % of migrant workers from these states, as a proportion of the local population.
- They pay a £70 registration when they register for employment.
- Many are paid low wages for the type of work they do and need to send money back to families at home. They are also often over-qualified for the work they do.
- They need one year of uninterrupted employment to be entitled to social welfare, other than emergency health care.
- Those who lose their jobs are not entitled to any statutory support.
- If living in tied accommodation, the loss of a job may lead to homelessness.
- Private hostels for the homeless have limited spaces, and have been informed that beds paid for by the NI Housing Executive cannot be used for destitute migrant workers. The providers must fund these beds themselves.
- Migrant workers here on visas are not entitled to official homelessness advice.
- The language barrier makes understanding forms and regulations an additional problem.
- Foreign rough sleepers are subject to harassment and intimidation.
- Homelessness makes it almost impossible to obtain and hold down employment.
- Destitution can lead quickly from an ordered life to one with multiple social and medical problems. This can include resorting to crime and/or alcohol and drug abuse.
- The devolved parliament in Scotland has chosen to stand apart from the rest of UK and does not debar new EU entrants from benefits.

Myths about Migrant Workers

People who are trying to help migrant workers to adjust to life here are increasingly concerned at the kind of language used about migrants. ANIMATE, a partnership group supporting migrant workers in Mid Ulster, has come up with a few commonly heard views, and some of their material is used here. For a more detailed look at their material, see their web site: www.animate-ccd.net.

“The migrants are taking our jobs.”

The facts: Migrants are attracted by job vacancies. They fill skills gaps and labour shortages and where there is nearly full employment, they often do jobs that local people are not prepared to do. Industries such as the food processing industry cannot survive without migrant labour.

“They are costing the country money.”

The facts: The Home Office calculates that after subtracting benefits and public services from Income Tax and National Insurance contributions, migrants provide an annual surplus of £2.6 billion to the UK Treasury. One local factory, O’Kane Poultry, in Ballymena calculates that their migrant workers contributed £624,998 in National Insurance and £1,562,496 in Income Tax in just 2 years, while spending £2.2million locally.

“Migrants are getting everything on social security.”

The facts: Most migrant workers are not eligible for any social security benefits in spite of paying tax and National Insurance. The only people entitled to benefits here, similar to those available to local people, are from member states of the European Union who joined before 2004.

“I don’t mind ‘them’ being here but ‘they’ need to behave.”

The facts: Everyone is subject to the law and should behave. If a person from a migrant community misbehaves, that should not reflect badly on others from their country or ethnic group. We have our fair share of local people who misbehave.

These myths are not the only fears expressed. There can be general anxiety about the creation of a low-pay economy. Some recent research, however, tends to show reduction in pay rates are temporary and that immigration simply allows the economy to expand, e.g. the headline ‘Increase in immigrants found to aid expansion’ (*Financial Times*, 13 May 2005). Nevertheless, genuine worries remain.

It is not all bad news

Newspapers are full of stories about racist attacks but that is not the whole story:

‘More than 100 migrant workers from around the south Derry area have been given a reception by Magherafelt council to show appreciation of the services given by them to local industry.’ Belfast Telegraph, 10 May 2005

Some interested groups:

ANIMATE <http://www.animate-ccd.net>

Belfast Welcome Centre

Concordia <http://www.concordiapartnership.org/home.asp>

Council for the Homeless in Northern Ireland <http://www.chni.org.uk>

Equality Commission <http://www.equalityni.org>

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) <http://www.nicem.org.uk>

Shelter <http://northernirelandshelter.org.uk>

STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Project) <http://www.stepni.org>

See www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk for information about the Churches Rural Group in England and positive suggestions about responses to rural migrant workers.

For contact details for local groups see pages 32-34.

Useful sources include:

Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland: Meeting the Needs of Migrant Workers, their Families and their Employers, a policy paper, Concordia, March 2006.

Kathryn Bell, Neil Jarman and Thomas Levebvre, *Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland*, Institute for Conflict Research, Belfast, 2004.

Neil Jarman, *Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland (Review)* Institute for Conflict Research, 2004.

People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

'It takes courage to be a refugee. Courage not to give up hope and to make the most of the hand that has been dealt. Courage to start a new life against daunting odds, eventually to become contributing and enriching members of society once more.'

World Refugee Day statement from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), June 2005

A small number of people here have been forced to flee from their home countries, and this makes them particularly vulnerable, as there are often few, if any, other people from their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds to help them through the experience. Applications for asylum are lodged with the Home Office and there are no separate official published figures for those who apply from Northern Ireland. However, the Home Office has stated that there were 165 applications here in 2003 and only 110 between January and October 2004.

Asylum and immigration issues have risen to the top of the political agenda in recent years, partly because of the genuine fears of some people in the more overcrowded parts of Great Britain, and partly because of a climate of political and media hysteria. These are factors in fuelling racist attitudes in Ireland, north and south. Immigration and asylum have been British election issues with both Conservative and Labour vying to have even tougher policies. There have now been 3 major changes in the law in as many years. Partly because of this, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), commenting in March 2005, noted that numbers of asylum applicants in the UK had plummeted by 61% in 2 years. (25,720 asylum applications, excluding dependants, were received in 2005, 24 per cent less than the 33,960 applications in 2004, www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=261). The UK ranked 11th among the EU states at that time, if the figures are taken on a per capita basis. (http://www.unhcr.org.uk/press_releases2005/pr11March05.htm)

In 2004 the UK had 40,600 applications while the United States had 56,000 and France 58,500. However this should be set against the major population movements which take place around areas of conflict. The overall figures of people of concern to the UNHCR rose at the start of 2005 to 19.2 million, an increase of 13% from the previous year. As a result of just one conflict, in 2004 146,900 people from Sudan arrived in neighbouring countries like Chad, Uganda and Kenya. In another continent, many people are beginning to return to Afghanistan, but there are still 2,084,900 people from that country listed among the refugee populations in countries from as far afield as Pakistan, Iran, Germany, the Netherlands, as well as some in the UK.

In 2004 Asia hosted more than a third of all people of concern to UNHCR, 6.9million (36%), followed by Africa 4.9million (25%), Europe 4.4 million (23%), North America 853,300 (5%), Latin America 2 million (11%) and Oceania 82,400 (0.4%).

