

EMBRACE is a group of Christians, from different denominations, working together to promote a positive response to people seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority-ethnic backgrounds living in Northern Ireland. Its primary role is to provide information and resources for Churches and individuals, in order to help them to make this a more welcoming place for minority-ethnic people.

This information update, *Embracing Diversity*, provides an introduction to the complex issues of immigration, asylum and racism and their implications for the life experiences of the people involved. It challenges Christian individuals and congregations to respond practically, by living out the gospel values of welcome and love of neighbour, so that we can build a more welcoming community that has moved beyond racism and exclusion.

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Embracing Diversity

Embracing diversity

Information Update 2010

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Embrace NI



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Introduction

This update gives an overview of the issues that concern minority-ethnic people, migrant workers and those who seek sanctuary in Northern Ireland. It also suggests some positive actions for Christians who want to make Northern Ireland a more welcoming place, where incomers are treated with dignity. Some of the text is unchanged from last year but there have been many developments, so we hope that this booklet will help to keep you up to date.

Immigration and asylum policy, 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. We try to keep our members updated about major changes through our newsletters, web site and links to other web sites.

Inevitably we highlight problems experienced by migrants and minority-ethnic people, such as racism and destitution. However, we do not want to emphasise problems in a way that makes it difficult for people to be regarded as individuals, with varied gifts and strengths, as well as vulnerability, just like the rest of the population. We hope that this booklet will not lead to all migrants or minority-ethnic residents being seen just as victims, but help us to ensure that all people are treated with respect.

Recession has changed the context and the nature of the debate over immigration and integration. Can we still argue that immigration is economically beneficial? When we give unconditional welcome to people from other countries and ethnic backgrounds, are we equally prepared to give reassurance and assistance to local people who find it difficult to live with economic hardship and an increasingly diverse society? We are also challenged to move beyond the theology of 'welcoming the stranger' towards inclusive theologies of justice and reconciliation.

Members of EMBRACE are active in networking, 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, and providing food for social events. EMBRACE On the Street enables 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. It operates through 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 or E-mail 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.

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.

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Why should we care?

'You shall not oppress the hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brethren or one of the sojourners within the land within your towns...' Deut 24:14

'Migrants become easy targets at times of economic difficulty but introducing yet more tough measures to exclude people could damage our prospects for economic recovery.' See page 22

'...women are being forced to choose between extreme poverty and remaining in potentially deadly relationships.' See page 39

'Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God' Micah 6:8

'People who used to move drugs around now move people around.' See page 44

'And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt' Matthew 2:13

'I just wanted to take my Bible, but they didn't let me.' See page 42

'...my wife's not happy – she can't sleep at night – we're all scared now, we can't really live this life anymore.' See page 64

'Lord...when did we see you a stranger and welcome you?' Matthew 25: 38

'Them bringing us furniture. It was wonderful.' See page 87

'The heart of Christianity is hospitality.' Jean Vanier See page 90

Migration

'Since the emergence of early humans from sub-Saharan Africa 500,000 years ago, humankind has been constantly on the move...'

'Are we not all migrants or descendants of migrants to this land?'

Our People Our Times: A History of Northern Ireland's Cultural Diversity,
NI Museum Council

Over the centuries people throughout the island of Ireland became used to thinking of migration as a one-way process, with thousands of people leaving here each year, many of them making permanent lives in other countries. People still leave – an estimated 21,700 from Northern Ireland in the year ending June 2008. There have also always been incomers, from pre-historic times to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century and the Scots and the English during the seventeenth century. Huguenots also came here to escape persecution in the seventeenth century, as Jewish people did in the nineteenth. An Italian community developed here and people from the Indian sub-continent began to arrive in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We had small numbers of Vietnamese refugees in the 1960s and larger numbers of Chinese people came from Hong Kong, as immigrants, around the same time, the forerunners of our Chinese community that now numbers over 10,000 people. We have also welcomed people from other countries, coming to further their education or work in our hospitals or other parts of the economy.

High unemployment levels insulated Northern Ireland from large-scale inward migration until very recently although, like other industrial economies, a declining birth rate has led to a reduction in the numbers of young people becoming available for work. The Troubles also contributed to continued outward migration in the 1970s and 1980s. 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. So, when violence reduced and the economy began to expand, there was a shortage of workers, and skills gaps also emerged. By the 1990s roughly the same number of people were coming into the country as those who were leaving; immigration began to contribute very slightly to population growth, for the first time in 2004. This is because companies and public employers had begun actively recruiting abroad.

The 2001 census indicated that there were 26,600 people in Northern Ireland who were born outside the UK or the Irish Republic. (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 March 2009, 36,500 people from the A8 European Accession states (see pages 3 and 4) registered as part of the Workers Registration Scheme. Estimates of the overall numbers of migrant workers working here in 2008, have been as high as 46,000. In 2009, however, an Oxford Economics economic impacts study points out the difficulty of identifying numbers accurately and suggests that between 33,000 and 41,000 people in the Northern Ireland work force in 2008

were born outside the UK or Republic of Ireland.

People come here primarily for the same reasons that encourage our young people to leave: for education, better employment prospects and higher incomes, and also to improve foreign language skills. Most have found work in food factories, building-sites, hospitals and nursing homes, fishing and fish processing, shops, fast food outlets and restaurants. Recently, however, the largest numbers of workers from the new EU accession countries were shown to be working in administration, business and management services, demonstrating how the need for additional workers has extended across the economy. (See page 4.)

Many people come for only a short time in the hope of improving their lives, or earning some extra money, and then leave, just as some of our young people return in time. The Government Accession Monitoring Reports up to March 2009 indicate that only 7% of central and eastern European applicants to the Worker Registration Scheme intended to stay more than 2 years. An Institute of Policy Research report, *Floodgates or Turnstiles?*, in April 2008, suggested that of the roughly 1 million workers who came to the UK from central and eastern Europe in the 4 years since EU enlargement, roughly half had already returned to their countries of origin. A significant number do decide to make 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 here from at least 120 different countries.

Immigration has also contributed to a rise in the birth rate. Back in 2004, Northern Ireland had the lowest birth rate in the UK. It has risen now for 6 years in a row, with 25,600 live births in 2008, 5% more than in 2007. In 2008 we had the highest birth rate in the UK and Republic of Ireland. This is partly because mothers who delayed having their babies until their thirties are now starting families, but immigration has also had an impact. In 2008, 2,300 babies were born to mothers who were born outside the UK or the Republic of Ireland. Of these, 1,080 were born to mothers from the A8 central and eastern European countries, and 1,267 from other countries. This is the first time births have reached replacement level since 1991, but the birth rate is still below that in the mid 1980s.

Some reasons why accurate figures on migration are difficult to obtain

- Foreign nationals resident in GB, who move here, may be identified as UK 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 new applicants.
 - Some people simply fail to register. (NI Council for Ethnic Minorities research in 2007 indicated that around a quarter of A8 nationals failed to register at that time.)
 - 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 leave the country.
-

Changing patterns of migration

The first group of recent migrants included a substantial number of Portuguese speakers who have come here since 2001, to work in the food processing industry, many of them in mid-Ulster. 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 the new EU member countries, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (the A8 countries), Cyprus and Malta, became entitled to come here and work without having to apply for permits. 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, 3,013, from Lithuania. By the end of 2006 a total of 14,405 A8 nationals had registered for work here. A further 8,335 registered in 2007 making an overall total of 33,470. Roughly 60% of these new migrants are from Poland with around 20,700 registering up to March 2009.

The Workers Registration Scheme figures for May 2004–March 2005 showed that 70% of newly registered migrants were men, and most were in their twenties and thirties. The women were in the same 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 of them were within the 18-34 age range, and around 16% of new migrants are children under the age of sixteen.

The Government's Accession Monitoring Report (May 2004–December 2007) for the whole UK echoes this pattern: 81% of people registering are aged between 18 and 34; and only 8% said they had dependents when they registered.

In the past, immigrants tended to come to our cities. While many still arrive in Belfast, the latest migrants often move on, and the jobs they fill are much more widely spread. Most country towns and rural areas now have some foreign nationals working there.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) figures show that of the estimated 21,731 people who came to live here between July 2004 and June 2007, 3,092 people came to Belfast, but the other local government districts receiving the highest numbers were: Dungannon 3,925, Newry and Mourne 2,981, Cookstown, 2,961, Fermanagh 1,129, North Down 1,065 and Armagh 1,035.

The latest report on central and eastern European workers, up to March 2009, shows the sectors where they have been needed.

Administration, business and management	10,840
Manufacturing	6,000
Food/ fish/ meat processing	5,025
Hospitality and catering	3,805
Construction and land	3,740
Agriculture	2,240
Retail	1,480
Health and medical	1,460
Transport	855
Entertainment and leisure	145
Others/ not stated	535
.....	
Total	36,155

Unauthorised or Undocumented Workers/ Irregular Migrants

It is impossible to quantify how many people remain here without proper documentation but several years ago the Immigration Service gave a guesstimate of around 2000 people. Many of them have probably entered the country legally and overstayed their work permits or visitors' visas. In addition, some people can become undocumented if they lose their employment for reasons beyond their control.

