

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 Northern 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 for practical help to those in need.

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WHO'S WHO? WHO'S HERE?

**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 address some
of that confusion.**

Did you know?

- The UK hosts only about 3% of the world's refugees.
- Most refugees from war zones or areas of civil unrest flee to neighbouring countries.
- Jordan and Syria host 1.5 million Iraqi refugees. UK received 950 applications for asylum from Iraq nationals in 2006.
- 250,000 Scots Irish left here for North America, in the 18th century, before the main waves of Irish emigration began.
- Many people continue to leave here, an estimated 21,000 in 2006-07.
- N. Ireland had its lowest recorded unemployment figures in July 2007, an estimated 3.7%.

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 up to 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 100 people per year, at present, and most applications are unsuccessful. Estimates suggest that there are only 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 benefits if their applications fail and some are forced into destitution.

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

A No, they have come here to escape persecution and have to apply for benefits from the Border and Immigration Agency because they are usually not allowed to work. While their application is being considered a single person over 25 seeking asylum receives £41.41 per week, plus money towards housing costs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION READ

Forced to Flee, published by the Refugee Action Group and available from EMBRACE and on pdf at www.mcrc-ni.org

Migrants

Q Who is a migrant worker?

A Someone who leaves his or her home to work elsewhere. The term is usually applied today 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 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 new EU Accession States are free to come here but must register to work in most jobs, paying a one-off £70.00 fee. They are not entitled to health or 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, although they have joined the EU.)
- Employers must apply for Work Permits if they employ people from other countries such as China, the United States or India. Employers have to demonstrate that they cannot fill the post any other way.
- Foreign Students studying on a full-time basis can work part time.

Q How many people work here illegally?

A Nobody is sure but a recent Home Office estimate was around 2000; most enter the country legally but overstay work permits or visitors' visas.

Q Why is there so much migration today?

A There has always been migration. 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 more incoming workers are needed.

Q How many migrant workers come here?

A Figures are slow to emerge, complex, and hard to interpret, but between May 2004 and March 2007 24,000 people from the new EU states registered under the Workers' Registration Scheme. For more figures see www.nisra.gov.uk

Q Do we really need migrant workers?

A Migrant workers would not come here or stay here if there were no job vacancies. We have both skills gaps and labour shortages, especially in hospitals and nursing homes, food processing and farming, IT and service industries.

Q Do they cost us money?

A No. 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 and contribute to the local economy by buying necessities, paying rent, etc. Most migrants do send money home, but they have helped us to sustain economic growth.

Q What about jobs for local people?

A Migrants do increase competition for jobs, but unemployment has remained low. There are, no doubt, some cases where migrant workers have displaced local workers, but this is the decision of local employers. If they are paying migrant workers (or local workers) below the minimum wage, they are breaking the law.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on myths about migrant workers see www.animate-ccd.net

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