These figures are all taken from the latest figures published in 2005 by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), *Refugees by Numbers*:

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/openssl.htm?tbl=BASICS&id=3b028097c>

Asylum: the Application Process in Northern Ireland

Frequent changes in legislation mean that the application process, rules and conditions of leave to remain vary, depending on when application has been made. For example, some people who applied a number of years ago are allowed to work while their claim is processed. People who apply today are not allowed to work. Claimants must now make an Asylum Application at the earliest opportunity on arrival. A Screening Interview establishes their identity and nationality and checks if another country should be considering their case. This process includes fingerprinting as a check of identity against an international database. Applicants undergo induction and are told about their rights and responsibilities. They are issued with an identity number. Under a new process, known informally as Fast Track, some people, from countries thought to be 'safe', are immediately detained and transferred to Great Britain while their cases are considered. If the case is not deemed to be arguable, then the person may be deported swiftly. Or, they may be sent to other parts of Great Britain under Home Office dispersal arrangements.

The latest on the Fast Track process

'The Home Office issued new guidance in February 2006. This included the statement that "any asylum claim, whatever the nationality or country of origin of the claimant, may be fast tracked where it appears, after screening, to be one that may be decided quickly". The list of countries of origin deemed suitable for fast track processing has now extended to 55. Asylum seekers from 15 of these countries (plus Nigeria and Ghana for men) whose claims are "certified as clearly unfounded" can only appeal after they have been returned to their own country (known as Non Suspensive Appeals or NSA). They have no right of appeal in this country.'

Extract from *In Touch*, the bulletin of the Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID) No. 35, April 2006

If people seeking asylum cannot support themselves the **National Asylum Support Service (NASS)** can provide subsistence benefits, 70% of normal social security benefits. As of 10 April 2006, a person who is applying for asylum receives £31.85 per week if they are over 18 and under 25 years of age, or £40.22 if they are over 25, plus housing, where required. The **Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)** is currently sub-contracted by the **Refugee Council** (the main charitable British refugee support organisation) to facilitate advice and emergency assistance for asylum applicants who are over 18. Children and young adults are the responsibility of the appropriate **Health and Social Services Board**. Follow-on accommodation is provided by the **Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)**, on behalf of NASS. Most asylum applicants in Northern Ireland live in the community while they are waiting to have their claims assessed but they may be detained at any time. Most are not allowed to undertake paid employment. Throughout the application process people may be asked to report to the authorities: immigration officials (at Belfast International Airport) or police stations. At any time during the application process people can ask for help to return to their home country voluntarily.

Applicants are usually required to complete a **Statement of Evidence Form (SEF)** which has to be completed in English. There is then an **Asylum Interview** at which people can submit additional information such as medical reports. Home Office officials come from Great Britain to interview applicants. Immigration officials at the Home Office in England **Assess the Claim** and make an **Initial Decision**, by looking at the consistency of the evidence, and relating this to background information on the country of origin, supplied by the **Country Information and Policy Unit** of the **Home Office Immigration and Nationality Directorate**. The claim may be allowed under the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees or on human rights grounds under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Successful applicants are entitled to the same social and economic rights as UK citizens. If successful, they have full access to medical treatment, housing, education and employment, but most applications fail at this stage. There were 5,645 initial decisions in the fourth quarter of 2005. Of these, only 10 per cent were granted asylum, 12 per cent granted either humanitarian protection or discretionary leave and 78 per cent refused. (www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=261)

Unsuccessful applicants normally have a right to an **Appeal** to a tribunal before an immigration judge. This takes place in a court setting in Northern Ireland. Applicants who fail at the appeal stage are able to apply for a review of the immigration judge's decision, if the earlier decision was wrong in law, and the error would have made a difference. If this is unsuccessful then a person may apply for **Statutory Review**. In some cases, people who have not been able to demonstrate that they fulfil the criteria, but who need protection, could be given **Exceptional Leave to Remain**. This has been replaced recently by the more restrictive categories of **Humanitarian Protection** or **Discretionary Leave**. Both of these are rarely given.

Recent changes in asylum legislation have tended to be increasingly restrictive. People who were successful asylum claimants in the past used to be granted **Refugee Status** but since August 2005 they will no longer be given **Indefinite Leave to Remain** but will only be granted limited leave, for 5 years in the first instance. After this time there will be a reassessment, taking into account such things as a possible improvement in the situation in their country of origin. In the meantime they will have rights to family reunion, to benefits and the right to work. However, under the 2005 Act the **Integration Grant** for refugees to help them set up home, was replaced with an **Integration Loan**.

In the past it has been common for the process described here to last for several years, but the Government has made strenuous efforts recently to speed up the process and also to attempt to remove a greater number of people whose applications have failed. The streamlining of the system has led to a diminution of legal safeguards in dealing with people seeking asylum.

As asylum applications have dropped, the Home Office **Quality Initiative Project** aims to improve the way in which they are assessed and to expedite the process. It is hoped to get more decisions right at the first stage. UNHCR has been working with the Government and feels it is making genuine efforts but there is still a need for improvement, especially in terms of accurate background information about the countries of origin of claimants. Accreditation for Home Office caseworkers would be desirable. (http://www.unhcr.org.uk/press/press_releases2005/pr27October05.htm)

A 24-hour advice and support service for refugees and people seeking asylum, is provided by:

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)

3rd Floor Ascot House

24-31 Shaftesbury Square

Belfast BT2 7DB

Tel: 00 44 28 9023 8645 / 00 44 28 9031 9666

Fax: 0044 28 9031 948

Email info@nicem.org.uk

Web: www.nicem.org.uk

028 90238645.

Their emergency out of hours number for asylum claimants in need of assistance is (028) 9024 2025.

Web sites:

Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate: www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk
Law Centre (NI) www.cinni.org
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) www.nicem.org.uk
Refugee Council (UK): www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
UNHCR www.unhcr.org.uk

Problems for People Seeking Asylum

Isolation: Many people have lost all contact with friends and family and a way of life where they had worthwhile jobs and status. People here are unlikely to understand their culture.

Language: The language barrier is a problem in the asylum application process, in daily life (including communication with doctors) and in developing a normal social life.

The Application Process: The process, described by Les Allamby of the Law Centre as, 'a war of attrition', includes delays, difficulties with translation, and limited access to financial and other social support. There can be high levels of fear and anxiety. People who may have been tortured or abused find the questioning difficult. It is also hard for most people to back up their cases with written evidence. Research has shown that people fleeing from repression often have difficulty in recalling the details of traumatic events. They do not always make the best witnesses.