Who is entitled to come here to work?

The main categories are:

- People from the European Economic Area do not need permission to come here and work. In the same way, anyone with a British or Irish passport can freely go to Spain or Germany, for example, to seek work. (The EEA includes pre-2004 EU states plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.)
- People from the 8 EU Accession States: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, are free to come here but must register for most jobs, paying a one-off £90 fee. They are not entitled to most health and welfare benefits until they have registered and worked here for an uninterrupted 12 months. (People from Bulgaria and Romania need permits for most forms of work, although they have joined the EU (See page 5.)
- People from outside the EEA are subject to a points-based immigration system (PBS). (See page 16.) Employers must register as sponsors and apply for permission to employ people from outside the EEA, from countries such as India or the Philippines. They must demonstrate that they cannot fill the post in any other way.
- Foreign Students studying on a full-time basis can work part time.
- Permit-Free Workers don't need a work permit or a certificate of sponsorship. They include the sole representatives of overseas companies in the UK, representatives of overseas newspapers, news agencies and broadcasting organisations (temporarily reintroduced in February 2009), and the dependants of any of these workers. These categories are subject to review and could change in the future. Clergy used to be included in this group but must now apply under Tier 2 or Tier 5 of the points-based system. (See page 17.)

Bulgaria and Romania (A2)

People newly arriving from the A2 Accession states are not allowed the same access to the labour market as those from the A8. It was announced in December 2008 that these restrictions will remain, in order to protect British workers during the economic downturn. See news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7789365.stm

A2 Nationals can work as self-employed workers without restriction. For other employment, the prospective employer needs to apply for a **Letter of Approval** from the UK Border Agency (UKBA) which enables the worker to apply for an **Accession Worker Card** under the **Worker Authorisation Scheme**. After 12 months of uninterrupted employment workers from the A2 (and A8) countries can apply for a **Registration Certificate** confirming that they are then exempt from work authorisation requirements. See *Your Rights in Northern Ireland, A Guide for Migrant Workers from: Romania and Bulgaria*.

Some A2 nationals are exempt from registering under the Worker Authorisation Scheme. For example, applicants who meet the 'highly skilled migrant' criteria (see page 16) can apply for a work permit themselves (rather than their employers). They can apply for a Registration Certificate immediately and therefore do not need to complete one year of 'authorised' work. Over the period 1 Jan 2007 – 31 March 2008, 300 'highly skilled' work permits were issued locally to Bulgarian nationals and 100 to Romanian nationals.

The only low skilled workers from the A2 countries who will be allowed to work for employers in the UK in 2010 and 2011 will be 21,250 in the **Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS)** and 3,500 in the **Sectors Based Scheme (SBS)** for food processing. They need to apply for an **Accession Work Card (AWC)**. These rules are subject to review.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) estimates that around 700 Accession Worker Cards may have been issued here between 1 January 2007 and 31 March 2009. [www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/NI_Migration_Report\(2008\).pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/NI_Migration_Report(2008).pdf)

For the welfare rights of A2 citizens see the Child Poverty Action group's **Welfare Rights Bulletin 196** www.cpag.org.uk/cro/wrb/wrb196/A2%20nationals.htm#int

(For the social consequences of treating the A2 states differently, see page 39.)

Some of the Languages now Spoken in Northern Ireland include:

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

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%.

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.

Interpretation requests in Newry & Mourne

Sociologist Dr Robbie McVeigh, quotes National Health and Social Services interpretation request figures for January–March 2008 to illustrate the variety of nationalities in the area. Of the total of 452 requests there were 251 for Polish, 94 for Lithuanian, 26 each for Portuguese and Russian, 11 for Hungarian, 9 for Mandarin Chinese and 5 for Cantonese, 7 for Bulgarian, 6 for Latvian, 3 for Yoruba, 2 for Hindi, and single requests for Czech, Estonian, Italian, Thai and Ukrainian.

Robbie McVeigh *'We Asked for Workers but Human Beings Came': Report on the Economic Impact of Migrants Workers in Newry and Mourne and Louth for Challenge of Change, 2008, page 25.*

The number of pupils needing **English as an Additional Language (EAL)** support in NI primary schools rose from 868 in 2001–02 to 4,660 in 2008–09 and from 463 to 2,142 in post-primary schools. www.deni.gov.uk (The term 'newcomer pupils' has been adopted in schools, but not everyone is happy with this terminology as it is inappropriate when considering the needs of children from resident minority-ethnic backgrounds.)

Increasing resources have been allocated 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 £5.5million in 2008–09 and an **Inclusion and Diversity Service** operated by the 5 Education and Library Boards received £1,015,000 in 2008–09. There is some concern, however, that these resources may not reach the individual pupils and that resources are inadequate. (NI Assembly debates 16 February 2009 www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2009-02-16.6.10)

'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.

The impact of the recession

When migration was at its height in July 2007, Northern Ireland had its lowest recorded unemployment figures, 3.7%. The recession is deep, and jobless figures are growing, so there is bound to be speculation as to whether migrant worker numbers are reducing. (The estimated unemployment rate here for July–August 2009 was 7.1%, slightly below the UK average of 7.9%, and lower than the European Union average of 9.0% and the Republic of Ireland rate of 12% July 2009.) Some migrant people, especially single men, have been returning home. Home Office migration figures showed a 47% drop in the number of economic migrants coming to the UK from Poland and other eastern European countries as the recession began to worsen in the last three months of 2008. The total number of work permit holders and dependants admitted to the UK was 112,000 in 2008, a decrease of 12% over the previous year. www.homeoffice.gov.uk/lrds/pdfs/09/immig209.pdf

Worker Registration Scheme applications locally also indicate clearly that the recession has slowed but not stopped the numbers of new people coming here to work from eastern and central Europe. Between mid 2006 and mid 2007, 9,100 people had registered, but between mid 2007 and mid 2008 only 7,800 registered. The figures for 2008–09 are showing a steeper decline, with only 1,215 registrations between June and September 2008, 1,000 between September and December 2008 and only

740 in the quarter December to March 2009. Overall figures indicate that the main reason for the decline is that fewer Polish people are coming to the UK. Our unemployment rate may not be the only reason. There are new opportunities in countries such as Poland, and the decline in the value of sterling makes the UK a less attractive place to work if you intend to save money for your return home. The Polish Embassy has been urging new migrants to think twice about travelling to UK during the recession. (*Guardian*, 18 September 2009.) www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/18/polish-jobseekers-britain-recession-unemployment

Locally, research for the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM), has found that Polish people here are much more likely to have lost their jobs during the downturn, than local people. www.nicem.org.uk/uploads/publications/Za_Chlebem_Report.pdf

Across the UK, however, many A8 nationals are still supporting the provision of public services in our communities. In the year up to March 2009, 815 A8 nationals registered as bus, lorry and coach drivers, 2,660 as care workers, 790 as teachers, researchers and classroom assistants, 55 as dental practitioners (including hygienists and dental nurses), and 720 as GPs, hospital doctors, nurses, and medical specialists.

'A8 workers are continuing to go where the work is, helping to fill the gaps in our labour market, particularly in administration, business and management, hospitality and catering, agriculture, manufacturing and food, fish and meat processing.'

Government Accession Monitoring Report 2004–09, page 1.

The report also found that 'while nationals from the A8 countries were continuing to come into the country to work and contributing to the economy they were still making few demands on the welfare system'. Although increasing because of the economic climate, the numbers of A8 nationals applying for tax-funded, income-related benefits and housing support, remain low in comparison to the total number of claimants in the UK, and proportionately lower in relation to their numbers in the population. For example, 6,732 applications for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance were processed in the first quarter of 2009, of which 1,797 were allowed to proceed for further consideration, compared to 3,007 and 918 in the first quarter of 2008.

It is anticipated that the new, more restrictive, points-based immigration system will reduce the numbers of people coming here from outside the EEA. (see pages 16–18) It is too early to tell exactly how far this will go. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) reported last year that the numbers of work permits issued here had dropped from 3,930 in 2004–05, to 1,800 in 2007–08. Of the 2007–08 figures, the largest numbers were for 450 people from India, 190 from the USA, 180 from the Philippines, and 135 from China.

The latest EU accession countries, Bulgaria and Romania (A2) have been treated differently from the A8 countries. (See page 5) Nationals from these countries are free to be here but need work permits for most forms of employment, so the figure of 1,800 also includes 190 permits for people from Bulgaria and 110 for people from Romania. Some existing work

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.

permit holders are leaving because of new rules prolonging the time that it takes to get residency or citizenship (see pages 39–40).

