

Embracing Diversity

Information Update 2008

EMBRACE NI

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Introduction

As in previous years, this update gives a brief overview of the issues that concern minority ethnic people, migrant workers and those who seek asylum in Northern Ireland. It also gives some suggestions for Christians who want to make this a more welcoming place for incomers. Some of the text is unchanged from last year but where there have been developments we hope that this booklet will help keep you up to date. We have also included some new subjects.

Immigration and asylum law and procedures are complex and subject to change. Although we have tried to be as accurate as possible, bear in mind the possibility of generalisation or inaccuracy. The immigration situation is also subject to change. We try to keep our members updated about major changes through our newsletters and links from our web site to other sites.

Inevitably we highlight problems experienced by migrants and minority ethnic people, such as racism. However, we do not want to emphasise problems in a way that makes it difficult for people to be seen as individuals with varied gifts and strengths, as well as vulnerability – just like the rest of the population. We hope that, in this European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 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 respect.

EMBRACE is a voluntary group of Christians from all the main denominations in Northern Ireland. Our primary role is to provide information and resources for Churches groups 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 and others. We are also involved in supporting refugees and foreign nationals by activities such as befriending, advocacy, transport, and providing food for social events. EMBRACE on the Street enables Belfast churches to provide practical support for destitute foreign nationals. An emergency fund was established in 2006–7. This is used to provide vital emergency assistance to people such as destitute migrant workers and people seeking asylum who have no other means of support, either statutory or charitable. This involves collaboration between church congregations and other voluntary and statutory groups. Other practical initiatives include our resource library in Belfast, which you can consult if you phone in advance.

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.

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Migration

We have always had small numbers of incomers, but over the centuries people throughout the island of Ireland became used to migration as a one-way process, with thousands of people leaving here for the New World, never to return.

In recent years 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 very recently, but we now have an economy that needs additional workers. Our declining birth rate is major factor leading to job vacancies and skills shortages. The recent past has seen great change. The population of Belfast, for example, dropped from a high of 400,000 in the middle of the twentieth century to 270,000 in 2006 – and it is still falling. Companies and public employers are actively recruiting abroad and, as more migrant workers come here, they encourage others to follow.

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 this figure does not include people who were born in this country and who are members of minority ethnic groups.) It is clear that numbers have expanded since then. Between 2004 and the end of 2008, 29,810 people from the A8 European Accession states (see p.??) registered as part of the Workers Registration Scheme. A report in 2006 suggested that the 'non-indigenous' population might be closer to 45,000.

More recently, this year, Sir Reg Empey, Minister for Employment and Learning, quoting Labour Force Survey estimates, stated that between September and November 2007 there were 58,000 people, aged 16 and over, in employment in Northern Ireland, who were born outside the UK. An estimated 46,000 of these were born outside both the UK and the Republic of Ireland www.lawcentreni.org/Policy/Assembly/Assembly%202008/Assembly_update_2008.htm

People come here primarily for the same reason that our young people still leave: for better employment prospects and higher incomes. Earlier immigrants tended to come to our cities. While many still arrive in Belfast, the latest migrants often move on and the latest jobs that they fill are much more widely spread. Most country towns and rural areas now have some foreign nationals working there. Most have found work in food factories, building-sites, hospitals and nursing homes, fishing and fish processing, shops, fast food outlets and restaurants. However, the most recent Accession Monitoring Report has shown that the largest category of workers in the registration scheme, 8,910 people, were working in administration, business and management services, showing how widespread the need has been for additional workers right across the economy.

Some reasons why accurate figures on migration are difficult to obtain

- Foreign nationals resident in GB, who move here, will tend to be identified simply as GB residents.
- Some people may register for work here while still living in the Irish Republic.
- There may be a time delay in people registering for work.
- People who register again after a period away may be regarded mistakenly as a new applicant.
- People applying for National Insurance numbers or registering for work only cover some of the adult population.
- The numbers of unauthorised or undocumented people are impossible to assess accurately.
- Historically, there has been no legal requirement for people to register when they enter or leave the country.

The numbers leaving here are still high, an estimated 21,000 in 2006–07, and while we see growing numbers of immigrants, many only come for a short time in the hope of improving their lives and then leave, just as many of our young people return. (An Institute of Policy Research report, *Floodgates or Turnstile*, April 2008, suggests that of roughly 1 million workers who came to the UK from central and eastern Europe in the four years since EU enlargement, roughly half have already returned home.) However, some people are making this their permanent home and so we have a gradually increasing number of minority ethnic people living among us from a rich diversity of backgrounds. It is reckoned that there are people living here from at least 120 different countries.

Ethnic diversity

The authors of How Public Authorities Provide Services to Minority Ethnic Groups: Emerging Findings Discussion Paper, estimate that the Northern Ireland population of 1.68 million in 2001 will rise to 1.8 million in 2030 and ethnic diversity will change from 1–2.5% to 5%.

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.

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 other countries 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 they were often familiar to some degree with the local culture.

The first wave of more recent migrants has 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 people being recruited in the Philippines, South Asia and, to a lesser extent, Africa.

European Union enlargement in 2004 coincided with economic expansion here and people from Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (the A8), Cyprus and Malta, became 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. By the end of 2006 a total 14,405 A8 nationals had registered for work here. A further 8,335 registered in 2007 making an overall total of 33,470. The latest accession countries, Bulgaria and Romania (A2) have been treated differently from the A8 countries. Nationals from these countries are free to be here but need work permits for most forms of employment.

The Workers Registration Scheme figures for May 2004–March 2005 show that 70% of new registered migrants were men, and most were in their twenties and thirties. The women were in similar age groups. For a similar period (April 2004 – March 2005) there were at least 10 applications for National Insurance numbers from people from each of 37 countries other than the Irish Republic. Work permits are required for people outside the European Economic area, and in the same period, around a quarter of the jobs requiring work permits were in the health service with the next greatest number, 20%, in the computer services industry.

Neil Jarman's research on migrant workers in Belfast in 2006/07 revealed that there is a roughly 60/40 male/female split, most are within the 18–34 age range, and around 16% of new migrants are children under the age of sixteen www.belfastcity.gov.uk/goodrelations/research.asp?menuitem=research. The latest Accession Monitoring Report (May 2004–December 2007) for the whole UK echoes this pattern: 82% of people registering are aged between 18

and 34; 93% said they had no dependents when they registered; and only 6% had dependents under 17. Although it has begun to increase, the number of A8 nationals applying for tax-funded benefits in the whole UK is very low. For example, only 3004 of the 11,992 applications in 2007 for Income Support or Jobseekers allowance were allowed to proceed.

SOME OF THE LANGUAGES 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, Malayala, Malayo, Mandarin, Marati, Mina, Mirpuri, Oriya, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Pushtu, Romani, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Sindhi, Sohosa, Spanish, Swahili, Sylheti, Tagalog, Tamazight, Tamil, Turkish, Telugu, Tetum, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, Xhosa, Yiddish, Yoruba.

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

'Surveys of linguistic competence show that the United Kingdom and Ireland have the lowest levels of language skills in a survey of 28 European countries.' N Ireland Languages Strategy Fact Sheet March 2008.

Until recently there has been little understanding locally of the value of language learning. However, the focus of the world economy is shifting and our future exports will depend on our ability to communicate with markets where English is not necessarily well understood. Our own tourist industry also requires a much wider facility with languages across the community. So, in future it will not just be important for incomers to have easy access to learning English, it will be important for local children to appreciate languages and that past inhibitions about language learning should disappear.

Migration has meant that the government has had to allocate increasing resources to Education and Library Boards for the teaching of English as an Additional Language (EAL), from an annual figure of £200,000 in 2002–03 to £834,000 in 2006–07, but there is concern as to whether resources are adequate.

'All too often, migrants are only seen as a problem – migrant children underperforming at school or adult migrants with only a minimal command of the language of the host country. What is often overlooked is the fact that migrants constitute a valuable language resource.' EU Commission Communication, 2005.

A consultation has been taking place about a Northern Ireland Languages Strategy. To find out more see www.nils.org.uk

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, religion, social group or political opinion, in their own country, and seeks refuge in another country.

Q Who is a refugee?

A Someone who applies for asylum, and is successful in being granted

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' or 'asylum applicant'.

refugee status, under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to Refugees. 'Refugee' is also used as a 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 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, can be tools used by 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 when they moved to other countries.

Q Who is an 'illegal' immigrant?

These are words that are often used as a term of abuse for people who do not have the correct documentation to allow them to remain in the country. Most people in this situation entered the country perfectly legally but their visas have expired or they are unaware that they need to renew work permits. More appropriate terms might be 'unauthorised' or 'undocumented' person or 'irregular migrant'.

Q What is the difference between Trafficking and People Smuggling?

Both involve illegal acts. In smuggling, people are transported, usually across international boundaries, having given consent. In trafficking there can be a combination of recruitment, deception, and transportation for exploitation and the exploitation is the key factor. People may give their initial consent. They may think they are going to have proper jobs in a new country, only to find they are in the power of gangsters, or have been misled about the work, conditions or remuneration. Of course consent does not apply where children are concerned. In either trafficking or smuggling, people can end up with a large financial debt that puts them in the power of others. (See also pp??)

THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF MASS MIGRATION

People have moved from their home countries for centuries, but the volume has risen rapidly in the last decade. It is reckoned that now over 200 million people in the world live outside their country of birth. In the GB this has created public concern that is fuelled by media hysteria.

Pull Factors

Migrants are drawn increasingly to countries such as UK and Ireland because:

- Developed countries, or industrialised city areas within countries, draw

labour from countries or areas where income is lower.

- International transport has never been easier and is cheaper than ever relative to incomes.
- The telephone and internet age make information easier to access.
- Falling birth rates in developed countries contribute to labour shortages and skills gaps.
- People are drawn to stable democracies where human rights and religious freedoms should be respected.
- Many people in other parts of the world understand and speak English.

Push Factors

People look for work abroad partly because these pull factors but these are usually accompanied by a range of economic and other problems that combine to push them away from home.

- Poverty and low incomes
- High unemployment rates
- Persecution and poor human rights
- Internal conflict and war
- Natural disasters, climate change and famine

Impacts on Countries of Origin

• Economic disadvantage

Many eastern European countries are hampered in their own economic development by the loss of skilled people and those of working age. The Polish birth rate, for example, is one of the lowest in Europe.

• Loss of highly trained people, especially health workers

'At least 4 million health care professionals are urgently needed around the world, with especially dire shortfalls in AIDS-ravaged parts of Africa' according to the director of the World Health Organization, Margaret Chan. 'Some powerful countries have gone to Third World countries to recruit their doctors and nurses'. *International Herald Tribune* 3 April 2007. This has a knock-on effect on preventive medicine for children, pregnancy care and access to treatment. Life expectancy in many poorer countries is half of that in rich nations and Western countries need to be especially careful not to 'poach' workers from these countries.

• Social problems for children

For example, access to jobs in Irish agriculture, on both sides of the border, with higher pay rates than those at home, means that the many children left behind in Latvia by both parents, 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. Migrant children lose the benefits of their wider families back home.