Detention: There is a strong fear of detention and the humiliation it brings.

Harassment and Discrimination: Most people will experience verbal abuse either on racial grounds, or because of the stigma attached to being an 'asylum seeker'. The sense of rejection can be powerful.

Not Being Allowed to Work: Enforced idleness makes hours of anxiety seem longer and people feel shame at living off the state. Some find volunteering beneficial.

Some examples from Bristol quoted in the *Tablet*, 12 Feb. 2005:

Consuelo: 'You don't know what to do all day' and Grace speaks of 'psychological torture, to drive you mad and make you want to go back.'

Poverty: The basic allowance of 70% of normal benefit gives no leeway for emergencies, especially where there is none of the family support that exists for local people. There can also be administrative glitches that leave people temporarily without even enough to eat. As of 10 April 2006, a person who is applying for asylum receives £31.85 per week if they are over 18 and under 25 years of age, or £40.22 if they are over 25. They also receive housing support.

Diet: It can take a while to adjust to cooking cheap, locally available, ingredients to replace a familiar diet. People end up with a poor diet and digestive problems.

Climate: Applicants often come from hot climates and find it hard to keep warm here.

Health: Pre-existing illnesses and injuries may be made worse by poverty, living conditions and climate.

Stress and Depression: Some people will be suffering from the after-effects of wounds and torture, or the death of relatives. Trauma and the worry about failing to achieve refugee status may easily contribute towards chronic depressive illness.

Exploitation: Asylum applicants who work illegally, or failed applicants who stay and work in the underground economy are often exploited, in the hours they work, and the conditions in which they live and work. They are vulnerable to abuse by their employers.

Remember that international conflict, and trade and justice issues interact directly with migration issues. Campaigning around these issues and support for development organisations will help to prevent the misery of people having to flee from their homes or move because of extreme poverty.

Update on the Immigration Detention Situation (March 2006)

Background

Immigration officers, acting on behalf of the Home Office, have the right to detain anyone waiting for a decision on an application for asylum in this country or awaiting deportation. In practice this may include people who have strayed across the border, people seeking asylum who live in the community but who are thought to have broken the Home Office conditions e.g. by spending time away from home or by getting paid work. Some people with valid papers have been detained, when immigration officers have not believed the reasons given for their visits. Detention periods may be very short or quite lengthy.

The situation of immigration detainees in Northern Ireland has given concern for some time. Numbers have risen and there have been anxieties around treatment and conditions, but the major campaigning issue was around the stigmatising by imprisonment of people who had not been convicted of any crime. A number of bodies here, including the Churches, have made representations to Government over the years.

In early 2004 the Northern Ireland Prison Service announced that Mourne House (the section of **Maghaberry Prison** where women prisoners and Immigration Detainees used to be held) was to close down. In June 2004, all women prisoners and female immigration detainees were moved to **Hydebank Wood Young Offenders' Centre**. Male detainees were no longer housed in prison but moved to a dedicated wing in a small prison 'work out unit' on Belfast's **Crumlin Road**.

Immigration detention in 2005

The **Refugee Action Group (RAG)** is an umbrella group of interested groups, including EMBRACE. Much of its information is gained from the first hand experiences of RAG volunteers, who visit detainees each week. A new RAG report on detention, published in February 2006, shows that the number of immigration detainees held in Northern Ireland continued to rise in 2005/06:

- 120 people were held in detention in Northern Ireland at the orders of the Immigration Service during 2005, a 20% increase on a previous 12-month period (Mar 2004 – Feb 2005).
- Of this number, about one-third (37 people) were seeking asylum and over a quarter (33 people) were women.
- In 2005, immigration detainees came from 25 different countries but the majority (57%) were from various African countries, most notably Nigeria, where 45 of the detainees originated. China (8%), South Africa (7%) and Romania (7%) were the other most common countries of origin.
- About one-third of detainees (41 people) were subsequently deported to their country of origin, one-fifth (27 people) were transferred to detention in Great Britain and a further one-fifth (25 people) were released or bailed.
- Most (91%) of detainees were arrested while entering Northern Ireland, with most being seized at airports and ferry terminals.

Patrick Corrigan, of Amnesty and RAG, speaking about the report said:

‘Our figures reveal a clear and troubling upward trend in the practice of locking up people, of whom many have fled to Northern Ireland in fear of their lives.’

Recent change in Government policy on detention in Northern Ireland

Just as the RAG report was published (March 2005), it was revealed that the Government is ending detention in Northern Ireland. All immigration detainees apprehended here will now be sent to removal centres in Scotland (Dungavel) and England (Oakington), a development of what RAG had already highlighted as a worrying trend in 2005. Some of the anxieties about this are:

- Concern that people may not receive timely legal advice and there will therefore be greater risk of deportation to countries where human rights are abused.
- There will be less scrutiny and the local spotlight of social concern.
- If detainees are removed from Northern Ireland against their will, they will lose contact with family, friends and support networks, including solicitors who are familiar with their cases.

Racism

... 'we must not merely regard black and minority ethnic people as 'deserving' respect and inclusion, but reject racism as the sin of exclusion, disrespect and 'segregation', by grasping and cherishing the fact that all God's children inherently share in the dignity of the Being of God.'

Rev. Arlington Trotman, Churches Commission on Racial Justice speaking at the All Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) conference, Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment, November 2005.

Northern Ireland has been labelled the race hate capital of Europe and we have a rising tide of hate crime against people from minority ethnic groups and migrant workers.

Police figures for 2004–05 record a total of 813 racial incidents in Northern Ireland. Of the 634 recorded racist offences there was 1 murder, 187 woundings and assaults, 61 cases of intimidation and harassment, and 322 criminal damage offences. The clearance rate was 15.9%.

We are all aware of the physical and verbal racial attacks. However, more subtle forms of racial discrimination, indifference and overlooking can exist throughout people's lives, in contacts with official bodies, in the schoolroom, job hunting and the workplace, medical and housing services, and socially.

Deprived of identity:

'People threaten you saying they are UVF/UDA and may be or not, they tell you that they see you as "Indian" and think you don't know the difference'.

A member of the Bangladeshi community quoted in *30 Years Seen but Not Heard*

'Local people who want to do something for ethnic minorities tend to want to group them all together. ... Being put together with other ethnic groups can make us feel vulnerable unless we have enough support'.

Julie Chiang Li of the Belfast Chinese Christian Church quoted in *lion & lamb: racism and religious liberty*, Autumn 2004.