As with most theories and facts relating to immigration here, there is controversy over the extent to which migrants automatically go home as unemployment rises. The Oxford Economics report published by the Department of Employment and Labour in December 2009 cited evidence that migrant movement (particularly inflows) is driven by market conditions. There is some evidence, however, that during this recession, people with families are tending to stay. For a discussion of recent research see '*Za Chlebem*'. www.nicem.org.uk/uploads/publications/Za_Chlebem_Report.pdf

Working life

'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. To read more of her story, go to www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland-society-ordinarylives-latvia.htm

International consequences of world recession

The dramatic economic downturn is bound to have impacts on migration as with other aspects of international life. The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** has highlighted the likely consequences, in a policy briefing in January 2009. These are some of the effects that they either observed already or thought likely to occur and are probably occurring here.

- Job losses will occur especially in construction, manufacturing, finances, services, retail and tourism, and will affect migrants in these sectors.
- Employers will try to reduce wages and erode working conditions and this will impact on the quality of life of migrants.
- There is a risk of discrimination and xenophobia as migrants are mistakenly perceived as 'taking the jobs of local workers'. (See pages 55–57.)
- The return of unemployed migrants could affect economic and social stability in their home countries.
- The decline in remittances could be a problem for developing countries, especially if migrants mistrust the stability of banking systems and choose irregular routes to send money home. (See page 11.)
- Immigration policies will become more restrictive (as we have already seen in the UK).
- There is likely to be an increase in irregular migration and trafficking, and a strengthening of the 'informal economy'.

Among the policy suggestions are the following.

- protection of migrants' rights;
- facilitating the flow of remittances and lowering transaction costs;
- protecting migrants from stigmatization and xenophobia;
- keeping regular migration channels open to prevent irregular migration and trafficking;
- monitoring the impact of the crisis on migrants.

www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/policy_documents/policy_brief_jan2009.pdf

For groups living on the fringes of society the impacts may be particularly grave. The co-ordinator of the European Roma Policy Coalition has observed European far right groups growing in strength, with attacks on Roma people in a number of countries, at the same time as there is an increase in long-term unemployment and poverty for these people. euobserver.com/851/27250 (For local attacks on Roma people see pages 66–67.)

Director General of IOM, William Lacy Swing has reiterated the need for developed countries to help migrants to ‘weather the storm’.

‘As job markets in the developed world have contracted, a perception has emerged of migrants as the unwanted flotsam and jetsam of globalization, a reserve army of surplus labour that can be jettisoned or rehired with the ebb and flow of the global economy. ...

At this point in the global economic crisis, developed countries cannot afford to turn their backs on migrants. Highly skilled migrants can bring the knowledge and innovation they need to emerge from recession. The low skilled can also contribute by taking essential jobs that host country nationals shun. ...

If rich country governments do not resist the short term political expediency of closing the door to migrants and retreat into xenophobia, they, together with migrant sending countries, the migrants and their families will all lose out as will the host countries and communities that depend on and benefit from their contributions.’

‘*Why Host Countries Must Help Migrants Weather the Economic Storm*’, September 2009. www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/about_iom/docs/DGs_OpED.pdf

Reporting on asylum and immigration issues

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in co-operation with the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Information Centre on Asylum and Refugees (ICAR), has published a guidance leaflet for journalists, *Reporting Asylum and Refugee Issues*, which looks at definitions, and identifies alarmist media coverage as encouraging and validating xenophobic attacks in the UK. www.unhcr.org/uk/press/reporting/guidance/documents/ReportingAsylumleaflet-2008final.pdf

A similar document, *Reporting on Refugees*, has been produced in the Irish Republic by the UNHCR, the NUJ, and the Irish Refugee Council. www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=1265

The NUJ has also produced a further leaflet, *Guidelines on Race Reporting*. www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=1265

Locally, the Refugee Action Group produced the 3rd edition of *Forced to Flee, Forced to Flee: Frequently Asked Questions about Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Northern Ireland in 2007*. This booklet was distributed to journalists and other people who help to form public opinion. www.refugeeactiongroup.com/publications.jsp?i=1

The Scottish Refugee Council has published *Fair Play: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Scotland, a guide for Journalists* www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/Fair_Play

The causes and effects of mass migration

People have moved from their home countries for centuries, but the numbers have risen rapidly in the last decade. It is reckoned that now over 200 million people in the world live outside their country of birth.

Pull Factors

Migrants are drawn increasingly to countries such as UK and Ireland by the following factors:

- 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 of these pull factors, but these are usually accompanied by a range of economic and other problems that combine to push them away from home.

- Lack of prospects for career advancement
- Poverty and low incomes
- High unemployment rates
- Persecution and poor human rights
- Internal conflict and war
- Natural disasters, climate change and famines

Impacts on countries of origin

- **Economic disadvantage**
Many eastern European countries have been hampered in their own economic development by the loss of skilled people and those of working age.
- **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.
- **Social problems for children**
Access to jobs in Irish agriculture, for example, 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, became known

as the 'mushroom orphans'. Because its population is small, Latvia has been forced to attract workers from other countries to fill the labour shortages created by people going to work abroad.

Migrant children lose the benefit of their wider family circle.

- **Developing countries benefit from remittances**

Payments sent home by migrants now probably outstrip international development aid in value, and are vital in the case of natural disasters. In 2007, nearly \$24 billion passed in this way from North America to Mexico, however, here too, the recession has caused a dramatic reduction. Worldwide it is estimated that remittances will decline by between 5% and 8% in 2009. www.developmentandtransition.net/index.cfm?module=ActiveWeb&page=WebPage&DocumentID=727

As fewer Mexicans leave home to get work due to the recession and a border crackdown in the USA, the number of Mexican families receiving remittances has fallen from 1.4 million in 2005 to 1.16 million in 2008. cbs3.com/Nationall/Mexico.immigration.rate.2.939114.html

- Returning migrants bring back savings, skills and international contacts
'As studies demonstrate, when they return home, migrants bring skills and know-how as well as capital which can contribute to the development of their countries of origin.'

'Time for EU to acknowledge the advantages of migration'

(Article in the European Voice October 15 2009) www.se2009.eu/en/meetings_news/2009/10/15/time_for_eu_to_acknowledge_the_advantages_of_migration_article_in_the_european_voice_october_15

The immigration debate

We are all aware of the hysteria in sections of the UK media when immigration is discussed, but the debate now also includes more sophisticated arguments around economics, resources and social cohesion. The House of Lords Select Committee of Economic Affairs report, *The Economic Impact of Immigration*, April 2008, is one serious contribution. 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 this is not a true index of prosperity. They argue that the measure of success should 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 rather than 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

The Mushroom Orphans

'The children live with their grandparents or are shuffled back and forth from Latvia to Ireland. In Riga, more than 100 children aged 14 or younger are living alone or with family friends ... There was a national outcry when a seven-year old girl got lost on her way home from school and it was discovered that her parents were living in Ireland.'

Embracing Difference
by Patrick Comerford,
p.29.

No Borders Network

No Borders is an international network of groups with the radical aim of freedom of movement for all, the end to all migration controls and the divisions between citizens and non-citizens. In the UK they have argued against immigration detention and supported anti-deportation campaigns. See www.noborders.org.uk/ Many people will find these ideas very challenging and feel that border controls are essential, if only for security reasons, but Christians in countries such as the USA say that a relaxation of restrictions, for example, on the Mexican border, would conform to the view that in Christ there are no borders.

eventually. Few people would disagree with some of the conclusions, for example; that we need more adequate statistics and assessment; that we should help immigrants with language proficiency; and the need for better enforcement of workers' rights. The report was also purely concerned with economics and did not claim to look at the cultural benefits of 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

Just as people in GB were protesting about 'British jobs for British Workers' in March 2009, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) said that there was no evidence to suggest that immigration had any substantial negative effect on either wages or employment. (See a *Guardian* article on the findings of *The Economic Impacts of Migration on the UK Labour Market* by Howard Reed and Maria Latorre, IPPR, February 2009. www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/feb/26/immigration-eastern-europe-jobs)

In July 2009, Professor Christian Dustmann said that during the 2008/09 fiscal year migrant workers paid 37 per cent more in taxes than they claimed in benefit. (*The Independent*, 24 July 2009. www.hrreview.co.uk/articles/hrreview-articles/recruitment/migrant-workers-improve-uk-fiscal-position/3509)

Locally a recent Oxford Economics research study published by the Department of Economic Development (DEL) concluded that migrant workers had helped maintain an adequate labour supply to fuel the 2004–2008 economic boom. The availability of migrant labour seems to have made the difference between some businesses surviving, or in the case of food processing, relocating abroad. (They quote a survey of 600 businesses where 31% said that migrants were important in the survival of their organisation and this rose to 50% in health and social care and agriculture.)

On the next page 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 was a factor in enabling the Irish and British economies to have one of the longest periods of sustained economic growth in their histories. Before the recession began, UK employment was at a record high at 29.46 million in February 2008. www.hrmagazine.co.uk/news/7945971
- 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 low local birth rates.
- Host countries benefit from cultural diversity. (This brings special benefits to young people such as encouragement to learn new languages, work ethic, and knowledge of the wider world.)
- Young foreign workers can enhance their life prospects.
- Failing schools (and those about to close because of falling rolls) can be transformed by numbers of highly motivated migrant children.