• Developing countries benefit from remittances

These probably now outstrip international development aid in value. (For example, in 2007, nearly \$24 billion passed in this way from North America to Mexico.)

• Returning migrants bring back new ideas and skill

In autumn 2006

Poland's unemployment rate was running at around 17.7% and annual GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per head of population was £6,684 compared to 5.1% unemployment and £16,263 GDP in the UK. Since then, unemployment in Poland dropped to 8.5% in November 2007 and there are signs that Poles are returning home as their economy develops and the fall in sterling makes our pay rates less attractive.

The Immigration Debate

We are all aware of the hysterical atmosphere in sections of the UK media around immigration, but 40 years on from Enoch Powell's emotive, 'Rivers of blood' speech, racism and xenophobia have not gone away, but the debate about mass immigration has moved towards more sophisticated debates around economics, resources and social cohesion. One serious recent contribution, is the House of Lords Select Committee of Economic Affairs report, *The Economic Impact of Immigration*, April 2008

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldeconaf/82/8202.htm.

The main argument in the report is that government claims of major economic benefits from mass migration are measured incorrectly. They say that using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of economic success only reveals the size of the economy but that this is not an index of prosperity. They argue that the measure of success must be the effect on income per head of the resident population, and that seen in this light, immigration makes little difference. Immigration may help employers and migrants but not the local population, and it may make it harder for jobless local people to be brought back into the job market.

Equally, they dispute the claim that immigration helps to fill jobs and skills shortages, as immigration itself creates new labour demands and new vacancies. The report also finds that the fiscal benefits are small. Meanwhile, population density, especially in the parts of England where immigrants are most concentrated, has economic consequences on infrastructure expenditure, and especially on the housing market. There are also questions as to whether young immigrants help to defuse the pensions time bomb as they will grow old and need pensions themselves eventually. Few people would disagree with some of the conclusions; that we need more adequate statistics and assessment; should help immigrants with language proficiency; and the need for better enforcements of workers rights, for example. The report was also purely concerned with economics and did not claim to look at the cultural effects of mass immigration. Critics of the report have argued that in a complex world of constantly moving people

'It is impossible to formulate the cost-benefit equation that distinguishes between the value Britain's immigrants take for themselves and that which they share with the rest of the population. ... The salient issue is not what fee in per capita GDP immigrants pay to their hosts, it is what benefit there has been from a generation of economic liberalism and global engagement – and who has been excluded from the bounty.' Observer leading article, 'A healthy economy is impossible with closed borders' 6 April 2008

www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/apr/06/economy.economics?gusrc=rss&feed=politics

Below are just some of the positive and negative impacts that are claimed on either side of the immigration debate.

Positive Impacts

- Economic growth can be sustained. Having had a more liberal immigration policy than other European countries has enabled the Irish and British economies to have one of the longest periods of sustained economic growth

in our histories. UK employment is at a record high at 29.46 million in February 2008. It is estimated that the Irish Republic will need 45,000 extra incoming workers per year to sustain current economic growth.

- Job vacancies and skills gaps can be filled.
- The pension gap can be filled by the contributions of greater numbers of new young workers.
- Immigrants bring energy and innovation (In the USA today, the list of Nobel Laureates contains a disproportionate number of immigrants.) The UK Labour Force Survey reveals that in the years up to 2006, 46% of new immigrant workers had university degrees.
- Services to an ageing population can be maintained despite declining local birth rates.
- Host countries benefit from cultural diversity (This brings special benefits to young people, learning language skills, work ethic and a knowledge of the wider world.)
- Young foreign workers can enhance their life prospects.
- Lower labour costs benefit consumers.
- Failing schools (and those about to close because of falling rolls) can be transformed by numbers of highly-motivated migrant children.

Negative Impacts

- Depression of wages may occur, although recent research tends to show reduction in pay rates are temporary and that immigration simply allows the economy to expand, e.g. 'Increase in immigrants found to aid expansion' (*Financial Times*, 13 May 2005).
- Access to workers willing to work for relatively low pay may encourage employers to ignore the need to become competitive in other ways e.g. by improved production methods.
- Financial benefits may be overstated. (See above.)
- Immigration serves employers more than the local population.
- Migrants may be exploited and conditions may deteriorate in the workplace and in housing.
- By increasing the population, pressure is put on public services such as medicine, housing and education. The UK population is due to rise from 60.6 million in 2006 to 71 million in 2031, mainly due to immigration.
- Unemployment may rise if there are too many incomers. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research suggests that between 60,000 to 90,000 people have lost their jobs in the UK due to recent immigration. However, unemployment remains very low.
- Although job vacancies are filled, migration creates the need for more workers, and far from solving the initial problem the UK has consistently had over 600,000 vacancies since 2001, in spite of mass immigration. (The total at February 2008 was 678,500.) Employers may fail to put proper training and apprenticeships in place if they are able to import skilled workers.
- A large pool of eager young capable foreign workers may make it more difficult to get local people off benefits and back to work. (UK had around 5.4 million people on welfare benefits in 2007.)
- There may be difficulties with cultural integration and friction with local people.

Economic benefit

The CBI and Business for New Europe (BNE) endorsed the Government's highly positive assessment, emphasising that immigration has been of "great economic benefit" to the economy ... The Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) suggested that increased diversity brings "huge economic benefits" ... The assessment of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) was also positive though more cautious: "Overall, immigration has been good for this country. We have more jobs, higher wages, better services and lower taxes than we would have had without immigration ... it is important not to overstate these benefits ... but it is not negligible either". Summary of evidence given before the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs in *The Economic Impact of Immigration Volume I: Report, April 2008, p.22.*

Low pay

The Government's Accession Monitoring Report, 2007, shows that 71% of the applicants to the Worker Registration Scheme from the eight central and Eastern European countries (the A8) between January 2007 and December 2007 stated that they earned between £4.50 and £5.99 per hour. The recent House of Lords Report, however, noted that migrant workers in other categories earn above average pay.

- At a time of heightened awareness of international terrorism, large-scale movements of people lead to more security monitoring.
- There is anxiety about increased crime and anti-social behaviour where large numbers of young incomers are thrown together without being given a sense of community. While overall crime is falling, movement of people does bring new patterns, including organised crime and people trafficking. There is a need for better co-operation between police services internationally.

Summary

It is clear that immigration can be beneficial for migrants, but only if their rights are protected properly. It can also be economically beneficial for both countries of origin and host countries. However, with present economic and trading structures it is the rich and powerful countries that can benefit most. Migration brings social and cultural problems that need to be taken into account in planning for future services. Where the economic preconditions exist, migration is inevitable. If it is banned, it just goes underground.

Migration also has the potential for bringing peoples together culturally. (It is an interesting side issue to the decision of the government to restrict Bulgarian and Romanian workers that this was against the advice of the Foreign Office. They were aware that relationships between friendly countries could be harmed by this decision, and the media scaremongering about Bulgarian and Romanian criminals that preceded it.) There is the possibility that in the long term, migration will have an equalising effect both in terms of the world economy and in the rights of the individual. Making the nation state less important may ultimately contribute to economic equality and world peace.

It is important to recognise our patronising attitudes. Although both mission and Christian development organisations now use much more positive images, many people from a religious background have been imprinted with the idea that people from other parts of the world are victims to be helped. The very charitable impulse to welcome, or support people who are destitute, may lead us to have a subconscious feelings of superiority. Migrants simply want to be received in dignity and equality just as we would hope to be treated in other countries.

IMMIGRATION POLICY AND LEGISLATION

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 to flee from their homes, or of people forced to look for work because of poverty. However, the Government has resisted calls for a cap on overall numbers.

Historically regulations have been complex with 80 different schemes that have allowed people into the UK. In March 2006 the government announced its intention to replace all the different work permit and entry schemes with a single Australian-style points system with 5 tiers, the first phase of which is in place. It applies at first only to highly skilled migrants. So, someone who speaks good English, is a graduate on £40,000 a year (or its local equivalent), will have enough

points. Other workers can come if there is a skills shortage and they have a job offer. It is intended that vacancies requiring low skills will be filled entirely from the European Economic Area.

- **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.

The **Migrant Advisory Committee** advises Government 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 face large fines for each illegal worker. The Migration Impacts Forum examines the social impacts and benefits of migration as experienced at local level.

There are some concerns about these plans:

- 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 in the developing world.
- The system favours wealthy people: for example, the English test will not apply to people who intend to invest £1 million or more in the country.
- The system will discriminate against poorer, less qualified immigrants who may 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 for developing countries. It underlines the detrimental effect of 'selfish' immigration policies that do nothing to address people's underlying need to migrate.

Until the whole system is in place, some of the original system of entry schemes remains in existence.

For more detail on the government's plans see:

www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/managingmigration/apointsbasedsystem/ and BBC News 'Migration: How points will work'

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4244707.stm 29 February 2008

Provisions of the Act:

www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070030_en.pdf

CATEGORIES OF MIGRANT WORKER

These are some of the main categories within the traditional framework :

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 **UK Border Agency** 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.) The latest accession countries, Bulgaria and Romania (A2) have been treated differently from the A8 countries. Nationals from these countries are free to be here but need work permits for most forms of employment.

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. Traditionally, they have helped as language assistants in schools.

Working Holidaymakers 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!

Unauthorised or Undocumented Workers/ Irregular Migrants 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.

'I am working in a school in Newry as a teaching assistant and cleaning after school. I've been working in the school over three years now. At the beginning I was cleaning, then I got the job in the school kitchen. At one moment I was working five jobs (is that not crazy?). I was cleaning two shops in the shopping centre from 8.00 a.m. – 10.00 a.m. Then I got a bus to the school, started in the kitchen at 10.20 am and finished at 12.30 pm, at 12.30 pm I started the classroom assistant job and finished at 2.30 pm and at 2.30 pm I started cleaning till 5.45 pm. Well – that is not all ... then I was cleaning a shop from 10.30 pm till 00.30 am. Well, I have done it!'

Jelena Bahvalova, a Theology graduate, originally from Latvia, who feels at home here, speaking about how hard she once worked. To read more of her story go to www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland-society-ordinarylives-latvia.htm

UK Borders Act 2007

Legislation around immigration has gradually become more restrictive and infringements of regulations criminalised. There are anxieties about a number of the provisions of the UK Borders Act which among other provisions, gives the Home Secretary power to introduce the carrying of compulsory biometric documents for the first time:

- In trying to stop irregular migrants working here immigration officers are able to seize the pay packets of unauthorised workers who may themselves be

the victims of traffickers or unscrupulous employers.

- Immigration officers have increased powers, for example, the ability to detain people on suspicion that an offence has been committed. While these powers have steadily increased in legislation from 1999–2006, so that they parallel the powers of police, this has not been accompanied by increased mechanisms to check abuse of power, similar to those that police are subject to.
- Foreign nationals who have committed a wide range of offences or have been sentenced to one year's imprisonment are to be deported automatically, regardless of the circumstances.