School

"When my eldest first went to school he encountered some problems. He is quite dark and other little boys told him that his hands were very dirty. They were P1 children too young to know any better. The principal took action'.

A mother from a minority ethnic community group quoted in *Fermanagh: Other Voices*

The health service

A family did not know their 6-year old child was dying until the day he died because an interpreter was not offered to them.

'I have had to interpret for my wife, it was very serious, goodness knows what would have happened if I had not been there'.

2 examples from the Bangladeshi community quoted in *30 Years Seen but Not Heard*

Workplace

'Sometimes people will talk the bad language. Maybe call you Chinkie and maybe 'go back to your country' just like that you know. Some...will not be friendly you know, But most people is quite nice'.

A Chinese woman restaurant worker quoted in *Into the Light*.

Officials

'They assume you are employed illegally'.

A member of the Bangladeshi community, complaining about heavy-handed raids on restaurants. *30 Years Seen but Not Heard*

Politics

'Everyone wanted you to take sides'... 'people should not expect you to be involved in their fight'.

Extract from an interviewee quoted in an ICCM briefing for Church Leaders.

Links with Sectarianism

"'Because I have darker skin", says Marizete, "people think I am Portuguese and therefore assume I am a Catholic." For this reason she avoids some parts of town.'

From an interview with a Brazilian Baptist pastor's wife, Marizete Lara living in Dungannon, in *lion & lamb: racism and religious liberty*, Autumn 2004.

Subtle Racism

Stereotyping: People are asked questions such as: 'Are you a mail order bride?'

Patronising: *'It really annoys me when people ask me "where did you learn English?" People take it for granted that I don't know many things and that in general Asian people don't know many things.'*

Women from a minority ethnic community group quoted in Fermanagh: *Other Voices*

Church

'The local minister...provided tins of food and spoons to our home but did not invite us to his church. They [the Church] were saying we were poor. I was insulted. Would the same thing have happened if a white person moved into the area?'

An African woman quoted in an ICCM briefing for Church Leaders.

All forms of racism are ultimately unsustainable because they are not only evil, but racism tries to subvert the essential identity of all human beings. We as Christians must embrace difference and be 'richer' by undergoing a measure of cultural integration, recognise our human interdependence, promote social and economic redistribution, and pursue ethnic harmony, so that our Being is being-in-love-for-one-another.

Rev. Arlington Trotman, Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ), speaking at the ACCMR conference Nov. 2006.

The **Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)** have appointed Minority Liaison Officers in each area to respond to the increase in racial incidents and have published *Hate Crime, Racial Incidents: Protecting your Rights* www.psni.org.uk

The words we use... A recent American study of 10 ethnic communities has revealed the lethal power of language. *'The most astonishing finding was that ethnic immigrant groups subjected to more "hate speech" were more likely than others to commit suicide.'*

Psychiatrist, Raj Persaud, *Independent*, 29 January 2005

Consider undertaking race or ethnicity awareness training

If you can get a local group together, the Irish School of Ecumenics, in Belfast, Learning Together: Education for Reconciliation Programme, may be able to design a course for you, based on biblical insights. Email: cenisec@tcd.ie

There are courses on ethnicity available from groups such as the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)) (www.nicem.org.uk), the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (www.mcrc-ni.org), and the Ulster Peoples' College (www.ulsterpeoplescollege.org.uk). Ask your District Council Community Relations Officer (CRO) if there are any courses available locally.

The word 'ethnic'

In reality the word 'ethnic' refers to all people because all people have ethnicity. In other words, each person belongs to a people group: Asian, white, black, all have a particular heritage. In order to be careful not to reinforce exactly what we are trying to defeat - racism and discrimination - African, African Caribbean, mixed heritage and Asian peoples in Britain are understood as minorities, simply in terms of numbers. White people in Britain are the majority. Whilst people prefer self-definition, 'minority ethnic', with the emphasis on 'minority' respects those minority identities because it emphasises 'minority, rather than 'ethnicity'. To emphasize ethnicity is to deny it to white people, and to use it negatively to segregate minority ethnicities from white ethnicities.

Consequently, even though it is widely used, 'ethnic minority' should be avoided as it places the emphasis wrongly on the ethnicity of African, African Caribbean, and Asian and mixed heritage people as the only ones that possess ethnicity. As such 'ethnic minority', for all intents and purposes means someone that is marginalized, excluded and unwanted in society, because those terms have attracted grossly negative connotations for minority ethnic groups in Britain.

'Ethnic group', 'ethnic community', 'the ethnics' 'ethnic minorities', 'ethnic people' as references to minorities in Britain are all linguistically incorrect, socially offensive, and do nothing to help our case against racism and racial discrimination.

Rev. Arlington Trotman Churches Commission on Racial Justice speaking at the All Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) conference, Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment at Dromantine, November 2005.

Some interested groups:

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland www.equalityni.org

Labour Relations Agency www.lra.org.uk

Law Centre NI www.cinni.org

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) www.nicem.org.uk

Northern Ireland Citizens Advice Bureaux (NIACAB) www.citizensadvice.co.uk

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission www.nihrc.org

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) 0800 555 111 www.crimestoppersni.com

Victim Support www.victimsupport.org

Important resource:

Seeking Advice and Redress Against Racism in Northern Ireland: An Information Handbook, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and National Consultative Committee on Racism & Interculturalism, March 2005 (This booklet also contains *Seeking Advice and Redress Against Racism in Ireland for people in the Republic of Ireland*.) This publication is available online: www.equalityni.org and www.nccri.ie.

Sources:

Daniel Holder, Rozana Huq and Loanne Martin, *30 Years Seen But Not Heard; a Listening Session with the Bangladeshi (Sylheti) Community in Northern Ireland*, MCRC, Belfast, 2001.

Into the Light, Conference Report, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, Belfast, 1999.

Lion & Lamb, Racism and Religious Liberty, No 37 Autumn 2004.

Official Responses

Incomers and members of minority ethnic groups have not always felt welcome here and report negative attitudes and unequal treatment by official bodies as well as individuals in society. **Institutional Racism** exists when there is collective failure to deal with people properly. This is similar to **Systemic Racism** where policies, practices and systems that work against certain groups of people become embedded in organisations. For example, deciding to treat everyone in exactly the same way may result in disadvantaging a group whose needs are not met by this policy. There is increasing awareness of these dangers, and policies are being put in place to redress them.