Locally, while not entirely positive, the Oxford Economics study indicates that migrants have not only facilitated growth in the economy but have also brought:

- Benefits to the tourism industry through the development of new air routes;
- Positive spillover effects on the productivity or efficiency of native workers;
- New ideas and a fresh approach to firms; and
- Greater cultural links with developing nations that will prove useful in growing international trade.

The Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, December 2009.

Negative impacts

- Depression of wages may occur, although recent research tends to show reduction in pay rates as temporary and that immigration simply allows the economy to expand. (See page 12.) Access to workers who are willing to work for relatively low pay may encourage employers to ignore the need to become more competitive in other ways (e.g. by improved production methods).
- Financial benefits may be overstated. (See the House of Lords Report page 11 above.)
- Immigration serves employers more than the local population.
- Migrants may be exploited in the workplace and in housing (see pages 50–54).

Devolution in Scotland and immigration

In a devolved Scotland, discussions about immigration are coloured by the fact that their population is still in decline and they feel the need to attract and retain migrant workers. This is contrary to the latest UK Government policy of discouraging settlement for migrant workers in the lower tiers of the points-based system. Scotland recognises that, although immigration is a reserved matter, with decisions taken in Westminster; it has competence in other areas relating to immigration including social services, children's policies, housing, policing etc. Consequently, immigration legislation is often applied differently and this has resulted in some innovative, progressive changes. In particular Scotland has negotiated its own Shortage Occupation list (see page 17) within the points-based immigration system. Scotland also grants much wider access to education and training initiatives and takes a much more holistic view of access to health services. The Scottish Government has also taken a very strong position on the immigration detention of children.

- Increases in population put pressure on public services such as healthcare, housing and education. The UK population is predicted 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. (This has proved difficult to quantify.)
- Although job vacancies are filled, migration can create the need for additional workers. In spite of high levels of recent immigration, the UK has had consistently high levels of unfilled jobs. (The total at September 2009 was 434,000. National Statistics Online www.statistics.gov.uk/ccil/nugget.asp?id=12.)
- Employers may fail to put proper training and apprenticeships in place if they are able to import skilled workers more easily.
- 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 in spite of years of economic growth.)
- There may be difficulties with cultural integration and friction with local people.
- 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, increased movement of people may bring new difficulties, such as organised crime and people trafficking.

‘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.

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 benefit most. Migration brings social and cultural pressures 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 own 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 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.

Low pay

The Government's Accession Monitoring Report, 2009, shows that 74% of the applicants to the Worker Registration Scheme from the eight central and Eastern European countries (the A8) between May 2004 and March 2009 stated that they earned between £4.50 and £5.99 per hour.

Immigration Policy and Legislation

‘Remote Controls’

The UK Border Agency employs around 9,000 people outside this country. In 2008 the GB-based Refugee Council published a report, *Remote Controls: How UK Border Controls are Endangering the Lives of Refugees*, which you can read at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/position/2008/remotecocontrols/remote_controls_report.htm. They fear that the drop in applications for asylum in the UK over recent years may mean that some people are not getting the chance to seek asylum. Border controls may now well be in the country of origin of would be refugees.

Every country seeks to protect its borders and monitor who comes in and out of the country. Any developed 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. The Labour Government has so far resisted calls for a cap on overall numbers but has indicated its intention to limit the permanent residency of some categories of worker. Border and Immigration Minister, Phil Woolas, said in July 2009, following the passing of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act

‘...we will publish a consultation to examine how the current points based system for economic migrants, which has proved to be an effective and powerful tool for controlling migration, could be applied to citizenship.’ (See pages 40–41.)

press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/immigration-customs-powers

The current Home Secretary, Alan Johnston, has admitted that the Labour Government has been ‘maladroit’ in the way that immigration has been handled, and that some parts of the country had been ‘disproportionately’ affected by pressures on jobs and services. But he claims that the UK is now more successful in tackling immigration. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/8338276.stm

This feeds into public perceptions that high levels of migration were a mistake and, while it may have a positive effect on people whose real difficulties are recognised, it also fuels unwarranted negative feelings towards immigrants.

Historically immigration regulations have been complex, with 80 different schemes that allowed people into the UK. In 2008 a **points-based system** was introduced which replaces many of the different work permit and entry schemes.

Who is entitled to come here from outside the European Economic Area?

People who are not European nationals seeking to work or study in the UK must apply for permission to enter or remain through the **points-based system (PBS)**. The system is made up of five different Tiers which have different eligibility requirements. It is based on the assumption that most gaps in employment will be filled by people from the European Economic Area.

- **Tier 1 (highly skilled migrants)**

This includes professionals such as doctors, scientists, entrepreneurs and investors ‘who can contribute to growth and productivity’. To be eligible for Tier 1 one does not need to have a job offer, but must demonstrate that they are highly skilled, have money to support themselves and can speak English.

- **Tier 2 (skilled people with job offers)**

This tier includes people such as healthcare workers who ‘fill gaps in the United Kingdom workforce’. Since December 2009, employers must adhere to the ‘resident labour test’ and must demonstrate, by advertising locally for 4 weeks, that no suitably qualified ‘settled’ worker can do the job. This does not apply if the job is on the ‘shortage occupation list’ (see below). (Also see below for sponsorship obligations.) There are also a couple of other exceptions such as certain categories of graduates.

- **Tier 3 (low-skilled workers)**

People such as contract workers in catering and construction, ‘to fill temporary labour shortages’ would be included, but this Tier has been suspended indefinitely, to ensure that low-skilled job vacancies are filled only by people from the EEA.

- **Tier 4 (students)**

For non-EU students, colleges and universities must register as a licensed sponsor. Students must meet a number of criteria and cannot transfer between different academic institutions. (See page 19.)

- **Tier 5: (youth mobility and temporary workers)**

Sports people, professional musicians, cultural exchanges and working holidays for young people are included in Tier 5.

(For additional information on the PBS see: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/managingmigration/apointsbasedsystem/howitworks)

The **Migrant Advisory Committee** advises government so that PBS entry points can be adjusted to reflect skills and labour shortages. A **Shortage Occupation List** exists for some jobs. As part of new control measures, some short-term workers 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.

The changes bring challenges for migrants and employers and favour Europeans. People from other parts of the world need either to be highly skilled or very wealthy.

Sponsorship (Tier 2 and Tier 5)

Employers bringing in staff under Tier 2 from outside the European Economic area must now sponsor these workers, and this involves considerable obligations.

If you are an employer or education provider who wants to act as a sponsor, you need to apply for a licence and be added to the register of sponsors. Organisations are subject to checks to see if they are legitimate and to ensure that they have the administrative ability to carry out their sponsorship duties. If you are registering for the first time the fee (as at April 2010) for sponsors with charitable status varies from £300 – £1,000 depending on the size of the organisation, for Tier 2, and £400 – £1,000 for Tier 5. Licences can be suspended.

The words we use

‘Third Country Nationals’

In some countries this term is used when foreign contractors use employees from a country other than their own, but in the EU, a ‘third country’ is one that is not a member of the Union. Locally, the term ‘third country national’ is used to describe migrant workers from outside the European Economic Area. They are treated differently for immigration purposes (see pages 16-20) and in terms of working, welfare, and citizenship. Under **Article 31 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**, however, ‘Every worker has the right to working conditions that respect his or her health, safety and dignity.’ To read more see www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/thirdcountrynationals.htm

Tier 2 has a number of categories: skilled worker; intra-company transfer; sports people and ministers of religion.

Tier 5 includes religious and charity workers. Members of a religious order who are studying or training in an institution, not looked after by their order, need to apply under Tier 4. Working full-time as a teacher in a school run by a church or missionary organisation does not count as missionary work. Teachers must apply as a teacher under the sponsored skilled worker category.

Sponsorship Duties

Sponsors have to comply with the UK Border Agency in keeping records such as copies of passports and contact details. They also have to report to the UK Border Agency events such as delays in taking up work or absences of more than 10 days.

An organisation in Northern Ireland that wants to become a sponsor must have obtained charitable status for tax purposes from HM Revenue and Customs. Charities that are not registered according to the relevant charity legislation must explain the reason for non-registration when they apply; and include any religious belief or similar philosophical belief in something transcendental, metaphysical or ultimate; exclude any philosophical or political belief concerned with man, unless that belief is similar to religious belief; and show that they do not exclude from their community on the basis of gender, nationality or ethnicity; and receive financial and material support for core religious ministry from their congregation or community on a voluntary basis; and do not breach, or encourage others to breach, any United Kingdom legislation; and do not operate against the public interest, or in a way that has a detrimental effect on personal or family life as these are commonly understood in the United Kingdom.

See also the Evangelical Alliance guidelines below.

Implications for Churches and Charities

Churches with substantial administrative capacity, who have regular migrant staff members, interns, or students, are finding ways to cope with the extra burden of sponsorship, but the system does not suit most Christian groups. Ministers of religion in the main denominations tend to be technically self-employed, and used to be responsible for their own immigration status. Some Churches have had to find ways of becoming 'quasi employers'. The expense and complexity of the paperwork will be a deterrent to bringing people here to work for relatively short periods.