SOCIAL AND JUSTICE ISSUES RELATING TO MIGRANT WORKERS

- **Isolation** and separation from family and culture.
- **Physical and moral danger**, including trafficking and abuse by organised criminals.
- **Racist attitudes**, abuse and attacks. (See also pp???)
- **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. (Deception in this area can be legally defined as trafficking. See pages ? and ?.)
- **Job insecurity** which can lead to pressure to work difficult shifts and long hours.
- **Long-term debt** may be established.
- **Exploitation** especially by employers and agencies.
- **Difficulty in opening bank accounts** can create serious problems.
- **Poor quality living conditions** especially for contract workers. They often end up in multiple occupancy housing. It is common for many migrants to be unaware in advance of the high cost of living here.
- **Inadequate public services** due to the lack of preparation for large numbers of immigrants.
- **The information gap.** Migrants need good information and access to advice about the law and their rights, language classes, medical care, and safe affordable housing. Knowledge about how to open a bank account here, for example, or obtain a driving licence, can be a real hurdle for foreign nationals.
- **Lack of access to interpreters** and the expense of language classes can compound all problems, making it hard for people to communicate their difficulties, or to establish their rights.
- **Homelessness and destitution** if people lose their jobs, or are between jobs. They often have no family or social networks to tide them over.

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. It called for the following:

- A specific Government minister responsible for migrant workers.
- Annual forecasts with realistic predictions relating to the immigrant population.
- A local public enquiry office on immigration, and local advice and support centres for migrant workers.

Strangers into Citizens Campaign

There is a growing feeling among both politicians and church people that unauthorised or undocumented people, who may number around 500,000 in the UK, should be given amnesty and the right to work. They propose a one off regularisation for everyone who has been in the country for over 4 years, to include long-term asylum applicants as well as the many people working without legal documentation. The Strangers into Citizens Campaign held a rally on May Day 2007 in London, attended by faith leaders and trade unionists. Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, who held a special mass for migrant workers in Westminster Cathedral, told the BBC: "Many of them are married, settled down and so they live in a kind of shadow land. That's not right and it's not fair."

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_news/6631193.stm
See also: www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk

- The establishment of a skills advisory service.
- Enforcement of regulations governing houses in multiple occupation.
- A migrant worker emergency rehousing fund.

www.concordiapartnership.org/policy_file.asp March 2006

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. www.concordiapartnership.org/policy_file.asp

Trafficking and People Smuggling (For definitions see p.??)

Our land border with another European state puts us in a unique position in the UK. Cheap direct flights mean that we can be seen as a gateway to both GB and the Irish Republic. As long ago as 2002 the BBC exposed the fact that hundreds of workers had paid money in order to be smuggled into Ireland, to work on farms here on the promise of high wages. In reality they were passed on to farmers who just wanted cheap labour.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/2407629.stm

In addition, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in a briefing to the Government in February 2008, said that 'Due to the very few restricted routes to the UK in which someone can legally seek asylum, many are forced to seek help from traffickers and smugglers.'

www.unhcr.org.uk/info/briefings/PR13Mar08b.html

The authorities see these offences as a danger to society and the economy, and the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) Annual Report and Threat Assessment, 2006, indicated that human trafficking was one of the key organised crime threats to Northern Ireland www.octf.gov.uk. Operation Gull, a multi-agency, cross-border operation headed by the United Kingdom Immigration Service (UKIS) and the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), and involving the Gardai and the PSNI, operates periodically to detect and detain people suspected of immigration offences. (See also pp??)

The major evil of trafficking, however, is the way it endangers people who have been moved illegally. It is impossible to say how many people are victims of trafficking here. Research is complex and dangerous both for the subjects and researchers. People are scared to report offences against them because they fear both the traffickers and the authorities, who may treat them as wrongdoers, and remove them from the country. Past assessments have given low numbers but Alliance MLA Anna Lo has talked about at least 2000 women from China's mainland working illegally in Ulster. She was especially concerned

about the murder of Qu Mei Na, a Chinese woman killed in Belfast in 2004. Speaking in February 2008, following the sentencing of one of the men convicted of her murder she said: 'At the time of the murder it was widely believed in the Chinese community that the woman had been trafficked and that she had been trying to get out of prostitution.' She also quoted police sources as saying that there were up to 70 brothels in N. Ireland, run by foreign gangs and paramilitaries, and that, as well as women, children as young as 11 were being smuggled into the country. Source: Newsletter:

www.newsletter.co.uk/news/MLA-and-Womens-Aid-voice.3751911.jp

Local Action on Trafficking

- Groups such as Women's Aid work with individual women.
- The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Equality Commission and the southern Equality Authority and Human Rights Commission are undertaking joint research.
- In October 2007 a special team of officers was set up in Belfast as part of Pentameter 2, a campaign to research and combat the trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation and forced labour. Police throughout the UK are working with other agencies to tackle the issue.
- It is important to remember the vulnerability and problematic status of people who may have been trafficked. They should be put in touch with the Law Centre, rather than the PSNI, in the first instance. (See Page.??)

An official inquiry was launched in 2007 when the BBC disclosed that migrant workers were being trafficked into Britain and exploited. Detective Chief Constable Grahame Maxwell programme director of the UK Human Trafficking Centre, said the opening of Europe's borders had brought with it a new kind of people trafficking ... 'This is a kind of forced or bonded labour – this is modern day slavery.' Paul Whitehouse, a Quaker, who chairs the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority (see page ??) said 'It's two hundred years since slavery was abolished. We mustn't allow it to continue now.' Aidan McQuade, director of campaign group Anti-Slavery International, said trafficking to exploit labour included the use of deception, intimidation, the removal of documents, excessive charges for accommodation and transport, the exploitation of someone's irregular immigration status or the fact they are in debt, in order to force them to work in conditions they do not agree to.

To read more see BBC News: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6594577.stm> See also the GLA web site: www.gla.gov.uk

Some Organisations and Resources

CHASTE (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe),

E: admin@chase.org.uk

T: 0845 456 9335.

www.chaste.org.uk

CORI (NI) has set up a focus group on human trafficking. Contact: Brighde Vallely

E: corini@btconnect.com

T: (028) 9064 5068

www.corie.ie/NorthernIreland

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Education Worker: Rebecca Dudley

E: rebecca.dudley@nihrc.org

www.nihrc.org

Set All Free Coalition

www.setallfree.net

Reports:

Rebecca Dudley, 'Crossing Borders: Preliminary Research on Human Trafficking in Northern Ireland', 2006.

www.niwaf.org/home%20page/Crossing%20Borders%20trafficking%20report.pdf

Irish Refugee Council Report, *Making Separated Children Visible*

www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/pub06/children.pdf

Home Office, Immigration and Border Agency report, *A Scoping Project on Child Trafficking in the UK* www.ceop.gov.uk/publications/research.asp

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland/ Dublin City University, *No Way Forward:*

Identifying the Problem of Trafficking for Forced Labour in Ireland, Dublin,

www.mrci.ie/publications

'We will honour William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, the Clapham Sect, the slaves who were real champions of freedom and all those who spent their lives in the pursuit of others' freedom, if we apply ourselves to tackle the injustices of our own day. There is much to be done. ... It is for all of us today to stand up against the unfinished business of all that enslaves human beings – [including] the slavery of trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation ...'

The Church of England Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, speaking at the William Wilberforce Memorial Lecture, City Hall, Hull, 30 October 2007.

Full text www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/cgi/news/news.cgi?t=template&a=1187

MIGRANT WORKER DESTITUTION

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

Some migrant workers from the A8 accession states have ended up destitute, and living rough on the streets. This can be for a number of reasons. They may have used all their savings to get here and pay the £90 to register for employment. If a job falls through they may have totally underestimated the cost of living here and quickly run out of money. People on short-term contracts may have to send money to families at home and fail to make sufficient savings out of relatively low pay. If they cannot get a new job quickly they soon become homeless. This is especially true of people who have been living in tied accommodation who could not possibly find the deposit for a flat.

Once migrant workers are homeless they face more problems than local people. Migrant workers here on visas are not entitled to official homelessness

advice. The language barrier makes understanding forms and regulations an additional problem. Migrants within the Workers Registration Scheme need to have been in uninterrupted employment before they are entitled to welfare benefits and anything other than emergency health care. (The devolved parliament in Scotland has chosen to stand apart from the rest of UK and does not debar new EU entrants from benefits.)

Because they are disbarred from benefits, if they end up on the streets it may not be possible to get a hostel bed. Private hostels for homeless people 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. Foreign rough sleepers have been subject to harassment and intimidation and homelessness makes it almost impossible to obtain and hold down employment and get back into employment. Destitute local people usually have a prior history of social problems, for migrant workers it can happen in the opposite way. Destitution itself 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.

EMBRACE has occasionally funded transport for people who are ill, or desperate to return home.

EMBRACE on the Street

In response to emerging concerns about migrant worker destitution, a pilot project, **EMBRACE on the Street** was organised with churches and organisations in the community sector who work with homelessness people. In consultation with Homeplus, the Belfast Welcome Centre and the Simon Community a list of needs: clothing, blankets, toiletries and easily handled foodstuffs was drawn up. Inner-city churches in Belfast provide goods and storage for Homeplus – a voluntary organisation seeking out 'rough sleepers' to offer support.

Homelessness charities have observed that with early support it is relatively easy to get these destitute foreign nationals back into jobs before they slip into a cycle of severe social problems. So, in some cases money has provided a couple of nights in a hostel to make it easier for people to get back into work quickly. The pilot is now being analysed to assess future needs.

NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES ABOUT MIGRANT WORKERS

People who help migrant workers to adjust to life here are 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 more, see *Migrant Workers: Frequently Asked Questions, Challenging Myths, Anti-Racism, Useful Terminology, Problematic Terminology*, on the Animate web site: www.animate-ccd.net.

"The migrants are taking our jobs."

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 Home Office calculates that after subtracting benefits and public services

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'Migrant workers are making a substantial contribution to Britain's economy, and some sectors would collapse if they were removed overnight. They haven't caused mass unemployment or held wages down as some would have us believe.

But we do not do enough to protect vulnerable workers, whether migrant or indigenous, from exploitation. If migrant workers are treated fairly and paid a decent wage they can only add to the economy, and pose no threat to the livelihoods of the rest of the workforce.

The availability of migrant workers should not stop employers or government helping unemployed and disadvantaged UK citizens into work, nor stop efforts to give the low skilled the new skills they need to improve their job security and help them get better jobs.'

TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, announcing the launch of
TUC study The Economics of Migration, 14 June 2007.
www.tuc.org.uk/law/tuc-13413-f0.cfm

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 calculated recently 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."

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, or others who have been here for some time.

"I don't mind 'them' being here but 'they' need to behave."

Everyone is subject to the law and should behave. If a person a migrant worker misbehaves, that should not reflect badly on others from their country or ethnic group. We have our fair share of local people who misbehave. Clearer guidelines on our customs and laws should be made available to new arrivals.