Until very recently we have had a concentration on **Community Relations** strategies that attempted to address the divisions between Protestant and Catholic communities. The term **Good Relations** is applied to dealing positively with other forms of difference. **The Belfast Agreement** of 1998 refers to equality and parity of esteem for people from different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds. This has been given legal backing. **Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998** obliges public bodies to promote equality of opportunity between different groups of people, including 'racial groups'. They are also obliged to promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Public bodies are obliged to have **Equality Schemes** and to submit their policies to **Equality Impact Assessments** that are open to public scrutiny.

Under the **Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997** it was already unlawful to discriminate either directly or indirectly on racial grounds, in terms of employment and training; education; provision of goods and services; and the disposal and management of premises and advertisements. The Human Rights Act 1998 gave people rights to protection under the European Convention on Human Rights. A **Human Rights Commission** and **Equality Commission** have been set up in Northern Ireland to ensure that existing legislation and practice protect and uphold human rights and equality. They also have an advisory role on these issues.

Following consultation, the UK Government published **A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland** (2005) (<http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk/>). It carries the aspiration that, through time, we will achieve, 'a normal civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals...' A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence.' The first policy objective flowing from this is to 'eliminate sectarianism, racism and all forms of prejudice and to enable people to live and work without fear or intimidation'. Northern Ireland is recognised as no longer being a bipolar society but one which is enriched by becoming more culturally diverse. It is also recognised however, that racism has emerged as a problem.

In practical terms, Government is setting up an inter-departmental **Good Relations Panel** to shape policies and institutions. The **Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)** has a policy role and is responsible for challenging, undertaking research and monitoring progress.

The existing **Community Relations Council** (www.community-relations.org.uk) will have an enhanced role in good relations work, independent of Government and representative of civic society. It will be the main funding source for voluntary and community organisations providing race relations programmes. **Community Relations Officers (CROs)** in district councils, also fund local good relations activities. **Community Relations Officers (CROs)** in district councils also give grants towards local good relations activities. **A Shared Future** recognises the role that churches and other faith-based organisations have to play in developing good relations at local level.

In July 2005, to complement **A Shared Future**, the government also published: **A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010**

It has 6 shared aims – shared that is with minority ethnic representatives

- Equal protection and redress against racism and racist crime
- Equality of service provision for minority ethnic people in accessing public services
- To increase the sense of participation and belonging of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in public, political, economic, social and cultural life
- To promote dialogue and mutual understanding between people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds
- To build capacity within minority ethnic communities

Priority areas for practical action include training and employment, housing and accommodation, health, education, the criminal justice system, and the particular areas of concern around immigration, asylum and the exploitation of migrant workers.

Under this strategy, **The Racial Equality Unit** within OFMDM manages a fund that is targeted at helping minority ethnic groups and other groups in the wider community to work together to foster integration. (See www.pfgni.gov.uk) As well as the Racial Equality Unit, government has set up a **Racial Equality Forum** to help draw up an action plan, to implement the strategy, and to monitor and review progress.

The Journey Towards Healing booklet and training course on trauma for pastoral carers in faith-based organisations has been developed under the auspices of the **Victims Unit OFMDM** and includes a recognition of trauma experienced through racism. (www.victimsnri.org.uk)

The **Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)** has appointed **Minority Liaison Officers** in each area to respond to the increase in racial incidents and have published **Hate Crime, Racial Incidents: Protecting your Rights** (www.psni.org.uk).

Useful documents:

A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland (2005)
<http://www.asharedfutureni.gov.uk/>

A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005–10 OFMDM
www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/raceequality

The OFMDM web site also contains other useful research texts on racism and racial equality.
www.research.ofmdfmi.gov.uk

A Good Relations Framework: an Approach to the Development of Good Relations, the guidelines that sponsored bodies will be asked to use by the Community Relations Council. Available from www.community-relations.org.uk

The Journey towards Healing: A Faith-based Resource on Trauma www.victimsnri.org.uk

Web sites:

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland www.equalityni.org.uk

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission www.nihrc.org.uk

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency www.nisra.gov.uk

The Christian Response

Celtic Blessing for Hospitality

I saw a stranger yestereen,
I put food in the eating place
Drink in the drinking place
Music in the listening place
And in the sacred name of the Triune
He blessed myself and my house
My cattle and my dear ones
As the lark said in her song
'Often, often, often
Goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.'

Quoted in What the Bible Says about the Stranger by Kieran J O'Mahony OSA. The Churches' Peace Education Programme, Irish Commission of Justice and Peace & Irish Council of Churches, Maynooth and Belfast, 1999.

In helping to build a welcoming community it is important not just to provide a welcome for newcomers but also to help existing populations to adjust to change. Cultural shock is acute for people who are made to feel out of place, but an influx of people who are different can also cause a range of emotions from unease to fear and hostility in local people. It is part of Christian leadership to acknowledge all these emotions and needs, and to find ways of creating mutual understanding and fellowship.

Church responses to issues of immigration, asylum and racism

The main Churches in Ireland have responded in different ways. The **Catholic Church** has a big commitment to refugees through the Refugee Project in Maynooth and Sr Joan Roddy who co-ordinates the Churches Asylum Network in the Irish Republic. The work of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People was published in 2004 as *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (The love of Christ towards migrants). It examines the challenge of human mobility and the pastoral implications. Each diocese in Ireland now has a person in charge of the pastoral care of immigrants and they report to the Bishops' Conference.

The **Presbyterian Church in Ireland** has adopted a document, *Policy on Asylum Seekers and Refugees; a Report by the Race Relations Committee to the 2003 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. It is more comprehensive than the title suggests, as it also explores issues of immigration, racism and welcome. The Race Relations Committee has recently become the Race Relations Panel. The **Methodist Church in Ireland** has adopted the Presbyterian policy document and addresses the issues through their Council on Social Responsibility.

The **Church of Ireland** is embarking on a 3-year Hard Gospel programme which aims to improve the ways in which the church deals with difference at all levels. This includes the challenge of ethnic difference. One southern diocese, Dublin and Glendalough, has a working group on combating racism which has published a useful booklet: *Welcoming Angels*. Much of this publication (including the material on welcome) is equally applicable in the north, and although aimed at Church of Ireland parishes, other denominations should find ideas which resonate with them.

Welcoming Angels is available from the Diocesan Office, Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough, Church of Ireland House, Church Avenue, Rathmines, Dublin 6. The price is 5.00 euro.