Evangelical Alliance has issued guidelines to assist churches and organisations in negotiating the complex and confusing situation. These can be accessed at www.eauk.org/public%2Daffairs/socialjustice/ Daniel Webster of Evangelical Alliance told *Christianity Today* that

'While drawing up our guidelines for the new system, it became clear that the Border Agency hasn't taken into account the way Christian activities work in practice. ... Some of the problems we have seen are due to churches not being aware of their new responsibilities, while on other occasions immigration officials have wrongly banned people

from the country because they haven't understood their own rules.'

It was reported that the Christian singer, Don Francisco, was refused entry into the UK because immigration officials did not believe he was going to perform for free. www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/immigration.rules.throw.churches.into.confusion.says.evangelical.alliance/23091.htm

The new regime has caused problems for some local organisations. Dr David Stevens, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, said that while they have successfully negotiated the 'huge bureaucratic hassle',

'The danger is that small organisations will not be able to meet the demands of the legislation and therefore won't be able to have international volunteers.'

ID Cards for Foreign Students and others

In October 2008 a representative of the UKBA told the **Migration Impacts Forum (MIF)** that the 358,000 non-EEA students who were granted entry to the UK to study contributed an estimated £2.5 billion a year to the UK economy in tuition fees and they had been estimated to bring a total value of nearly £8.5 billion. (For the whole of 2008, 371,000 non-EEA students were admitted, an increase of 3% on 2007.)

Critics of mass migration have focused on visas for foreign students as a loophole in the immigration system because students may overstay their visas or register with bogus educational institutions as a backdoor entry to the UK. On top of the registration and sponsorship arrangements, it was announced in November 2008 that the first compulsory ID cards in the UK since the post-war period, would be issued to foreign students and people renewing their visas on the basis of marriage. Applicants are photographed and fingerprinted. The details on the card indicate whether a person is entitled to access state benefits and services. (From March 2009 the categories of people requiring ID cards have been extended and the Home Office expects that by 2015, 90% of nationals from outside the European Economic Area will have cards.) Further restrictions followed in early 2010.

When the scheme was introduced in 2008, visas with cards cost between **£295** and **£500**. Those renewing marriage visas were to be charged between **£395** and **£595**. There would be a £30 charge to replace a lost card. www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article5225907.ece

The student visa process has caused discomfort in university circles because there is the perception that

- overseas nationals from outside of the EEA are forced to negotiate a series of hurdles in a way that is discriminatory.
- foreign students are being used as guinea pigs for an unpopular ID card scheme.
- university staff are being asked to monitor compliance, without prior agreement, as if they were part of the UK Borders Agency.

See University and College Union www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3698 and www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/q3/PBS_briefing_final_v2.pdf

People who apply to extend their stay in the UK also have to have ID

cards, and from January 2010, this has been extended to skilled workers and their dependents as well as Ministers of Religion under Tier 2. You can find out which categories of people need to have identity cards here: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/lidcardsforforeignnationals/whoneeds-a-card/

Life in the UK Test

Anyone who wants to become a British citizen or settle permanently in the UK has to either pass the **Life in the UK Test** or take a combined **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** course along with citizenship classes. To find out more about the test, or where you can access classes phone the **UK Test Helpline: 0800 015425**. See also: www.lifeintheuktest.gov.uk/

The Cost of Being a Migrant

Anyone moving to another country has traveling costs and, as at January 2010, these are some of the extra expenses involved in moving to the UK:

Visas

Visa fees vary depending on country of origin and duration of stay, but these are some examples; **£67** for short-term visitors; **£215** for migrant workers and other long-term entrants, and between **£750** and **£820** for entrepreneurs or highly skilled migrants. www.ukvisas.gov.uk/en/howtoapply/visafees/

Student Identity Cards

See above. Visas plus cards cost between **£145** and **£565** depending on whether applications are submitted from inside or outside the UK. Failure to comply or having any false details on the card (such as failing to inform about a change of name on marriage) will result in penalty charges of between **£125** and **£1,000**. A replacement card costs **£30**.

Residency/ Indefinite Leave to Remain

£840 for a postal application and **£1095** at a public enquiry office

Application for Naturalisation

£655

Registering Nationality

£470 for adults, **£470** for a child under 18 and **£97** for each additional child

Citizenship Ceremony

£80

Workers Registration Fee

Workers from the A8 accession states have to pay a **£90** registration fee. (See page 38–39.) For individual migrants there are additional costs. Before coming here, a Filipino nurse, for example, would have to spend **£700+** to complete the requirements of the Overseas Nursing Programme. Once here, there is an annual registration fee of **£76** with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Permission to Marry

Immigrants from outside the European Economic Area are required to obtain a Certificate of Approval from the Secretary of State, before they get married or register a civil partnership. People permanently resident here, and not subject to immigration control no longer need approval to marry or register a civil partnership, but if one of the parties lives abroad, then they need to apply for entry clearance. Both parties must now be over 18 years of age.

The words we use

Controversies have arisen recently relating to the employment, pay and conditions of some foreign workers. British workers have felt excluded from contracts where foreign companies have brought in their own staff and there have been concerns locally about the working and living conditions of non-EU workers in the fishing industry. These issues have introduced some unfamiliar terminology into news reports.

Posted Workers: An EU Directive concerning the free movement of workers in the EU allows companies to employ their own workers when they carry out work in another country. A European Court of Justice interpreted the **Posted Workers Directive (1999)** as meaning that employers are only required to apply the equivalent minimum wage and working conditions that workers would experience in their home country.

Transit Visas: If someone is passing through the UK on the way to another country they may need a 'visitor in transit' visa. In the case of the fishing and shipping or oil industries, transit visas are designed for temporary use to allow workers to join ships that are about to leave UK waters. In fact they are sometimes used on a long-term basis, to avoid the work permit regime for non-EU workers. Such workers have been found in the County Down fishing industry, with evidence of exploitation in terms of both pay and conditions. (See also pages 52–53.)

Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009

The last decade saw a large amount of immigration legislation. The Government was concerned about the resulting complexity and announced its intention to produce an **Immigration Simplification Bill** to consolidate existing legislation. Unfortunately the **Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009** actually adds to the already complicated situation and further legislation has been needed. While it was passing through Parliament, local groups, including EMBRACE, briefed local politicians in an attempt to reduce some of its negative aspects. (See also pages 40–41.)

The Act merged customs and immigration powers in a unified border force as part of the **UK Border Agency (UKBA)**. This is a matter of concern because Immigration Officers exercise very wide powers, similar to police powers, and yet are not subject to the same kind of oversight and scrutiny. There are some positive elements. The Act extends the **Police and Criminal Act (PACE)** to some immigration functions and thus increases oversight. There are, however, still gaps in the level of oversight and safeguards it provides.

The legislation also introduced a new **Pathway to Citizenship** which extends the amount of time it takes to obtain British citizenship, and places additional duties on applicants. The concepts of 'earned' and 'probationary' citizenship further extend the length of time when migrants feel insecure, and the increased duties, such as volunteering, will be imposed without any enhanced rights or entitlements. The new arrangements for citizenship will come into force in 2011.

In February 2009 the **Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)** warned that the recession could be longer and deeper if Government plans to restrict immigration are implemented. Restricting migrants who fill skills gaps, or take jobs which local people will not do, could damage the economy. It also criticized aspects of the proposal to end the automatic right to stay after five years' residence and replace it with 'earned citizenship'. The IPPR claimed that the number of people coming to Britain for work would reduce 'naturally' as the economy slows. Tim Finch, of the IPPR migration team, said,

'Migrants become easy targets at times of economic difficulty but introducing yet more tough measures to exclude people could damage our prospects for economic recovery. ... As it stands, the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Bill could deter migrants who are in high demand and who are essential for our economy.'

He said that it was unfair to deny benefits to migrants who are working and paying taxes. To read more see www.relocatemagazine.com/index.php/relocation-news-blog-format/13-immigration-a-visas-news/469-think-tank-criticizes-government-bill-on-immigration-restrictions

The **Common Travel Area (CTA)** is a free movement area between the UK, Republic of Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, allowing people arriving in the UK by sea or air, to travel to the Irish Republic without being subject to immigration controls. The Government planned to introduce controls at ports and airports, and to increase the number of ad-hoc checks at the border as part of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill. Human rights and migrant worker support groups opposed these proposals. In March 2009, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Chief Commissioner, Monica McWilliams stated that

'The Human Rights Commission is extremely concerned that the proposed land border checks could lead to racial profiling and as a result impact significantly on minority-ethnic persons, crossing or just living or working near the land border. As these measures could lead to ethnic minorities having constantly to carry identity papers or face frequent questioning regarding their status and, potentially, detention.'

www.statewatch.org/news/2009/mar/uk-nihrc-border-checks-prel.pdf

The CTA proposals were ultimately dropped from the Bill following lobbying by local groups and politicians. Unfortunately, however, the **Policing and Crime Act 2009** reintroduced the Government's original intentions in a different context. Customs and immigration officials are empowered to check, for customs purposes, the travel documents of anyone entering the UK, which includes the land border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Government has given an assurance that this will not apply outside customs operations but as customs and immigrations powers have merged, it is not clear how this assurance will work in practice. (See also 'Border issues' pages 41–42.)