"The stereotyping of a group of people as criminals has always been an easy way to demonise them. This has at times happened with migrant workers – for examples racist stereotypes such as "they all carry knives" based on a handful of real or imagined incidents that allegedly involved individual migrant workers. Imagine that if following an incident involving people in the local communities that people went round saying "all local people carry knives." "

Migrant Workers: Frequently Asked Questions, Challenging Myths, Anti-Racism, Useful Terminology, Problematic Terminology, Animate, 2007. www.animate-ccd.net

A recent survey shows that there is a mixture of negative and positive attitudes towards migrant workers:

- 24% of respondents thought Northern Ireland people were very prejudiced towards migrant workers. However, only 3% of respondents consider themselves to be very prejudiced;
- 49% of respondents agree or strongly agree that migrant workers are generally good for the local economy;
- 45% of respondents feel that migrant workers take jobs away from people

who were born in Northern Ireland;

- 25% of respondents agree or strongly agree that migrant workers come to Northern Ireland just to get social security benefits;
- 20% of respondents felt that migrant workers were more law abiding than locals;
- 59% of respondents agree or strongly agree that migrant workers are more hard working than local workers;
- 63% of respondents feel that the number of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland puts a strain on services;
- 76% of respondents feel that migrant workers mostly take up jobs local workers do not want;
- 85% of respondents think that migrant workers are prepared to work for lower wages than local workers.

Extracts from the NI Omnibus Survey
on the public's attitude to migrant workers, 19 June 2007.

To access the full survey go to
www.delni.gov.uk/publicattitudetomigrantworkers

For further surveys on attitudes towards minority ethnic people, and other research resources, see the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey web site:
<http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/minethres.html>

POSITIVE INITIATIVES

It is easy to be critical of the lack of preparation for large-scale immigration but there have now been many positive initiatives across the public sector and other sectors in society. There has been considerable research, collaboration, and positive action. These are just some examples.

- The **Equality Commission** has held a number of conferences on employing migrant workers and published important documents including *Employing Migrant Workers – A Good Practice Guide for Employers* in 2006, and a *Code of Practice for the elimination of Racial Discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment* in 2007. See www.equalityni.org.

- In May 2006 the mid-Ulster migrant worker support groups, **Animate** and **STEP** (South Tyrone Empowerment Programme), joined with the **National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism** to hold a conference on 'Promoting the Rights of Migrant Workers'. This pinpointed many of the human and civil rights issues raised by migration. Organisations such as STEP

'Migration has had a significant impact on UK communities in past years but while this has led to new demands made on the police service, the evidence does not support theories of a large scale crime wave generated through migration. In fact, crime has been falling across the country over the past year. Many migrants are young professionals looking to earn money and return to their home countries. Cultural differences such as attitudes to offences like drink driving may exist, but can be exaggerated. ... The influx of eastern Europeans has created pressures on forces in some areas, including local rumour and misunderstandings fuelling tensions which police have had to be proactive in resolving, and leading to significant increases in spending on interpreters, which can also make investigations more complex.'

Association of Chief Police Officers for England Wales & N Ireland (ACPO) press release, 16 April 2008
www.acpo.police.uk/asp/news/PRDisplay.asp?PR_GUID={017B1944-5CB2-43F6-BE22-E9AD91364597}

The words we use...

It is common to hear people talk about 'non-nationals'. This is demeaning as well as inaccurate. 'Foreign nationals' is more appropriate.

provide support services including translation.

- Research in Scotland, the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland enabled the publication 2006 of *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups*.
- Some local businesses and other organisations have signed up to the **Voluntary Code of Practice for the Employment of Migrant Workers** produced by Business in the Community <http://www.bitc.org.uk/document.rm?id=7246>.

'Migrant workers play an important part in shaping our local communities and in contributing to a more robust Northern Ireland economy. This economy remains dynamic despite the threat of potential labour shortages which migrant workers help to overcome. I am therefore particularly encouraged by the significant level of recognition, that migrant workers are making a valuable input to local businesses and industry. ... It remains a priority for my Department to ensure we have a modern and effective employment rights infrastructure that will afford suitable protection for all Northern Ireland workers, not least for those who may be more vulnerable, such as migrant workers.'

Sir Reg Empey, NI Employment and Learning Minister, commenting on the NI Omnibus Survey on the public's attitude to migrant workers, 19 June 2007.

- **The Irish Congress of Trade Unions** has appointed a Migrant Worker Support Officer to help protect rights and, with the Equality Commission, launched a *Your Rights at Work* leaflet in five languages. For further information Tel: 028 90 247140 or email: Kasia.Garbal@ictuni.org
- **The Migrant Worker Support Network** (MWSN), organised through STEP, allows voluntary and community groups and practitioners to share information and expertise.
- The **Gangmasters Licencing Act** became law in 2006. It seeks to curb exploitative activities of 'gangmasters' otherwise known as 'labour providers' – people who provide a flexible workforce especially where seasonal labour is required. It creates a clearer distinction between legal and illegal labour providers. However, it is limited in its remit and applies mostly to the agriculture and food processing industry.
- The **Gangmasters Licensing Authority** (GLA) shares intelligence and co-operates with other agencies in working to safeguard the welfare of workers. Licences are issued for 12 months and there is an inspection system. It only has a small number of people responsible for compliance and there is still widespread concern about vulnerable workers.
- The **Department of Employment and Learning** now has a migrant workers branch. This co-ordinates a group to address issues of research regarding statistics, needs and public services; joined up government and information sharing; inspection and enforcement; and the roles of the government and voluntary/community sector. Their advice guides are in a number of languages www.delni.gov.uk/index/er/er-migrant-workers.htm
- The **Department of Employment and Learning** also has a Migrant Worker Thematic Sub-Group to the Racial Equality Forum, which is inter-departmental

and includes members from the voluntary and community sector. This examines the role of government and community sectors.

- As cohesive national and ethnic groups are becoming more confident, associations are being formed and organising activities e.g. the Lithuanian Association's Lithuanian Cultural Day in Dungannon, in April 2008.

There is better information for incomers. For example

- The **Multi-Cultural Resource Centre** (MCRC), Orientation Pack for Migrants, compiled by Tatiana Rehakova, for people from mid and eastern European accession states contains leaflets with advice on employment, housing, social security, benefits, health services, education, shopping, transport and opening a bank account. To check on availability phone MCRC, (028) 9024 4639.
- **A Rights Guide for Migrant Workers**, *Your Rights in Northern Ireland*, explains the rights and entitlements of foreign nationals working here. It is available in 3 versions and a number of languages depending on the country of origin. The guide covers employment, housing, healthcare, human rights, political, and educational issues. For further information, or to obtain copies please contact the Law Centre NI (028) 9024 4401.
- Many local authorities have now developed welcome packs that help people to navigate their new social environment. As well as Good Relations Officers, and Equality Officers a few have additional staff such as an Anti-Racism Officer or Ethnic Minorities Co-ordinator.
- In April 2008 **Advice NI** launched a multi-language online service to assist foreign nationals with tax credits www.adviceni.net/ebook/index.html. Advice NI can also refer people to local centres and organisations who can give general advice on benefits. Tel: (028) 9064 5919. **Citizens Advice Bureau** (CAB) also holds information sessions in different languages for migrant workers and is developing web advice in several European languages www.citizensadvice.co.uk
- Local authorities are more proactive e.g. **Belfast City Council** held an information evening in April 2008 for migrant workers from Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia.

SOME INTERESTED GROUPS:

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>

Ballymena Ethnic Minorities Project
E: emp@ballymenacommunityforum.org

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) 90244401 or Derry/Londonderry (028) 71262433. See also page??

Useful sources include:

Animate,

South Tyrone Empowerment Programme,

National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism,

Promoting Rights of Migrant Workers, Conference Report, 23 May 2006, 2006.

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

Philip Watt and Fiona McGaughey, *How Public Authorities Provide Services to Minority Ethnic Groups: Emerging Findings Discussion Paper*, NCCRI, 2006.

Philip Watt and Fiona McGaughey, *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups*, Belfast 2006.

Kathryn Bell, Neil Jarman and Thomas Lefebvre, *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

Every year, thousands of desperate people in search of protection, or a new life, drown as their flimsy boats capsize or sink.

Headline from *Refugees*, UNHCR magazine, No 148, Issue 4, 2007

‘...we recognize that it is becoming more and more difficult for people to cross borders to seek a place of refuge. Simply put, their story is often not believed and they are turned back. The coming among us of Jesus, as part of the human family, reminds us that no one is excluded from God’s family. Building up this family is our task as individuals Christians, as communities and as a country.’

Sr Joan Roddy, Director of the Bishops’ Refugee & Migrant Project, Maynooth, 14 January, 2007 speaking about the World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

www.catholiccommunications.ie/Pressrel/12-january-2007-3.html

‘A shrinking world and growing global labour market, signs of our economic interdependence, have been a boon for many. But they have also fed anxieties. And when stoked by populist rhetoric, concern about rising migration and national cohesion can easily become intolerance and exclusion. The result, too often, is a rejection of anyone who is different, whether they are looking for opportunity or pleading for protection.’

Statement by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. António Guterres,

on the occasion of World Refugee Day, 20 June 2007

www.unhcr.org/admin/ADMIN/4678dfd34.html

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 officially published figures for those who apply from Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (sub-contracted until recently by the Refugee Council to channel support services for people seeking asylum) reported that the number of service users declined from 166 in the year August 2004 to July 2005 to 153 in the year August 2005 to July 2006.

During that time the number of single applicants increased from 61 to 129 and the number of families fell from 30 to 24. www.nicem.org.uk. (These numbers do not include asylum applicants who have not sought support.) During the first quarter of 2008, however, there has been an increase in numbers, with the Belfast Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Seekers, the body now channelling

In 2005

Asia hosted 41% of the world's refugees, 8.6 million people, followed by Africa (25%) 5.2 million, Europe (18%) 3.7 million, Latin America (12%) 2.5million, North America (3%) 716,800 and Oceania (04%) 82,500.

Source: Refugees by Numbers 2006, UNHCR www.unhcr.org

support services (see p??), reporting that there were 85 applications between January and March. These include a number of people from Somalia and some unaccompanied minors, who are the responsibility of Social Services.

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. This is a factor in fuelling racist attitudes. Immigration and asylum are election issues with both Conservative and Labour vying to have even tougher policies. The press has helped to turn the words 'asylum seeker' into a term of abuse, but politicians have also not always been careful with their language in how they lump categories of people together. The then House of Commons leader, Jack Straw, was quoted as claiming that the problems at the Home Office were less to do with the staff but the people they deal with, 'dys-functional individuals many of them, criminals, asylum seekers, people who do not wish to be subject to social control...'

bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5017028.stm, 25 May 2006. The needs of vulnerable people become secondary in this emotionally charged climate.

So, there have been many restrictive changes in the law in recent years. This, rather than a markedly safer world, accounts for a marked drop in applications. 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. There was a further 9% drop in 2006 with 23,520 applications. Of the 20,960 who got initial decisions, 10% were granted asylum and 11% Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave to Remain. 79% were refused. The UNHCR reported in June 2007 that the numbers of refugees in the world had risen for the first time since 2002, yet, at the end of February 2008 the Home Office announced that asylum applications in 2007 were at their lowest level for 14 years with a further 1% drop to 23,430. Of these, 16% were granted asylum, 10% either Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave and 73% had their initial applications refused. There were 2,610 appeals, of which 23% were allowed. Including dependents, 13,595 failed asylum applicants were removed from the country.

www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/4676a5694.html and www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/asylumq407.pdf.