Quakers are raising awareness among their own members through workshops, seminars and regular exchange of information. They also work closely with other churches and faiths. Other Christian groups such as the **Evangelical Alliance** have worked to raise consciousness around the issues and the **Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (CCCI)** (formerly ECONI) have been involved in hosting conferences and building awareness. For example, see ECONI's *lion & lamb, Racism and Religious Liberty*, No 37 Autumn 2004 and Noel Fallows, 'Multi-cultural church life' in *lion & lamb, Racism and Religious Liberty*, No 36 Spring/ Summer 2004, pp 10–17.

The **Corrymeela Community** has hosted holiday breaks for refugees and people seeking asylum.

Organisations and resources:

Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland (CCCI) www.contemporarychristianity.org

Corrymeela Community www.corrymeela.org

Evangelical Alliance: www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/

The Refugee Project at Maynooth, publishes Sanctuary, on the Refugee situation in the Irish Republic and the involvement of the Churches. www.catholiccommunications.ie/sanctuary

Hard Gospel Study: www.ireland.anglican.org/issues/scstudyfull.pdf

Methodist Church in Ireland www.irishmethodist.org

Presbyterian Church in Ireland www.presbyterianireland.org

Inter-church structures:

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is the umbrella body for Christian Churches. It liaises with ecumenical bodies in Great Britain and Ireland as well as ecumenical organisations at European and world levels. It provides a forum for joint decision-making, and enables the Churches to take action together. See www.ctbi.org.uk. The **Churches' Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ)** (www.ctbi.org.uk/ccrj/) is a Commission of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and includes representatives from the Churches and related organisations. It monitors trends and developments in the field of racial justice in Britain and Ireland, and Europe and seeks to co-ordinate the Churches' response on key issues.

In Ireland, the **Irish Council of Churches** includes the mainstream Protestant churches. The **Irish Inter-Church Meeting** includes the Catholic Church and the ICC members. That umbrella grouping has combined with the **CCRJ**, as the **All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR)** and this has enabled 2 major initiatives to take place.

The late Fee Ching Leong undertook research for AICCMR that was published in November 2005 as *The experiences, expectations and aspirations of black and minority ethnic people in relation to the churches' role in tackling racism*. The interviews undertaken for this research reveal the shortcomings within the Churches in responding to the needs of minority ethnic people, and are a starting point for progress.

As a further step forward, the AICCMR appointed Dr Scott Boldt to network and organise a conference in November 2005, *Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment*.

- To listen and learn from the experiences of minority ethnic groups and people who have responded to the challenge of difference.

- To encourage all Christian churches to acknowledge racism as a fundamental issue in society that the churches have a significant role in addressing.
- To describe and to present anti-racist initiatives that various churches have undertaken, developed or supported.
- To create the time and space for people to interact, share ideas and concerns, caucus on issues and make a commitment to anti-racist work.

Leaders and representatives from the churches, minority ethnic communities and from various agencies came together for this event. Follow-up sessions have been held to assist networking, including one in Belfast.

In October this year AICCMR is planning to host an event that will reflect the variety of new Christian worship expressions on the island of Ireland.

For further information and copies of the conference papers, please contact: Dr. Scott Boldt, Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast, BT9 6AZ. Tel: 028 (048 from the Republic) 90 66 31 45 or scott.boldt@btconnect.com.

Building welcoming congregations

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2: 19)

Richard Kerr of the Presbyterian Race Relations Panel and EMBRACE has the following suggestions: 'Use **Initiative** in exploring options. Find out what is appropriate in your situation and for those you meet. What works elsewhere may be a good pointer, but may well need adaptation for your situation and your gifts and resources. **Perseverance** is an important attribute; if at first you don't succeed try and try again. Some things may work, others (perhaps inexplicably) won't. It is important to **network** with other churches, statutory organisations and non-government organisations (NICEM, MCRC, Law Centre and ourselves in EMBRACE for example). **Commitment** is required to make things happen and to build relationships. Within your congregation there will be the need to inform and persuade members and leaders of the importance of reaching out. This will inevitably demand patience. Being involved **may well involve risk**; it will not necessarily be easy. Yet, the challenges and opportunities are there to be met, and provide us with an opportunity to share and show the love of Christ.'

The authors of *Welcoming Angels*, outline 3 stages of Christian welcome:

- **'Genuinely outward-looking': a social welcome**
The welcome beginning in the wider society
- **'Truly welcoming': a welcoming church event**
How people are made welcome when they choose to attend a service
- **'Seriously inclusive': a structural welcome**
Celebrating diversity and encouraging participation

Welcoming Angels, Dublin 2005, pp37–51.

Some ideas on congregational welcome (including some from *Welcoming Angels*):

- Ensure that the building is welcoming from the outside, with clear welcoming signs
- As well as having individuals responsible for welcoming at services, involve the whole congregation in learning about the importance of welcome
- Welcome should never be overwhelming, people need to take their time before they decide to make a congregation their home
- Language is very important, and it is helpful if people can be greeted with a phrase or two in their own language
- Encourage newcomers to participate, for example, in reading a lesson or taking up the collection/offertory – small, visible signs of acceptance
- Include some aspect of the worship tradition from the country of origin, such as a song or a prayer
- Invite members of minority ethnic churches to take part in special services
- Hold special services for example, in Refugee Week, Anti-Racism Sunday, or Holocaust Memorial Day, and invite members of minority groups to speak or attend
- Expect blessings, such as enthusiasm and sense of fellowship, not just problems

Liturgical expression can ... be very mono-cultural with music and movement (or lack of it) from one tradition. In the parish where I now serve as Parish Priest, we have three choirs, a “folk” choir, an African choir and a Filipino choir. The Filipino choir sings at the main Sunday service on the second Sunday of the month and the African choir on the last Sunday of the month. There would always, however, be at least three hymns in English on those days. This aspect of affirming identity needs to be mainstreamed so that it pervades all that we do.

Rev. Philip T Sumner from Oldham in England speaking at the All Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) conference, *Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment* at Dromantine, November 2005.

Pastoral Considerations

Many people who come here will adjust easily. However, we need to bear in mind that some people find a change of country very difficult. In addition, people who have been forced to flee here, destitute migrant workers, or undocumented people all have special difficulties. It is not always easy to understand people's feelings of insecurity, bewilderment, loneliness, suspicion, fears, hopes and needs, when their stories are so different from ours. We need an attitude of openness, respect and sensitivity.