UK Border Agency Office Opens in Belfast

Drumkeen House in South Belfast was opened finally in July 2009, to provide a range of immigration services including :

- immigration law enforcement
- enrolment of foreign nationals onto the identity card scheme
- asylum claim-handling and decision-making
- sharing of intelligence to help tackle criminality linked to the immigration system
- a reporting centre, for foreign nationals on bail in the community
- a public enquiry office

The office originally housed 60 staff, including representatives from organisations such as the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (see also pages 53–54) and 25 additional staff have been appointed recently. There are two members of staff with specialist training in human trafficking.

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2009/july/ukba-new-office-belfast

All the services are available by appointment only
Tel: (028) 90191004

People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

'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

In his special World Refugee Day message, High Commissioner António Guterres warns that in these difficult economic times, 'those of us who work with refugees are struggling more than ever to meet even their most basic needs'.

World Refugee Day 2009 www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c46d.html

'...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 individual 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

Asylum and immigration issues have become high on the political agenda in recent years, partly in response to concerns about pressures on local resources, but mostly 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 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. 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 than the people they deal with, 'dysfunctional individuals many of them: criminals, asylum seekers, people who do not wish to be subject to social control...'. news.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 the fact that the world is safer, accounts for a steep drop in applications. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (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. They were up slightly in 2008 with 25,930 applications but this still means that they have fallen by almost a half in 5 years. There were even fewer applications in 2009, 24,250.

13,505 asylum applications were refused in 2008. Of the total 19,855 decisions made in 2008, only 20% resulted in grants of asylum; 11% were given **Humanitarian** or **Discretionary Leave to Remain** and the remaining 69% were refused. In 2009 only 13% were granted asylum at the initial decision. A further 28% received a positive decision at appeal. www.homeoffice.gov.uk/irds/pdfs/10/imm1q409.pdf

Of the 67,980 people who were removed from the country in 2008, 12,875 had sought asylum at some time. Asylum applicants and their dependents, totalling 2,660, also left under the **Assisted Voluntary Return Programme (AVRP)** run by **IOM** (the **International Organization for Migration**). Provisional figures indicate that 64,750 people were removed or left voluntarily in 2009, 10,815 of whom had claimed asylum. www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/immig409.pdf

Why do people apply for asylum in the UK?

Refugee Council research, *Chance or Choice? Understanding Why Asylum Seekers Come to the UK*, published in January 2010, dispels a number of myths.

- Over two thirds did not choose to come to the UK.
- Most only discovered they were going to the UK after leaving their country of origin.
- The primary objective for all those interviewed was reaching a place of safety.
- Around three quarters had no knowledge of welfare benefits and support before coming to the UK – most had no expectation they would be given financial support.
- 90% were working in their country of origin and very few were aware they would not be allowed to work when they arrived in the UK.

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/position/2010/18jan2010

'I am not Muslim, I am a Sabian Mandaean. You either have to leave Iraq or change your religion. I went with my parents to stay with a Christian friend but this was not safe. While we were staying with our friend, many Christians were killed. My parents considered this to be a very dangerous situation and began planning for me to leave.'

(Iraq, male, 25-34)

'The only thing in my mind was to be safe. I didn't make any choice to leave my country.'

(Democratic Republic of Congo, male, 35-44)

'I didn't want to come to the UK. I was working. I had a nice house in Zimbabwe and my own business. I was involved with the church. I never had a plan to leave.'

(Zimbabwe, female, 35-44)

Three interviewees, among many, talk about their lack of choice in leaving their home country.

Download the full report by Heaven Crawley, *Chance or Choice? Understanding Why Asylum Seekers Come to the UK*, at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/position/2010/18jan2010

The words we use

The term 'asylum seeker' is often used as a depersonalising term of abuse, associated with the word 'bogus'. In EMBRACE, we try to use the phrase, 'person seeking asylum' or 'asylum applicant' instead. Now, however, some people in GB have been trying to replace the abused word 'asylum' with the word 'sanctuary', which gets a much more positive reaction from members of the public.

Citizens for Sanctuary has produced *10 Ways for Citizens to Save Sanctuary*. This is described as 'a toolkit for action' and can be downloaded from www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/pages/ten%20ways.html. This group also initiated the work of the **Independent Asylum Commission** (see page 27–28).

Local concerns about the numbers of people seeking asylum, need to be seen in an international context. The **United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)** annual report in June 2009 stated that there are currently 42 million people uprooted from their homes due to conflict and persecution, of which 16 million are refugees, or seeking asylum and 26 million people are internally displaced in their own countries. New countries of particular concern are Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia, with long-term problems originating from countries such as Columbia, Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia. www.unhcr.org/4a2fd52412d.html

Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia were the top countries of origin of people, newly seeking asylum in the first half of 2009. www.unhcr.org/4adf12516.html

The countries which host most of the world's displaced people are often very poor, experiencing conflict, or with conflict on their borders.

- In 2008, Pakistan hosted the largest number of refugees, 1.8 million.
- There are around 1,650,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria.
- Over 520,000 refugees have fled the conflict in Sudan to neighbouring countries, of these only 265 Sudanese people applied for asylum in the UK in 2007 (UNHCR 2007: *Global Trends*; and Home Office *Statistical Bulletin: Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2007, 2008*)
- The UK was home to less than 2% of the world's refugees in 2007 – of 16 million worldwide. (Source: UNHCR 2007 *Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Displaced Persons and Stateless Persons* 17 June 2008, www.unhcr.org/4852366f2.html)
- The UK was 17th in the league table of industrialised countries for the number of asylum applications per head of population in 2008.
- (Source: UNHCR, *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialised Countries 2007, and 2008*)

For these and more basic facts on asylum in the UK like these see www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/practice/basics/facts.htm#factone

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

The New Asylum Model (NAM)

From March 2007 all new applicants fell within the Government's **New Asylum Model (NAM)**. NAM is aimed at ensuring that asylum cases are concluded within 6 months. 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

On the positive side, each applicant should now have a single **Case Owner**, a Home Office official who should be better trained than before. It is also proposed that for complex cases there will be more flexibility in the time-scale, so that people's claims can be properly presented. In general, however, the Refugee Council feels that the timings are too short for proper evidence to be sought on behalf of applicants. Vulnerable people such as abused women, children, and victims of torture, may find it difficult to disclose sensitive information within the time allowed. Under NAM, people have no guarantee that they will see a legal representative before their substantive interview. There is also fear that segmentation may be arbitrary and difficult to challenge. Broader fears are that the longstanding culture of disbelief remains.

In the past it has been common for the application process to last for several years but, with the introduction of the New Asylum Model, the Government has made strenuous efforts at streamlining and also to attempt to remove a greater number of people whose applications have failed. The Home Office is now concluding 60% of new asylum cases within six months. www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2009/august/immigration-asylum-stats-release?area=Controllingmigration

Applications made prior to 2007 are called **Legacy Cases**, and at one time totalled over 400,000 for the whole UK but the Home Office claims that this number included duplicates and errors and they hope to be up to date by 2011. www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/oldercases/. Recent reports, however, indicate that UKBA's targets are 'unachievable'. www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/26/immigration

Monitoring the asylum system

As asylum applications have decreased in recent years, 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. 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. For more see www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/reports/unhcrreports/qualityinitiative/unhcrreport4.pdf?view=Binary The use of **Country of Origin (COI)** information (see page 31) was criticised by the UNHCR in May 2009 for relying on Home Office information and ignoring additional sources in the public domain. They noted that the information often failed to take into account human rights violations such as prison conditions, forced labour (including children), and female genital mutilation. They suggest that an independent body should monitor the COI content. www.iasuk.org/media/16851/use_of_coi_in_uk_rsd_final_may%202009.pdf

The **Independent Asylum Commission (IAC)**, was set up by the **Citizen Organising Foundation** and undertook a comprehensive review of the UK asylum system between 2006 and 2008.

'We are frequently

dismayed by the apparent stance of the Home Office in assuming that our clients are lying to gain asylum. Sometimes they look for inconsistencies as proof of this but we know from our understanding of the nature of trauma that memories can easily become fragmented, particularly when under pressure ... Feelings of shame are prevalent among people who have been tortured, particularly if this involved their sexual organs. Having to air this as part of an asylum claim is very distressing.'

Submission from The Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling to the Independent Asylum Commission, IAC interim findings, *Fit for Purpose* Yet, page 146.