Local concerns need to be seen in the international context. At the start of 2006 the number of people 'of concern' to the UNHCR rose to 20.8 million, up 6% from the 2005 total of 19.5million. The international rise in refugee numbers is largely due to the situation in Iraq. The countries which host most of the world's displaced people are often poor, are experiencing conflict, or have conflict on their borders. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) calculated that there were 1,200,000 internally displaced people in Iraq at the start of 2006. The top 2 countries hosting refugees at this time were Pakistan (next to Afghanistan) with 1,085,000, and Iran (on the borders of Iraq) with 716,000. In February 2007 the Refugee Council accused the United Kingdom of not pulling its weight, and pointed out that while Jordan and Syria host 1.5 million Iraqi refugees we had only 950 applications for asylum from Iraqi nationals in 2006.

- In 2006, the Home Office refused 88% of applications from Iraqis at initial decision-making stage. (Source: *Home Office, asylum statistics: 4th quarter 2006, 2007.*)
- In 2006, the UK was 16th in the league table of industrialised countries for the number of asylum applications per head of population. (Source: *UNHCR, Asylum levels and trends in industrialised countries 2006, 23 March 2007*)
- The UK is home to less than 3% of the world's refugees – around 290,000 out of 8.4 million worldwide. (Source: *UNHCR, 2005 Global refugee trends, 9 June 2006*)

For more basic facts on asylum in the UK like these see

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/basics/facts.htm#factfive

For global trends see www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/4676a71d4.pdf

ASYLUM: THE APPLICATION PROCESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Frequent changes in legislation mean that the application process, and the 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 generally not allowed to work, although they can apply for permission to do so if their case is not settled after a year.) 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 removed swiftly from the country. Or, they may be sent to other parts of Great Britain under Home Office dispersal arrangements.

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 April 2008 the weekly allowances are as follows:

A couple	£66.13
A lone parent	£42.16
A single person over 25	£42.16
A single person between 18 and 25	£33.39
A young person between 16 and 18	£36.29
A child under 16	£48.30

On top of these allowances there are additional payments: £3 per week for a pregnant woman and children between the age of one and three, for the purchase healthy food; and £5 per week for a child under 1 year.

In May 2007 **Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Seekers** took over from the **Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities** (NICEM), the umbrella

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

body serving minority ethnic, statutory, voluntary and community organisations here) as the group 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. (NICEM is still currently offering a refugee Integration Service for those who get a favourable decision.) 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, and is sourced from private landlords and housing associations. 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 or police stations. At any time during the application process people can ask for help to return to their home country voluntarily.

Applicants have previously been 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 Home Office **Country of Origin Information Service** (COI Service). 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 and are assessed for housing like everyone else. They have full access to medical treatment, education and employment, but most applications fail at this stage. Of the 23,430 applications in 2007, 16% were granted asylum, 10% either Humanitarian Protection or Discretionary Leave and 73% had their initial applications refused. There were 2,610 appeals, of which 23% were allowed www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/asylumq407.pdf

Unsuccessful applicants have normally had a right of 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.

Changes in asylum legislation have tended to be increasingly restrictive. Successful asylum claimants in the past, and who were granted Refugee Status, also received Indefinite Leave to Remain, but since August 2005 they are only granted Limited Leave to Remain, for 5 years in the first instance. After this time there is a reassessment, taking into account such things as a possible improvement to the situation in their country of origin. In the meantime they

Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Applicants

A 24-hour advice and support service for people seeking asylum, is no longer provided by NICEM. People should be advised to contact:

Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Seekers

9 Lower Crescent,

Belfast BT7 1NR

Tel: (028) 9043 9226

E-mail: info@brysononestopservice.com

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

have rights to family reunion, to benefits and the right to work.

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** has aimed 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. The **United Nations High Commission for Refugees** (UNHCR) has been working with the Government and feels it is making genuine efforts but that there is still a need for improvement. Their fourth report to the Home Office in January 2007 continued to recommend improved training and accreditation for caseworkers, who should have university degrees or equivalent. They also stressed the importance of improving the way in which facts are gathered and the need for good research and up to date information on the situation in countries of origin of claimants. For more see

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/6353/aboutus/unhcrfourthreport.pdf

The interim report of the **Independent Asylum Commission** (IAC), published in March 2008, has found that 'the UK asylum system is improved and improving, but is not yet fit for purpose. The system still denies sanctuary to some who genuinely need it and ought to be entitled to it; is not firm enough in returning those whose claims are refused; and is marred by inhumanity in its treatment of the vulnerable.' www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/

From March 2007 new applicants were supposed to fall within the government's **New Asylum Model** (NAM). NAM is aimed at ensuring that as many asylum cases are concluded within 6 months, (although the speedier timescales do not seem to have been implemented yet locally for everyone). This is partly achieved by categorising applicants at initial screening in a process called Segmentation. The 5 segments include:

- Segment 1: People who could have claimed asylum in a third country
- Segment 2: Unaccompanied minors
- Segment 3: People from one of 16 'safe' countries who may not be entitled to appeal in this country
- Segment 4: Applications that are regarded as 'late and opportunistic' e.g. following arrest for working without documentation
- Segment 5: All other cases

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.'

'I can't stay in England

— nothing to do, morning till night, just sleeping, going to the park, sometimes make people crazy.'

Anonymous failed asylum applicant speaking on Nick Broomfield's film on destitution, Still Human Still Here.

www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10398

On the positive side, each applicant should have a single Case Owner, a named Home Office official responsible for their case who will be better trained than before. It is also proposed that in complex cases there will be more flexibility in the time-scales, so that cases can be properly presented. However, in general, the Refugee Council feels that the timings are generally too short for proper evidence to be sought on behalf of applicants. In particular, vulnerable people such as abused women, children and victims of torture will find it difficult to disclose sensitive information within the time allowed. Also, under NAM, people will no longer have the opportunity to submit a written statement of evidence (SEF) and have no guarantee that they will see a legal representative before their substantive interview. There is also anxiety that segmentation may be arbitrary and difficult to challenge. Broader fears are that the longstanding culture of disbelief remains.

Previous applications, called Legacy Cases, will gradually come under NAM. (To read more, see the Refugee Council briefing on the NAM see www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

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, previously described by Les Allamby of the Law Centre as, 'a war of attrition', has included 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. Efforts to expedite the system bring other problems. (See p. ?? above.)

Detention: There is a strong fear of detention and the humiliation it brings. (See p?? and ??)

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, because most people are not allowed to work during the asylum application process. Some find volunteering beneficial.

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. (For details of the allowances see p?.)

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.

Destitution

Failed asylum applicants are not entitled to work and most lose their small amounts of benefit. They are forced to live on what handouts they can manage to obtain or slipping into the black economy with all its dangers and potential for exploitation. Most are asked to leave the country as soon as possible. Although the Government has increased the number of removals it is unable to enforce this in all cases. Some countries will not accept people back and others have poor human rights records. The health of individual applicants may also be a factor in preventing removals. A recent independent inquiry reported that the present system falls between two stools in terms of being too soft-hearted or too tough, and leaves 'an invisible population of destitute people who can neither go home nor contribute to British society'. The Joseph Rowntree Trust team based their research in Leeds where they found people failed by 'a tattered safety net', rough sleeping, with grave social and health problems and many wrestling with thoughts of suicide. The report called for revocable licenses giving permission for people to work until they can go home, and reasonable assistance such as basic food, shelter and care. Inquiry chair Kate Adie said 'For the benefit of everyone, there has to be urgent and pragmatic reform which brings these people in from the shadows so that they can be treated humanely, contribute to the community and remain inside the system.' (28 March 2007) To read more about the report, *Moving on: From Destitution to Contribution*, see www.jrct.org.uk

The **Still Human Still Here** campaign is dedicated to highlighting the plight of tens of thousands of people who have been refused asylum and who are being

"I was persecuted in my country for my journalism and it was not safe for me there. But claiming asylum in the UK was like jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire."

Fit for Purpose Yet, IAC interim findings, 2008 www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk

'A Zimbabwean friend, a fluent English speaker, read the transcription of his screening interview on the return journey to Manchester. In 5 instances, the case worker had written the exact opposite of what he had said. He challenged the statement, and these errors were corrected'

Evidence of Cath Maffia to Independent Asylum Commission, published in Fit for Purpose Yet, IAC interim findings, 2008 www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk

'I lost my whole adult life in misery in this country. I was not poor in Iran — I did not come here for your money but I was seeking refuge. I ask those in the Home Office to think, if you were to spend one day in my shoes how would you like to be treated?'

Independent Asylum Commission hearing in Manchester. Published in Fit for Purpose Yet, IAC interim findings, 2008 www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/ For full testimonies visit www.humanrightstv.com

'If you don't have acceptance, a paper from Home Office then you do not exist. As a human being your existence is gone.'

Afshin, a failed asylum applicant, speaking in the film on destitution, Still Human Still Here.

www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10398

'Human beings are social animals. They depend on others. Their family, or extended family, is the group on which many people most heavily depend, socially, emotionally and often financially. There comes a point at which, for some, prolonged and unavoidable separation from this group seriously inhibits their ability to live full and fulfilling lives.'

Lord Bingham quoted on the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns web site, April 2007.
<http://www.ncadc.org.uk/>

forced into abject poverty in an attempt to drive them out of the country. www.stillhuman.org.uk To see Nick Broomfield's documentary film on destitution go to www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10398

Lunchtime Drop-in for Refugees

NICRAS, the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, is the only refugee-led organisation in Northern Ireland. This community group for refugees and people seeking asylum aims to support the integration process while consciousness raising, campaigning and informing people about the legal situation, and organising social and fundraising events.

NICRAS has become much more active since obtaining premises at One Vision Offices, Unit 2, 129 Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 1SH, Tel: 90246699, E-mail: nicras@hotmail.co.uk. They have a Thursday lunchtime drop-in for refugees and people seeking asylum, at the One Vision Offices (12.30–2.00).

NICRAS Volunteering Programme

It is now possible to volunteer with NICRAS. This programme has two aspects. People who are applying for asylum here are given the possibility to undertake worthwhile activities. (In the past they have made valuable contributions mostly to working in the community sector.) NICRAS is now also looking for people who support the aims of NICRAS to volunteer in a number of ways, such as assisting with English classes, doing research for information packs, helping at social events, lobbying and advocacy, assisting asylum applicants in accessing funding for education, and finding opportunities for them to volunteer. NICRAS hopes to develop a range of youth activities that will also require volunteers. To find out more contact NICRAS. (See above.)

REMEMBER THAT:

international conflict, trade and justice issues, and climate change interact directly with migration and refugee 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.