- You may need to research where to access expertise – legal, social, and medical.
- You may be pressed to find a lot of time for people whose multiple problems leave them very emotionally dependent.

- You will need to be aware of special sensitivities, for example, regarding *confidentiality*. Someone left a church permanently because he felt shamed at being introduced as an asylum seeker by someone who probably only wanted him to be made especially welcome.
- In responding to a racist incident the natural instinct to make public your sense of outrage should always be overridden if the victim of the attack needs *privacy*.
- In some cultural backgrounds women should never be visited by a single man so it is helpful to make at least initial *pastoral visits in pairs*.
- Be aware that immigrants and minority *ethnic groups are not homogeneous*; there is great diversity, and sometimes animosity, within and between ethnic groups.
- It is important to listen empathetically. It can be a challenge to hear what someone is feeling and not just the words they are saying. Different cultures invariably express things in different ways, even similar words can be understood in different ways, and body language can be significant.
- *You may never know if what people tell you is completely true*, and it is hard to measure up a story when the normal parameters do not apply. You have to take a certain amount on trust, and you may find *cultural signals confusing*. A failure to make eye contact may appear a sign of untrustworthiness or trauma, when in reality it may only be what is regarded as respectful in the country of origin.
- We all make *cultural mistakes*, whether in your assumptions, language or behaviour, such as simply forgetting to remove your shoes in an Asian house.
- You may be confronted by *new unpleasant issues* such as child prostitution and people trafficking.
- You may find yourself *acting at or beyond the edge of the law* and uncertain where the moral and legal boundaries lie.
- Above all you will not be human if you do not experience *frustration and anger, pain and guilt*, as there is often little which can be done to assist in immigration cases which are governed by procedures which seem beyond influence.

The words we use... We need to find out what people want to be called, and to expect change – at one time ‘coloured’ was acceptable for African or Caribbean people, now, in almost all cases, it is not. People became proud to be ‘black’, but some may now prefer to be ‘people of colour’. People from the far East were once happy to be called ‘Asian’ or ‘British Asian’ or ‘Irish Asian’ but now some prefer other, more precise, religious, ethnic or national names.

Helping to build more inclusive communities

Christians are not just called to be welcoming within their congregations but also within their private lives and in how they act as part of the wider community.

'The command to love your neighbour extends to everybody who lives near you and everybody you meet in the six days between attending church. ... We should avoid thinking of 'church' as simply a 'church' building and instead think of ourselves as the active, committed people of God.'

Welcoming Angels, Dublin 2005, p. 40.

Extracts from some suggestions by Rt Rev. Dr Ken Newell, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland on the subject of racism:

Refocus on the life God calls you to live in your community: 'live a life of love'.

Assess your emotional involvement with the issue: 'Before Hlaleleni from Zimbabwe described the hell of racist abuse she had been put through in an estate in East Belfast, I felt emotionally detached from the problem of racism. After hearing her story of windows smashed, doors kicked in and dog's dirt shovelled in piles on her doorstep, I changed.'

Change your lifestyle: 'Become more socially inclusive. If you rarely have people from a different ethnic, religious or cultural backgrounds to your home for a meal, why not adopt a different approach? Open your heart and your home. ... There is nothing more powerful than your neighbours seeing you enjoy the friendship of people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.'

Open up the issue in your church: 'Compile a dossier of racial attacks in your area. Share this material with your friends in church. Present it to your minister and church leaders. Ask them to discuss it and initiate a positive response in your area. ... Would Jesus be passive if he lived in your neighbourhood? He does!'

From lion & lamb: racism and religious liberty, Autumn 2004

What we can learn about each other

- Encourage racial awareness and anti-racism training.
- Hold celebration meals such as harvest suppers where you might invite people from a minority ethnic group to cook for you.
- Celebrate festivals such as Chinese New Year.
- Visit cultural centres together. For example, people from a rural background, anywhere in the world, will find something in common at somewhere like the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.
- Visit the cultural centres of minority ethnic communities – such as the Indian Community Centre in Belfast, to learn, and affirm their presence as part of a shared society.

- Learn about other people's religious beliefs and practices by hosting an exhibition, visiting religious centres, or inviting members of other faiths to explain their religious beliefs.
- Encourage young people to study the languages, cultures and religions of people from local minority ethnic populations.
- Find ways of celebrating and honouring the achievement of individuals and groups from minority ethnic populations in your community.
- Use any forum, inter-church groups, Community Safety Groups, District Policing Partnerships, to make sure that even minor acts of racism are taken seriously.

The use of church premises and other resources

- Churches form part of the social capital of a community and many already make their buildings, facilities and the skills of their members available to other groups. These are some suggestions as to how our churches can, and are being used:
- A community audit of local needs
- Working with others on a welcome pack for new residents
- Drop-in centres giving people the chance to integrate
- Mother and toddler groups for refugees or the families of migrant workers
- Language classes
- Advice centres for newcomers
- Recreational facilities for minority ethnic groups

What the Bible Says about Welcoming Outsiders

At the EMBRACE Annual General Meeting in 2004 Sr Brighde Vallely (EMBRACE Vice-Chairperson) reflected how, in John's Gospel, while Peter warmed himself by a charcoal fire, in the in-group, Jesus was in the out-group, among the demonised. After the resurrection, it was Jesus who cooked breakfast on a charcoal fire for the disciples, and Peter, following his earlier denials of Christ, had the opportunity to make his threefold response to Jesus' question: "Do you love me?" Brighde then asked 'So what must we do?' and answered:

- Repent of sectarianism, racism and prejudice
- Wash the feet of others
- Churches and church communities should be communities of the inclusive charcoal fire.
- Be informed and learn to ask the right questions, of Churches, politicians and policy makers

Embracing the Stranger

God is portrayed in the scriptures as identifying with fallen and broken humanity. God revealed Himself as the God of the outsider when He intervened in the lives of the Israelites in Egypt. His liberation of His people from their oppression displayed His commitment to the marginalized and the vulnerable. And it is this concern, compassion and commitment that God holds up as a blueprint for His followers. ...

The Israelites themselves are portrayed as sojourners or tenants on the land that God has given them and their tenancy is linked to their obedience to God. Indeed, the way in which the stranger, together with the widow and the orphan, is treated, is an indicator of the Israelites' obedience to the law of God and it is this commitment to justice and the defence of the weak that the prophets highlight repeatedly. God does want lip service; He desires obedience. He requires us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him (Micah 6:8). The stranger provides the opportunity for the Israelite to reciprocate the heart of God for the downtrodden and the oppressed. ...