'A Zimbabwean

friend, a fluent English speaker; read the transcription of his screening interview on the return journey to Manchester. In five instances, the caseworker 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

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/ The interim report, published in March 2008, found that 'the UK asylum system is improved and improving, but is not yet fit for purpose. It concluded that 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.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/pages/reports/InterimFindings.pdf

The Commission made over 180 recommendations about how applications are processed, how people are treated while they are here and what happens if they are refused sanctuary. At the Belfast launch of the findings, **Les Allamby**, Director of the NI Law Centre, said:

'The IAC has rightly shone a light on a number of important issues including the need for local facilities for reception, the need to use detention sparingly, the importance of access to local information and advice and more emphasis on care and services than the current UK Border Agency's concentration on detention and enforcement.' www.lawcentres.org.uk/news/detail/call-for-a-distinctive-approach-to-northern-ireland-asylum-policy/index.php?css_skin=1

The IAC's critical findings have resulted in a campaign, **Citizens for Sanctuary**, which is trying to bring the recommendations about. www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/ One of their key aims is to re-establish public confidence in the system. They have found that people have extremely negative reactions to the term 'asylum', while the word 'sanctuary' produces very positive responses. (See page 26.) Citizens for Sanctuary have also produced the **Sanctuary Pledge** which has been backed by many religious groups in Great Britain. To find out more see sanctuarypledge.org.uk/

A recent *Guardian* article raised even greater worries about how cases are assessed. Whistleblower, Louise Perrett, who had worked as a case owner with the UKBA spoke about indifference and rudeness to clients and that anyone who approved an asylum application had a stuffed gorilla put on their desk as a 'badge of shame'. 'Border staff humiliate and trick asylum seekers – whistleblower', *Guardian*, 2 February 2010 www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/feb/02/border-staff-asylum-seekers-whistleblower

How Many People Apply for Asylum Locally?

Of the people who seek sanctuary in the UK, only a tiny number apply in Northern Ireland and this can make them particularly isolated and vulnerable, especially as some will have few 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 in Northern Ireland. It is possible, however, to get some idea of the numbers from the applications for subsistence and accommodation here, although there may also be a small number of people who are able to look after themselves financially.

The Belfast-based **Bryson One-Stop-Service for Asylum Seekers** which channels support services (see page 29), forwarded 194 support applications to the Home Office in the period from April 2008 to the

end of March 2009. These included 164 single people and 30 families, 146 male applicants and 48 females. The main countries of origin were Somalia, China, Zimbabwe and Kuwait. Numbers have risen slightly. The figure for people supported in accommodation at the end of December 2009 was 265 (250 in Belfast, 10 in Lisburn and 5 in Newtownabbey), with 15 people on subsistence only support. See www.homeoffice.gov.uk/irds/pdfs10/immig409.pdf?version=1 There are an additional small number of young people, unaccompanied minors, who are the responsibility of Social Services. No figures are available for the number of people whose applications are successful locally but it has been estimated that there are only about 2,000 refugees living here.

Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Applicants

For 24-hour advice and support service for people seeking asylum 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**

The Application Process in Northern Ireland

People seeking asylum are expected to submit their application at the 'first available possibility', which is normally deemed to be on arrival at a port or airport. However, this is not always possible in Northern Ireland because Immigration Officers are not always stationed at the ports, so it can be difficult to have an application recorded. A late claim may affect the credibility of their application and may affect eligibility to receive asylum support. Most people wishing to claim asylum will be directed to the **Bryson One Stop Service**. The Bryson service can fax the applications through to the local UK Border Agency Office, **Drumkeen House**, in South Belfast.

A **Case Worker** from Drumkeen House will invite them to a **Screening Interview** to establish their identity and nationality, and check if another country should be considering their case. This process includes fingerprinting as a check of identity against an international database. Applicants should be told about their rights and responsibilities. They are then issued with an identity number. Under a 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. This is referred to as **Detained Fast Track**. If it is thought that the case could not be argued successfully, the person may be removed swiftly from the country or they may be sent to parts of GB under Home

Office dispersal arrangements. People from countries, presumed to be safe, have no right of appeal in this country. They can appeal when they arrive home and these are known as **Non Suspensive Appeals (NSA)**.

If people seeking asylum cannot support themselves the **National Asylum Support Service (NASS)** can provide accommodation and cash support, which used to be 70% of Income Support but some payments are now much lower than that. The weekly allowances from April 2010 are as follows:

A couple	£70.34
A lone parent	£42.62
A single person aged 25, or over	£42.62
A young person at least 16, but under 18	£38.60
A person under 16	£51.37

(The weekly allowance for a single person over 25 was reduced in October 2009 to £35.52 but people whose support was agreed before that, continue to get £42.62.) www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/pdf/ukSI_20100784_en.pdf

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 of healthy food; and £5 per week for a child under 1 year. The UK charity **Refugee Action** has been campaigning to get the Government to reinstate asylum support to 70% of Income Support. See www.refugee-action.org/

In May 2007 **Bryson One Stop Service for Asylum Seekers** took over from the **Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)** 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. 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 unless they have had to wait for more than 12 months for an initial decision on their case. Throughout the application process people may be asked to report to the immigration officials at Drumkeen House. At any time during the application process people can ask for help to return to their home country voluntarily.

Each new application is allocated a **Case Owner** who is responsible for interviewing and assessing the application and making arrangements for either integration or removal. At the first meeting people should be told how to get a solicitor to help them and asked if they need an interpreter. Applicants complete a **Statement of Evidence Form (SEF)** in English.

At the **Asylum Interview** people need to explain why they fear returning to their own country and to provide what proof they can, including medical reports, if they are available. It is now a criminal offence to lie to

an immigration officer and if the answers to questions are not accurate and comprehensive it may harm the credibility of the applicant. This can be difficult if people are traumatised by what they have seen or experienced.

The case officer must **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.

Changes in asylum legislation have tended to be increasingly restrictive. Since 2005, new applicants who are successful in gaining **Refugee Status** are only granted permission to stay in the UK for 5 years. This is called **Limited Leave to Remain (LLR)**. They have rights to family reunion, benefits and the right to work at this stage. After 5 years they can apply for **Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)**. At this stage they will be subject to **Active Review** and could be asked to leave, if for example, conditions have changed in their country of origin. It remains to be seen if this will

Asylum Appeals

Unsuccessful applicants may have 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 **First Tier Appeal** stage may seek permission to appeal the immigration judge's decision, if the earlier decision was wrong in law, and the error would have made a difference. Where the appeal is unsuccessful, and the application for permission to appeal has been refused, you can seek the **Upper Tribunal's** permission to appeal the immigration judge's decision. Since 15th February, such appeals are now heard at the Immigration and Asylum Chamber, which replaces the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal system. (Recent changes mean that UKBA can now remove someone where there are still outstanding legal matters. UKBA can also remove a number of different categories of individuals without giving them the usual 72-hour 'notice' period, including separated children.)

Different types of protection

If an asylum seeker is successful in demonstrating a need for protection, s/he is normally granted **refugee status**. However, other types of protection can be granted in specific instances. **Humanitarian Protection** may be granted to people who do not qualify for protection under the **Refugee Convention**. This is often granted in cases where removal would result in a human rights violation but for reasons unrelated to the Refugee Convention. **Discretionary Leave** is granted in exceptional circumstances where there are compelling reasons to grant a person a period of leave for reasons not covered in the **Immigration Rules**. Discretionary leave is often granted to unaccompanied minors. Humanitarian protection and discretionary leave were introduced on 1 April 2003 and replaced the more expansive category of **Exceptional Leave to Remain**.

Show Racism the Red Card

has produced an updated version of their double DVD *Islamophobia and A Safe Place*, addressing issues and attitudes about refugees and people seeking asylum with contributions from top footballers. www.theredcard.org/about/publications

be rigorously enforced. To read more about Active Review see www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/outcomes/successfulapplications/activerewiew/

When applications fail people are expected to leave, and if they do not, they may be taken into detention (see pages 42–44) prior to **Forced Removal**. (People who are willing to risk going home have the option of **Voluntary Assisted Return with the International Organization for Migration (IOM)** (see page 25). Some cannot be removed because they are too ill, the journey could not be made safely, or their own country will not allow them to return. In these cases, if they are co-operative, they may receive **Section 4 Support** which can include emergency accommodation and a contribution towards their food and other purchases, through pre-paid cards that can only be used in a limited number of shops. The cards representing £35 of purchases per person per week, replace a previous voucher system. For details of the conditions that need to be in place in order to receive this support see www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/support/apply/section4/ People have difficulty proving that they are destitute enough to receive support. For more details about this, and the hardship experienced see pages 72–74.

A very small number of refugees, 2,000 in the whole of the UK since 2004, are brought here under the **Gateway Protection Programme**, run jointly with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). These people from very troubled areas of the world apply in camps abroad and are interviewed there by the UK Border Agency. The successful applicants are then brought here, with the agreement of local authorities that are prepared to participate in their integration. It is likely that we will receive some Gateway refugees locally in the future.