Enforcement of Immigration and Asylum Legislation

Background

The political rhetoric of the immigration/asylum debate has helped to create a climate where the Government wants to be seen to be active in removing people with criminal convictions, those here without authorisation (including visa overstayers) and people whose asylum claims have been unsuccessful. There are targets for numbers to be removed and large numbers of removals or deportations are trumpeted as a sign of political success. In February 2008 the government boasted that during 2007 the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) removed 63,140 people from the UK – one person every eight minutes. The Government is also committed to expanding their detention facilities by the end of the year, in order to increase the number of people who can be removed from the UK

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/lowestnumberasylumapps

On 3 April 2008 the Government announced the launch of a new unified UK Border Agency. Home Secretary Jacqui Smith claimed that this 'will help strengthen protection of our border. With tough customs, immigration and police-like powers UK Border Agency officers will be better equipped than ever to guard our ports and airports, protecting the country from illegal immigration, organised crime and terrorism.'

bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/ukborderagencylaunch

Officers, acting on behalf of the Home Office, have the right to detain anyone they suspect of committing an immigration offence, and also people waiting for a decision on an application for asylum in this country or about to be removed. 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 rules, e.g. by spending time away from home or by getting paid work. Detention periods may be very short or quite lengthy. Others are detained where it is felt that their application has little hope of success or the process seems to be exhausted.

The issue of immigration detention has given concern here for some time. Numbers have risen over the years and there have been anxieties around treatment and conditions. In the past, the major campaigning issue was around the stigmatising of people who had not been convicted of any crime but were held in prison or prison-like conditions. A number of bodies here, including the Churches and the **Refugee Action Group (RAG)**, an umbrella organisation of which EMBRACE is a member, made representations to Government over the years and this resulted in improved conditions. Partly because of such pressure, the Government finally ended immigration detention in Northern Ireland in 2005. People apprehended here are now sent to Removal Centres in Scotland and England. There are anxieties about this.

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

In order to alleviate some of these difficulties RAG has prepared an **Information Pack** for people who may be detained. This contains contact details for local (NI) and GB support organisations and groups; advice on rights and how to access legal advice and representation; and suggestions on how to be prepared, including keeping documents, medication and phone numbers to hand. It is also a helpful set of documents for people who are campaigning for someone who is in detention, and it can be obtained from NICRAS (see pp?? for contact details).

Since the change, it has indeed proved much more difficult to monitor how many immigration detainees have been taken from Northern Ireland to removal centres in GB. However it is clear that the increase in numbers has continued, with at least several hundred people apprehended last year, and removed to GB. (This is partly due to **Operation Gull** – see p.??.) It has proved more difficult for people to communicate with families and solicitors. The **Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission** is examining the situation

Tightened controls have led to at least some acknowledged instances of injustice. For example, Frank Kakoba, a structural engineer originally from Zimbabwe was working in England when he brought his wife and children here in 2005 for a mini-break. In spite of documentary evidence that he was living legally in the UK, he was singled out and held for 2 days in Maghaberry Prison. He was strip-searched, isolated from his family and not allowed to make phone calls. Listeners to Radio Ulster's Sunday Sequence on 28 October 2007 heard Mr Kakoba talk about his sense of humiliation. 'Being a former prisoner will always stick with me.' He has just been awarded £7,500 compensation for wrongful imprisonment and Eileen Lavery of the Equality Commission who supported his case commented: 'Why pick on him? Other than, I think, because he is black.' Unfortunately this is not an isolated case and local solicitors report other cases of people whose documentation and rights are ignored by immigration officers. A positive outcome of the case has been the agreement by Immigration Service that officers here will have training in racial equality awareness.

To read more about this case see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7066077.stm

currently and RAG also hopes to undertake research when NIHRC has completed its overview.

The Government has had plans to open an Immigration Enforcement Unit, in Belfast, to house Home Office officials and members of the PSNI, with Gardaí officers present in order to ensure that there is prompt liaison with the southern authorities. However, this has been delayed.

In addition to the earlier concerns, some immigration documentation infringements are now criminal offences, and this has led to people once again being remanded within the prison system. There are fears that these people may be allocated solicitors with experience of criminal offences who lack the specialist expertise to advise on immigration and asylum cases. Locally these

issues are of concern to the following groups who also support the people concerned:

NICRAS

The Law Centre

The Refugee Action Group

Local support groups including church congregations can enroll support through the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns www.ncadc.org.uk

In late 2007 people from Mountpottinger Presbyterian Church found themselves campaigning, with others, against the detention and removal of the Falode and Adefowoju families who were part of their congregation. Both families had fled from Nigeria. In spite of a hard-fought campaign, it proved impossible to persuade the authorities to allow the families to return to Belfast. Both these cases highlighted how children suffer and feel criminalised by the experience of detention.

'What I personally will never forget, are the eyes of Ronke's boys looking up at me and asking "What have we done wrong?" and my sense of helplessness as I watched them pass through the door to their detention centre as branded criminals.'

Rev Johnstone Lambe, minister of Mountpottinger Presbyterian Church, quoted in *Building a Welcoming Community*, No.11 Spring 2008, <http://www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/>

' "They make you feel like a criminal, when you haven't done anything wrong," says Adebowale.'

[Adebowale Falode aged nine.]

'Sarah, a tiny, lively baby, has livid red eczema all over her face which, Comfort [Adefowoju] tells me, she has not been able to get any medicine for. "They don't even provide enough formula. It is four o'clock, and Sarah has only had one bottle so far today."'

Both quotations from the *New Statesman* 'No place for children', Alice O'Keefe, 13 December 2007

www.newstatesman.com/200712130038

The Medical Justice

Network campaigns for detainees' rights and to ensure independent medical advice for asylum applicants, that medical evidence is taken seriously and to improve conditions for people in detention. www.medicaljustice.org.uk

'My torture was terrible, but giving birth in handcuffs came a close second.'

'When you're watching your village burn to the ground, getting proof isn't the first thing on your mind.'

'Being raped didn't hurt as much as being told it never happened.'

Quotations from a booklet about its work that can be downloaded at www.medicaljustice.org.uk/images/documents/medical-justice-booklet-july-2007.pdf

International Organisation for Migration

Some people who no longer have authorisation to be here want to struggle on, sometimes because they fear going back home, and it is important not to pressure people into leaving. Others, however, get to the point where they are exhausted and disillusioned and would like to go home with dignity if they could afford to.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) can arrange travel documents, pay for transport and help people to re-establish themselves back home. The main categories of people assisted are asylum applicants whose appeals are exhausted, people who have been smuggled or trafficked, or those whose visas have expired.

Once home, they can be assisted further by grants, help for small business start-ups, vocational training and further education. IOM is able to do positive re-settlement work in surprising places such as Iraq and Zimbabwe, where they are currently also helping the victims of internal displacement.

For further information Tel: 0800 783 2332 www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp

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.

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

Research in the health service in 2006 reveals the disturbing level of racist behaviour experienced by healthcare workers. Some extracts from the key findings:

- 46% of those who responded had experienced racist harassment at work.
- A substantial minority (13%) experienced racism on a weekly or monthly basis.
- Those who considered themselves to be of Arabic descent were most likely to report having experienced racist harassment at work.
- 47% reported having been harassed by patients, 27% indicated friends or relatives of patients and 19% said that they had suffered racist harassment from a manager or supervisor.
- 50% stated that work colleagues were most likely to be the source of racist harassment in the workplace.
- 59% experienced racist harassment outside of work.
- Many found it difficult to adapt to the culture and some commented on the different sense of humour their Northern Ireland colleagues had, which could sometimes lead to hurt and misunderstandings.
- Many of those interviewed excused racist comments from patients because they were either elderly and confused or ill and upset.
- Most of those interviewed tended to excuse all but the most blatant racism.
- On occasions where staff had suffered harassment from colleagues, incidents that involved humiliation were found to be the most upsetting.

Police Figures.

In 2004–05 a total of 813 racial incidents were recorded in Northern Ireland. These figures rose in 2005–6 to 936 overall. While there were no murders, there were 238 woundings or assaults and 351 incidents of criminal damage. The clearance rate was 20.5%. Unfortunately the total number of incidents reported in 2006/07 rose yet again to 1,047 with the overall clearance rate down, at 13.4%. The figures include 1 attempted murder, 251 woundings or assaults, 48 cases of intimidation or harassment. The largest category was the 501 cases of criminal damage.

Source:
www.psni.police.uk

- It was felt that in some cases indigenous staff were not sufficiently prepared for the initial arrival of overseas nurses.
- Some respondents thought that the situation for overseas nurses had improved over the 4 years that they had been here and that they were now 'growing' in confidence.

Jennifer Betts & Jennifer Hamilton, *An Investigation into the Nature, Extent and Effects of Racist Behaviours Experienced by Northern Ireland's Ethnic Minority Healthcare Staff*, 2006.
www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ICRracismreport-06.pdf

THREATS AND VIOLENCE

'One Polish woman who doesn't want to be identified describes how her son was attacked. "He was hit on the head by two boys and was taken to the hospital, he had stitches on his head, and that case was reported to the police"'

An incident in Portadown,
news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7266249.stm 27 February 2008.

'The latest attack ...resulted in the family's BMW car being gutted by fire and the word 'OUT' being spray painted on the front door of the home. The Rosta family, originally from the Romanian capital Bucharest, moved to Londonderry from London just over eight weeks ago. Father of four children and husband of Elena, Malin Rostas expressed his belief that the attacks are racially motivated and he has not been welcome in the area since his arrival.

www.londonderrysentinel.co.uk/news 1 April 2008

'If I go out, especially at night, because they call me a 'black bastard', I don't go out without the car and go to an hotel or something. ...Drunk young people are the worst, even though I have seen a generation of them grow up and the majority say 'hello Doctor, how are you?' But not if they are drunk and want trouble'.

'Some teenagers in a park. I thought they were going to ask me about something and they just punched me. I thought of leaving Northern Ireland.'

Two statements by health workers, interviewed for *An Investigation into the Nature, Extent and Effects of Racist Behaviours Experienced by Northern Ireland's Ethnic Minority Healthcare Staff*, 2006.

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

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

quite dark and other little boys told him that his hands were very dirty. They were PI children too young to know any better. The principal took action’.

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

Health

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.

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.

‘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

At first I had a very bad experience. Very, very bad. There’s just some people who feel that it is a joke, that they think it’s a joke. They don’t realise that it’s not a very good joke because our culture is very different. We would not say things unless we mean it.

A health worker interviewed for *An Investigation into the Nature, Extent and Effects of Racist Behaviours Experienced by Northern Ireland’s Ethnic Minority Healthcare Staff*.

‘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*

‘I asked: [a Social Security official] “Can you please tell me if there is anywhere else I can go for help?” The answer was blunt and direct.: “No! Go and ask the Portuguese Government to help you. And if you need money for the return ticket to Portugal, find a job.”’

A woman dismissed from here job because she was pregnant. *Case Studies of Discrimination and Disadvantage for Portuguese Migrant Workers*, quoted in the *Animate Research Compendium*.

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.

‘Being a foreigner in this land has not been easy because people take you as a leper... We have once sat in the church ... we smiled as we sat down, but there was nothing in response. They shifted and moved to keep space and distance between us so much that it became embarrassing. ... Was this just? Everywhere we go, it brings home the fact that once you have coloured skin you are regarded as scum and a refugee who has come to take...take...take...’