Jesus takes this a step further when he tells his disciples that what they do to the stranger, they do to Him. He is in the guise of the stranger, the poor and the weak and His call is to treat all people as we would treat Him. In the incarnation Jesus comes as a stranger into this world. ... Jesus understands those who seek refuge and asylum and identifies with them. As the stranger on the road to Emmaus, He draws alongside and supports the weak. His great call is to hospitality, a central theme of scripture. Jesus epitomised hospitality in his welcome and treatment of those on the fringes of society. But it was more than a welcome. His hospitality was about reconciliation and the transformation from stranger to guest and from guest to friend.

Part of an article by EMBRACE chairperson, Richard Kerr, in *lion & lamb: racism and religious liberty*, Autumn 2004.

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13: 1–2).

Some biblical sources:

Who is my neighbour?	Luke 10 25–37
How to treat a foreigner	Leviticus 19 33–34
How foreigners can be a blessing	The book of Ruth
Justice love and fellowship	Micah 6: 8
Treating others as we treat the Lord	Matthew 25: 31–46
The gift of hospitality	Hebrews 13: 2
Breaking down barriers	Ephesians 2: 11–22

Policy on Asylum Seekers and Refugees; a Report by the Race Relations Committee to the 2003 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, p. 15.

Some useful organisations:

For a more comprehensive list of organisations see our web site:

If telephoning from the Republic of Ireland please drop the code (028) and use (004 28)

Animate Project

Unit T2 Dungannon Enterprise Park
2 Coalisland Rd
Dungannon
BT71 6JT
Tel: (028) 8772 9439
Fax: (028) 8772 2869
E-mail: info@animate-ccd.net
Web: <http://www.animate-ccd.net>

Belfast Islamic Centre

38 Wellington Park
Belfast
BT9 6DN
Tel: (028) 9066 4465
Fax: (028) 9091 3148
E-mail: info@belfastislamiccentre.org.uk
Web: www.belfastislamiccentre.org.uk

Belfast Welcome Centre

65 St Peter's Square North
Belfast
BT12 4DH
Tel: (028) 9023 4387

Centre for Global Education

9 University Street
Belfast BT7 1FY
Tel: (028) 9024 1879
E-mail: info@cge.uk.com
Web: www.globaldimensions.org.uk

Amnesty International Northern Ireland

397 Ormeau Road
Belfast
BT7 3GP
Tel: (028) 9064 3000
E-mail: nireland@amnesty.org.uk
Web: www.amnesty.org.uk

Community Relations Council

6 Murray Street
Belfast,
BT1 6DN
Tel: (028) 9022 7500
Fax: (028) 9022 7551
E-mail: info@community-relations.org.uk
Web: www.community-relations.org.uk

Chinese Welfare Association

133–135 University Street
Belfast
BT7 1HP
Tel: (028) 9028 8277
Fax: (028) 9028 8278

Concordia

C/o Countryside Services Ltd
97 Moy Road
Dungannon
BT71 7HA
Tel: (028) 8778 8242
E-mail: info@concordiapartnership.org
Web: www.concordiapartnership.org

Council for the Homeless in Northern Ireland

72 North Street
Belfast, BT1 1LD
Tel: (028) 9024 6440
E-mail: info@chnii.org.uk
Web: www.chni.org.uk

CHNI North West

79 Strand Road
Derry
BT48 7BW
Tel: (028) 7136 6363

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Equality House
7–9 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DP
Tel: (028) 9050 0600
Fax: (028) 9024 8687
E-mail: information@equalityni.org
Web: www.equality.org

Indian Community Centre

86 Clifton Street
Belfast
BT13 1AB
Tel: (028) 9024 9746
E-mail: info@iccbelfast.org.uk

Law Centre (NI)

124 Donegall Street
Belfast BT1 2GY
Tel: (028) 9024 4401
Fax: (028) 9023 6340
Textphone (028) 9023 9938
E-mail admin.belfast@lawcentreni.org
Web: www.lawcentreni.org

Law Centre (NI) North West

9 Clarendon Street
Derry
BT48 7EP
Telephone (028) 7126 2433
E-mail: admin.derry@lawcentreniwest.org

Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (MCRC)

9 Lower Crescent
Belfast BT7 1NR
Phone (028) 9024 4639
Fax (028) 9032 9581
E-mail mcrc@mcrc-ni.org
Web: www.mcrc-ni.org

**Northern Ireland Council for
Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)**

3rd Floor
Ascot House
24-31 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast BT2 7DB
Tel: (028) 9023 8645 / (028) 90319666
Fax: (028) 9031 948
E-mail info@nicem.org.uk
Web: www.nicem.org.uk

NICEM Ballymoney

Tel: (028) 2766 9149
Fax: (028) 2766 8920
E-mail: mpetrushkin@nicem.org.uk

RAG Refugee Action Group

c/o MCRC
9 Lower Crescent; Belfast BT7 1NR
Tel: (028) 90 244639
Fax: (028) 90 329 581
E-mail: refugee@mcrc-ni.org
Web: www.mcrc-ni.org/RAG/RAG%20home.htm

Red Cross

87 University Street
Belfast BT7 1HP
(028) 9024 6400
Web: www.redcross.org.uk

Refugee Action Group

c/o MCRC

9 Lower Crescent

Belfast

BT7 1NR

Tel: (028) 9024 4639

Fax: (028) 9032 9581

E-mail: refugeeactiongroup@hotmail.co.uk

Web: see www.mcrc-ni.org

Shelter

10–12 High Street

Belfast

BT1 2BA

Tel: (028) 9024 5640

E-mail: info@housingrights.org.uk

Web: northernireland.shelter.org.uk

STEP

(South Tyrone Empowerment Programme)

Unit T7

Dungannon Business Park

2 Coalisland Road

Dungannon

BT71 6JT

Tel: (028) 8773 9002

Traveller Movement (NI)

30 University Street

Belfast

BT7 1FZ

Tel: (028) 9020 2727

Fax: (028) 9020 2005

E-mail: inof@tmni.org

Web: www.tmni.org

Sources

Web Sites

Home Office, Immigration and Nationality Directorate	www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk
Refugee Council (UK)	www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees)	www.unhcr.ch

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Christian Welcome

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