Yvonne Mefor in *Inter-Cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland*

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

'I am from a rejected people. As a member of the Traveller Community neither society, nor the church knows me. And in not knowing me they fear and at times despise me. I am so tired of the rejection and ignorance. I too am much in need of the water from the well. I crave the life giving water that is life from God. ... My only hope is to be filled with the spirit of love or I will be lost to the continuous hurt I experience as a Traveller person.'

Cathleen McDonagh reflecting on John 4: 5–15 in *Inter-Cultural Insights*.

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.police.org.uk

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. They have also organised courses on such topics as hate crimes, including racism, Christianity in a world of many faiths, and restorative justice. Tel: (028) 9077 5010, E-mail cenisec@tcd.ie, **www.tcd.ie/ise**.

Yvonne Naylor has developed resources for young people and these can be freely accessed on a number of websites including that of Corrymeela, **www.corrymeela.org** under 'Free resources'. They can also be seen on **www.puppetwoman.org**.

There are courses on ethnicity/ diversity awareness and anti-racism available from groups such as the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) **www.nicem.org.uk**, the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (MCRC) **www.mcrc-ni.org**, the Chinese Welfare Association **www.cwa-ni.org**, and the Ulster Peoples' College **ulsterpeoplescollege.org.uk**. Ask your local authority about courses that may be available locally.

Members are made aware of the training that EMBRACE makes available from time to time, but if you feel that you have enough people for a course, ask EMBRACE and it may be possible to arrange something for you, contact **info@embraceni.org**.

SOME INTERESTED GROUPS

Chinese Welfare Association www.cwa-ni.org

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland www.equalityni.org

Labour Relations Agency www.lra.org.uk

Law Centre NI www.lawcentreni.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: **<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/NIGuidebook.pdf>** and **www.nccri.ie**

Some Sources:

Jennifer Betts & Jennifer Hamilton, *An Investigation into the Nature, Extent and Effects of Racist Behaviours Experienced by Northern Ireland's Ethnic Minority Healthcare Staff*, 2006. **www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ICRRacismreport-06.pdf**

Scott Boldt ed., *Inter-Cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland*, All Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism, Belfast 2007.

Hate Crime, Racial Incidents: Protecting your Rights, PSNI, 2006.
www.psni.police.org.uk

Holder and Lanao eds. *SobreOViver Na Ilha Estudos Sobre Discriminacao na Comunidade Portuguesa da Irlanda do Norte/ Case Studies of Discrimination and Disadvantage for Portuguese Migrant Workers*, Dungannon, 2006.

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, ECONI, Belfast, 2004.

Charo Lanao and Daniel Holder, *Fermanagh: Other Voices*, Women of the World/ MCRC, Fermanagh, 2002.

Fee Ching Leong, *The experiences, expectations and aspirations of black and minority ethnic people in relation to the churches' role in tackling racism*, All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting (AICCM), Belfast, 2005.

Philip Watt and Fiona McCaughey, *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups*, Belfast, 2006.

'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.'

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

Official Responses

Recent incomers and more long-standing 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 the dangers and policies are being put in place to redress them. As part of its overall commitment to fostering diversity and combating racism and sectarianism, the NI Executive is supporting the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID) www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu. The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has a role in co-ordinating EYID activities here, and proposals include a conference that will include local practitioners.

Until very recently we 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 all forms of different identity such as nationality or ethnicity. 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 have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between different groups of people, including 'racial groups'. They are also obliged to have regard to the desirability of promoting 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 is 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. There has been a feeling in the voluntary sector that it would be helpful to have an updating of the equality legislation and that a Single Equality Act would produce more consistency.

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 carried 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 was to 'eliminate sectarianism, racism and all forms of prejudice and to enable people to live and work without fear or intimidation'. Northern Ireland was recognised as no longer being a bipolar society but one that is enriched by becoming more culturally diverse. It was also recognised however, that racism had emerged as a problem.

In practical terms, an inter-departmental Good Relations Panel was set up to shape policies and institutions. The Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has the policy role and is responsible for challenging, undertaking research and monitoring progress. The new 2007 ministerial pledge of office includes the words 'and will promote a shared future'. The existing Community Relations Council (www.community-relations.org.uk) was given an enhanced role in good relations work, independent of Government and representative of civic society. Good Relations Officers (GROs) in district councils fund local good relations activities. Government has also recognised that churches and other faith-based organisations have a role to play in developing good relations at local level.

In July 2005, the Government also published a **Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010** with 6 aims.

- Elimination of racial inequality through ensuring equality of opportunity in all aspects of life
- 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 included 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 OFMDFM 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, a Racial Equality Forum was established to help draw up an action plan, to implement the strategy, and to monitor and review progress.

OFMDFM is now developing proposals for a Programme of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration for a 'shared and better future' that they hope will refresh and adapt both the Racial Equality and Shared Future strategies for the new political dispensation. They see the proposals as being at the heart of the Programme for Government, which is committed to a cross cutting theme of 'a shared and better future for all' in programmes across government (www.pfgbudgetni.gov.uk). It

is intended that the programme will build on some of the excellent work undertaken, particularly by district councils and community organisations, to address the challenges faced by local communities.

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.police.org.uk

Useful documents

Promoting Good Relations – A Summary Guide for Public Authorities (2008)
<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/Good%20Relations%20Summary%20Guide.pdf>

Good Relations indicators baseline report (2007)
<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/good-relations-report.pdf>

Promoting Good Relations – A Guide for Public Authorities (2007)
<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/PromoteGdRel.pdf>

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 OFMDFM
www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/raceequality

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

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

The Christian Response

Welcome

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.

There are recent indications that politicians are also beginning to see a role for the Churches. Speaking at the Church of Ireland conference in January, Junior Minister in the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), Gerry Kelly, said that the Church had a key role in being able to deliver in areas where Government may not be able to.

'Diversity involves new people, living down the street, shopping at local shops, attending local schools and working alongside us and sharing our places of worship. It is at this level that the real level of integration must happen. ...It is important for us all to work together to promote good relations but Church and Government, in partnership, could provide the focused leadership.'

www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-ofmdfm/news-210108-church-and-government 19 January 2008.

CHURCH RESPONSES

...to issues of immigration, asylum and racism

The main Churches in Ireland have responded in different ways. The Catholic

Church has a major commitment through the Irish Bishops' Refugee and Migrant Project in Maynooth, headed up by Sr Joan Roddy. She also co-ordinates the **Churches' Asylum Network** (CAN) which includes in its membership individuals and groups from various Christian communities/churches in Ireland who work with and on behalf of migrants and refugees. The document *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (The love of Christ towards migrants), published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, examines the challenge for the Church of human mobility and the pastoral implications. At the initiative of the Bishops' Conference, many dioceses in Ireland now have a person in charge of the pastoral care of migrants. As well as priests who have served abroad, there are also chaplains from several of the main countries of origin of migrants who ensure liturgical celebrations and pastoral care for different language groups. For example, the Polish Chaplaincy, set up in Dublin in 2006, includes Fr Mariusz Dabrowski, based in Belfast who serves the Polish community in the North. In November 2007 the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants held a major conference titled *From Pastoral Care to Public Policy – Journeying with the Migrant*, to mark their 50th anniversary. The papers can be accessed at <http://www.usairish.org/iece.html>.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland 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 responsibility in this area lies with the Race Relations Panel. The PCI Peacemaking Programme has a module on Relating to our Neighbours in its Gospel in Conflict: Loving our Neighbour course. During the year, the Panel has been actively concerned with how immigration enforcement has impacted on people at congregational level (see for example p.??) and they have met with Home Office Officials.

The Methodist Church in Ireland has adopted the Presbyterian policy document and addresses the issues through their Council on Social Responsibility. The Methodist Women in Ireland are members of the Refugee Action Group. Scott Boldt, Reconciliation Development Officer at Edgehill Theological College is also currently continuing his work with the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (see below).

Practical Expressions of Methodist Belief

Asylum seekers and refugees

We urge all Methodist people to be open to the diversity and enrichment that can come from people of different cultures, including those who have come to this island as refugees and asylum seekers.

We deplore all forms of racism and seek to promote understanding and inclusion within church life and society in general.

We encourage governments to show humanity, understanding, generosity and openness in their dealings with asylum seekers and refugees.

We encourage local communities to welcome strangers to share in the life of this island.

www.irishmethodist.org/who/mb-e.htm

The Church of Ireland is coming to the end of the three-year Hard Gospel

project that aims to improve the ways in which the church deals with difference at all levels including the challenge of immigration and ethnic difference. A six-part course on *Loving our Neighbours* has been distributed to all rectors and it includes a session on Welcoming the Stranger. In 2007-08 diocesan consultations culminated in an all-Ireland Pilgrim People Conference on immigration in January 2008. Dioceses are beginning to plan their own welcoming strategies and Advisors on Diversity and Migration are being appointed. It is hoped that Reflect and Act Courses will help parishes to identify the needs of migrants and engage at a local level. Hard Gospel resources, including a Welcome poster in 27 languages can be accessed at www.hardgospel.net.

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. Quaker Social Services have been associated with the piloting of a visiting scheme for isolated prisoners in Maghaberry which includes foreign nationals.

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. In 2007 Evangelical Alliance produced a briefing advice booklet, *Alltogether for Asylum Justice: Asylum Seekers' Conversion to Christianity* www.eauk.org/public-affairs/upload/alltogether-for-asylum-justice-2.pdf.

The **Corrymeela Community** continues to provide an annual holiday break for refugees and people seeking asylum. Its website includes some useful resources www.corrymeela.org.

Individuals, groups and congregations continue to act imaginatively at local level to make this a more welcoming community, especially by running English language, conversation classes, and friendship groups.

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 Ireland and the involvement of the Churches.

www.catholiccommunications.ie/sanctuary

Hard Gospel Project: www.hardgospel.net

Methodist Church in Ireland www.irishmethodist.org

Presbyterian Church in Ireland www.presbyterianireland.org

During the year, the leaders of the four largest churches interceded with the Home Secretary on behalf of families from the Mountpottinger area of east Belfast. (See also p.??) They expressed their acceptance of the need to have an immigration policy but said: 'It should not over-ride basic human rights and the religious freedom of each individual. These, we believe, must always be protected.'
UTV 21 December 2007
www.utvinternet.com/news-room/indepth.asp?id=86667&pt=n

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 An inter-denominational study group convened by CTBI has published, as *Migration Principles: Statement for Churches Working on Migration Issues*, a broad statement of principles and suggested action. To obtain a copy (£5.00 & £1.50p&p) phone 01733 325002 or order online 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, Ireland and Europe, and seeks to co-ordinate the Churches' response on key issues. The CCRJ newsletter, *Racial Justice Today*, is now in full colour and carries lots of articles and photographs. To find out about subscribing email ccrj@ctbi.org.uk.

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 combined with the CCRJ, as the **All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism** (AICCMR) and some initiatives have taken 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 this was discussed at a major conference in November 2005, *Challenged by Difference: Threat or Enrichment*. Follow-up sessions have been held to assist networking.

AICCMR has published *Inter-Cultural Insights: Christian Reflections on Racism, Hospitality and Identity from the Island of Ireland* edited by Scott Boldt. The contact for AICCMR is Dr Scott Boldt, Edgehill Reconciliation Project, Edgehill Theological College, 9 Lennoxvale, Malone Road, Belfast, BT9 5BY Tel: 028 9068 6933, Email: rec@edgehillcollege.org.

Adrian Cristea of the Parish-Based Integration Project has published a leaflet to explain how this Dublin-based project can assist churches to welcome immigrants into congregations. It includes 10 integration guidelines for parishes. They can also supply a questionnaire for church committees that want to assess how best to welcome newcomers in their individual situations. The project is based in at Bea House, Milltown Park, Dublin 6, 01 (003531 from the North) 269 0951 Email: adrian@iccsi.ie Web: www.iccsi.ie

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

'The authentic Christian community must always be asking "Who is being excluded."' Archbishop Rowan Williams quoted in *Inter-Cultural Insights*

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 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*, published by the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin's Working Group on Combating Racism outlines 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* and others from Parish-Based Integration Project material):

- Analyse your local circumstances carefully in order to be able to provide a meaningful welcome for newcomers. (Where you find it hard to get a picture of what is happening locally, it may help to talk to employers and the local Further Education Colleges to find out about incomers and how best to get to meet and know them.)
- 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. Use plain English in services in order to help those with limited language skills to participate better.

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.

- When praying for people in difficult situations in other countries, ensure that the words do not imply an attitude of patronising pity. It may be helpful to use prayers from the country concerned.
- 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.
- Promote the participation of newcomers in leadership and promote a sense of belonging and being appreciated.
- 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.
- Stress the universal nature of your church, as a church for all nations.
- Expect blessings, such as enthusiasm and sense of fellowship, not just problems.

What churches can do together

- Work together to let new residents know about church services and activities.
- It is helpful if local church leaders have an agreed policy so that they can respond jointly and immediately if a racist incident occurs.

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.

PASTORAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many people who come here will adjust easily. However, we need to bear in mind that others find a change of country very difficult. In addition, people who have been forced to flee here, destitute migrant workers, or unauthorised 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 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, especially where you are relating to people who are here without authorisation.
- 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.
- It is now an indictable offence to give technical advice on immigration (which could include assistance with form filling). People needing advice should be encouraged to ring one of the **Law Centre advice lines** Belfast (028) 90244401 or Derry/ Londonderry (028) 71262433. This is equally true of people who may have been trafficked or who have no authorisation to be here. Poor advice could put someone in danger. They should also be put in touch with the Law Centre.

- You may find yourself involved in campaigning and advocacy on behalf of people, such as failed asylum applicants, who may be detained under immigration legislation and ultimately removed or deported. Ensure that you involve other people and groups who have appropriate expertise. (See p?.) Your campaign may not succeed. Seek prayer support and a listening ear for yourself and other supporters who may be left with a deep sense of pain and disillusionment.

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

Cultural Differences

There are many things to write about if we look at the differences between cultures in the country I came from and the country I live now. ... Probably everyone will write about how it is nice to be here, the country is beautiful and people wonderful. Problem is that something is being said and something else is being felt. Sometimes we can be surprised when somebody is behaving in a way totally different from our expectations, in a positive or negative deviation. ... The point is that where there are people there is communication and where there is communication there are problems; and it does not matter if they are so small to be nearly invisible ...

Karel Kuchera from the Czech Republic, works in marketing at a factory in Lurgan. To read more of his story go to www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland-society-ordinarylives-czechrepublic.htm

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.

'People deprived of familiar rootedness in family, culture, tradition and geography deserve the next best thing, which is welcome, hospitality and compassionate concern in their new environment.'

Paul Surlis, 'Exile', *The Furrow*, April 2000,
(reproduced in *Inter-Cultural Insights*.)

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

How we can learn about each other

- Encourage cultural and ethnic awareness and intercultural and anti-racism training.
- Link with schools and community groups in developing good relationships and planning programmes.
- Hold celebration meals such as harvest suppers where you might invite people from minority ethnic groups to share their cooking traditions with you.
- Celebrate festivals such as Chinese New Year.
- Visit cultural centres together. For example, people from a rural background, anywhere in the world, may 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, visiting religious centres, or inviting members of other faiths to explain their religious beliefs.
- Take part in a course that encourages examination of Christian attitudes towards relationships with people of other faiths. (See pp??.)
- 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 and to foster good relationships at local community level.
- When you are planning a project remember that small grants may be available from your local authority for good relations activities. For other advice on looking for funding or drawing up grant applications go to NICVA (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action), 61 Duncairn Gardens Belfast, BT15 2GB, Tel: (028) 9087 7777, E-Mail: nicva@nicva.org, Web sites: www.nicva.org/ and www.grant-tracker.org/.

See

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

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
- After-school clubs, helping incoming children to adjust to the differences in our education system
- Language and conversation classes
- Advice centres for newcomers run by those who are nominated by the local authority to do so – such as Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB).
- Recreational facilities for minority ethnic groups

Volunteering Opportunities

A number of organisations work with minority ethnic people and refugees, and some welcome volunteers. Just a few are mentioned here.

The **Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers** (NICRAS) Tel: 90246699, E-mail: nicras@hotmail.co.uk. NICRAS is looking for

Passing by on the other side?

Many of us feel uncomfortable when we pass by people who ask for money in the street, whether it is for goods that we do not want, or simply begging. For local people in this position we usually have a strategy worked out that we can live with. We now see people who are obviously 'not from here', perhaps women in selling magazines, accompanied by babies or young children; young girls selling flowers late at night; or young men dodging the traffic to sell newspapers. We want to know who they are, and if they need help or are being exploited.

There are no easy answers. Most people are probably from the EU and are perfectly entitled to be here, although, if they are from Romania or Bulgaria they would not have an automatic right to work without a permit, unless they are self-employed. Some may live outside Northern Ireland and may be brought here on a daily basis by an organising figure who may or may not be a family member. Others live here. There may be some exploitation but you cannot assume that they are all people in need.

You may feel that your sensitivities are being played on if you are begged to give money for something you do not want, but you do not want to turn away from need. You might offer someone a hot drink or some food. If this is refused you know that the person, at least is not hungry or thirsty.

During the past year EMBRACE has made contact with some of these people, and some initiatives have been actively pursued, including developing opportunities for learning English.

people to volunteer in a number of ways, such as assisting with English classes, doing research for information packs, helping at social events, lobbying and advocacy, assisting asylum applicants in accessing funding for education, and finding opportunities for them to find volunteering jobs with other groups. NICRAS hopes to develop a range of youth activities which will also require volunteers.

Red Cross migration services in Belfast has volunteering opportunities, assisting in tracing relatives, and in helping new asylum applicants to adjust to life here. Contact Services Manager Neil McKittrick, Tel: 9024 6400 or nmkittrick@redcross.org.uk. They are also working on providing practical help with clothes and other necessities for destitute people whose asylum claims have failed.

The **Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (MCRC)** is a regional organisation promoting human rights and equity through empowerment and collaborating with minority ethnic groups. If you want to volunteer with MCRC, contact Louanne Martin on (028) 9024 4639 or E-mail info@mcrc-ni.org.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT WELCOMING OUTSIDERS

At the EMBRACE Annual General Meeting in 2004 Sr Brighde Vallyelly (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 doesn't 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).

EMBRACE CD ROM: Once we were strangers

EMBRACE has produced a collection of first-hand accounts of the life experiences of immigrants and refugees here. The personal stories are accompanied by 7 bible studies and other resource material. The study themes include Recognising Jesus in the Stranger and A Refugee's Story: The Flight to Egypt. To obtain a copy of the CD, or to find out more about this resource please contact the EMBRACE office, by email or phone. These can be used for group study, to inspire sermons, addresses, or for prayer.

'What can we do to help people coming into our country?' '...From a Christian perspective, I think genuine love is the key, the Bible says "Love your neighbour as yourself." I think this is the fundamental answer to your question. I will say that you can help people coming into this country by showing them genuine love. I think that it is important that Northern Irish people love them-

selves first and then perhaps this love can be genuinely extended to ‘foreigners’ coming here, ... a genuine love that will cut across communities, sectarianism, racism and other related intolerance.’

Extract from an interview with Alfred Albolarin, Nigerian- born British, former chairperson, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), interviewed for *Once we were strangers*.

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

Source: *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.

“Our duty is to infect the world with the goodness of God: Christ’s risen life into the world. Let us create communities that will heal our divisions, overcome our fears in economics, fear of violence – and enable us to tackle conflicts in the world: poverty, injustice and global warming... Let us live the resurrection. Believe it and share. It is God’s power to reconcile a broken and hurting world.”

The Church of England Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, speaking in his Easter sermon, 23 March 2008
www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/cgi/news/news.cgi?t=template&a=1272

Even if we are always strangers (foreigners), when we truly believe and know for a fact that God is in control and has placed us where we are, it enables us to overcome each obstacle that arises.

Even if always strangers in Ireland, in God’s eyes we belong. It is not easy but by faith, when we place ourselves in God’s hands, we have hope to face another tomorrow.’

Florence Muthoni Hegarty in part of a reflection on the Book of Esther in *Inter-Cultural Insights*.

Some useful organisations

For a more comprehensive list of organisations see our web site:
www.embraceni.org

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

The All Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism, (AICCMR)

Reconciliation Office,
Edgehill Theological College,
9 Lennoxvale, Belfast
BT9 7BY
Tel: (028) 9068 6933

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

Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Seekers

9 Lower Crescent
Belfast
BT7 1NR
Tel: (028) 9043 9226
E-mail:
info@brysononestopservice.com

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

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

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

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 mrcr@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) 9031 9666
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

Northern Ireland Committee for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)

One Vision Offices,
Unit 2, 129 Ormeau Road,
Belfast, BT7 1SH,
E-mail nicras@hotmail.co.uk
Tel: (028) 90248855

Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)

61 Duncairn Gardens
Belfast BT15 2GB
Northern Ireland
Tel: (028) 9087 7777
E-mail: nicva@nicva.org
Web: www.nicva.org

Parish-Based Integration Project

Bea House,
Milltown Park,
Dublin 6,
Tel: 003531 269 0951
E-mail: adrian@iccsi.ie
Web: www.iccsi.ie

Red Cross

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

Refugee Action Group (RAG)

c/o MCRC
9 Lower Cresecent
Belfast
BT7 1NR
Tel: (028) 9024 4639
Fax: (028) 9032 9581
E-mail:
refugeeactiongroup@hotmail.co.uk
Web: see www.mcrc-ni.org

STEP

(South Tyrone Empowerment Programme)

Unit T7
Dungannon Business Park
2 Coalisland Road
Dungannon
BT71 6JT
Tel: (028) 8773 9002

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Independent Asylum Commission	www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk
Institute of Race Relations	www.irr.org.uk
Medical Justice Network	www.medicaljustice.org.uk
National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns	www.ncadc.org.uk
Police Service of Northern Ireland	www.psnipolice.uk
Refugee Council (UK)	www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
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