The **Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES)** is available for people over the age of 18, whose applications are successful. Locally, this is delivered by the Bryson One Stop Service that gives advice (including employment advice) and mentoring. However, at present this is only available to the more recent applicants for sanctuary, who fall within the New Asylum Model (NAM). People who applied for asylum some years ago may have caseworkers in England who do not help with integration. When people are granted status they have to move on from their accommodation and claim benefits or find work, and this can be an additional period of adjustment and stress. The refugee-led **Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)** offers an advice service and supports the integration of those who receive leave to remain but do not fall within the criteria for the Refugee Integration and Employment Service. (See below pages 34–35.) The Red Cross also gives practical assistance and has published *Welcome to Belfast; An Information Guide for Refugees and Asylum Seekers* booklet in English and Arabic. (See also page 108 for volunteering opportunities.)

People with refugee status are entitled to have their close family with them but **Family Reunion** involves difficulties. The UKBA sometimes requires DNA evidence and this is not easy as there is no local laboratory on the official list. The UNHCR organises the paperwork for reunion but resources to assist with transport are suspended at present, so families may have to use their **Integration Loan** or borrow from other people in order to bring their family back together.

Problems for People Seeking Asylum

Fear: People who have had to flee for their lives fear return to their home country; often fear officials if they have suffered at the hands of their government; and fear the shame of being put into jail-like detention when they have committed no criminal offence (see pages 42–44).

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 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.

Language: The language barrier is a problem in the asylum application process and in developing a normal social life. (See also pages 29–31 and 68.)

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 may not understand their culture.

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. (see pages 58–59.)

Enforced Idleness: Inactivity makes hours of anxiety seem longer, and people feel shame at living off the state, because most are not allowed to work during the asylum application process. Some find volunteering helpful. (See also pages 34 and 35.)

Poverty: The basic allowances leave 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 page 30 and for more on destitution see pages 72–74.)

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 is an additional precondition for chronic depressive illness. (See also page 75.)

‘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

‘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

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.

Refugee Support and Community Integration

'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

Peace and Development Issues

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.

Refugee-led support

The **Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)**, is the only refugee-led organisation in Northern Ireland. This community group for refugees and people seeking asylum aims to support the integration process by raising awareness, campaigning, advising people who are seeking asylum, or have received leave to remain and organising social and fundraising events. They also give training in refugee awareness, equality and diversity, and capacity building for new refugee support groups as well as skills training for service providers.

As well as an advice worker and a training and development worker, they have two youth workers who help with building up skills and confidence through trips and workshops. The older boys do football training at Crusaders. NICRAS also runs a homework club and English classes. They are planning to develop an activities project to further support integration.

The NICRAS volunteering programme has two aspects. People applying for asylum here are usually not allowed to work and so doing useful work in the community is important. At the moment this includes work in charity shops, with Conservation Volunteers, short-term volunteering with the Corrymeela Community in Ballycastle and facilitating with the Corrymeela/ NICRAS Inclusive Neighbourhood Project (see opposite). Information about current activities is detailed in the NICRAS newsletter www.nicras.org.uk/.

Local people who support the aims of NICRAS can also volunteer in a number of ways, such as assisting with English classes, doing research for information packs, helping at social events, lobbying and advocacy, updating the website and assisting asylum applicants in accessing funding for education. Volunteers are also sometimes needed in order to accompany people who are signing at police stations and are worried about being detained. Volunteers can contact friends and legal advisers. To find out more about volunteering contact Brendan or Tom.

NICRAS: The Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

136 University Street
Belfast
BT7 1HH
Tel: 90246699

E-mail: nicras@hotmail.co.uk
Web: www.nicras.org.uk

Cities of Sanctuary

Leading Methodist, Inderjit Boghal visited Belfast in October 2008 to encourage support for Cities of Sanctuary. He told an open meeting, hosted by the Refugee Action Group, that the movement is not primarily a campaigning one but is about organisations getting together to support people seeking asylum, by encouraging good neighbourliness, hospitality, eradicating hatred and making everyone safe. Many British cities have large numbers of refugees and a number of groups who support and develop relationships with them. It remains to be seen if Belfast has the critical mass of people to join the movement. For more about GB cities of sanctuary see www.cityofsanctuary.org.

Corrymeela/NICRAS Refugee and Inclusive Neighbourhood Project

The Corrymeela Community and the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) have launched a project to encourage positive relationships between the local community or host community and the small but growing numbers of refugees here. This project aims to develop mutual understanding and common action between the host and refugee community, developing a package of formal and informal training, and working in equal measure with both the local people and refugees. It promotes ways of dealing with difference that may reduce the likelihood of friction and increase the potential for integration.

It is active in three areas where refugees and people seeking sanctuary are living: the mid Falls in West Belfast; Willowfield in East Belfast; and the Holylands, Lower Ormeau and Donegall Pass in South Belfast. A DVD about the areas has been made, as one of the ways to help people with orientation when they first arrive. A team of local people and refugees has been trained to help with training and social activities. The project has funding up to the end of 2011. Project officer Ann Marie White says

‘The Inclusive Neighbourhood Project (refugee and host community integration project) is based on developing understanding and building lasting relationships between people from the host and refugee community. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties in accepting recent changes in communities, it looks to explore misunderstandings and create a safe place for talking, learning and laughter with both the refugee and host community, leaving a legacy of understanding and hospitality.’

At the project launch, one of the refugee facilitators, Justin Kouame, spoke about how long the months had seemed with nothing to do all day since he applied for asylum: ‘Seven months is like seven years.’ He had gone to NICRAS to volunteer and was delighted to have the chance to participate in the Inclusive Neighbourhood Project.

‘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. www.ncadc.org.uk/

In March 2009

the Refugee Council held a conference, 'Integration: Building a Life in the UK.'

The conference reports and recommendations to the UK Border Agency can be downloaded from www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/eventsandtraining/conferences/archive/integration.htm

'I came to the UK seven years ago as a young refugee from Rwanda. As the years passed, I came to think of the UK as home, people in my local community as friends. I felt confident enough to think that I was no longer a refugee but a citizen of a country that needed my skills and would welcome my contributions. My goal is to share what I have learnt from my experiences to empower those that are still in need.'

Marie Lyse quoted in the Independent Asylum Commission's first report, Saving Sanctuary, 2008, p. 22.

'I arrived in Belfast at the end of October [1947] and spent the first two years learning to understand that strange place, its language, customs and people. ... Yet in spite of being safe and feeling secure, I was tormented by a recurring nightmare, from which I always awoke screaming in terror. It stopped, never to return again, after the birth of our first child, Michael, in 1949. Robin's arrival five years later marked the end of transition and the beginning of my integration. From then on I was home.'

The eminent teacher, choreographer and pioneer of modern dance, Auschwitz survivor and refugee, Helen Lewis MBE, who died in December 2009, from her autobiography, A Time to Speak, Belfast 1992.

Challenges for Migrants, Refugees and Minority-Ethnic People

Moving to a new country is a challenge in itself. Migration deprives people of community until they build social links and find their place in the new country. Migrant workers with secure jobs, steady incomes, and good command of English find it much easier to feel comfortable in local communities. They will find it even easier if they are met half way, with acceptance and respect. Not everyone is so fortunate. Immigration policies and how they are enforced, the length of time it takes to get the security of citizenship, workplace exploitation and lack of recognition of qualifications, negative stereotypes and racism, and difficulties in accessing English classes can all contribute to unhappy experiences. An unfortunate minority can experience extreme poverty and destitution. It is impossible to be comprehensive in this document but some of the difficulties experienced are examined below.

In a recent consultation exercise for Belfast City Council's Migrant Forum groups of migrant workers identified the following wish list.

- Accessible information on rights and services, welfare entitlements, how to access health and education services and driving and insurance regulations.
- Advice workers to have a better understanding of the complexities regarding the different categories of migrant workers.
- More information about local culture and more opportunities to engage.
- Local people to be given more information about migration.
- More campaigning against racism.
- Funding for English classes.
- Accessible childcare.
- Support for emerging migrant support groups.
- Greater sharing of information between groups.
- Events where people can meet people from their own country or community.

They also mentioned difficulties with the health service, proving where they lived in order to get a library ticket and proving identity in order to open a bank account. Those who had lost their jobs felt that their nationality would make it more difficult to get another job.

When local citizens who act as **Honorary Consuls** (accredited by foreign embassies) were consulted by Belfast City Council, they mentioned exploitation by agencies and employers; ruthless landlords; outrageous fees for transferring money home; difficulties because of the Worker Registration Scheme; UKBA holding onto passports too long; and difficulties with police, especially for people who had experience of authoritarian regimes.

The Law Centre (NI)

has also produced a number of briefings on community care for migrants
www.lawcentreni.org/Publications/Community%20care%20publications%20list.htm

Living conditions

'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. See www.concordiapartnership.org/policy_file.asp

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), 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.
- 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

The effects of immigration policies

Some migrant workers experience more hardships than others precisely because they have different entitlements depending on where they come from and how they are regarded by complex immigration rules or the asylum system.

Worker Registration Scheme (WRS)

Under the **WRS** migrant workers from the A8 accession countries have to pay £90 to register with the Home Office and need one year's uninterrupted work in order to be entitled to full welfare and medical benefits here. (They are only allowed a break in employment of 30 days.) Some employers fail to ensure that their employees are registered, and workers are sometimes unaware of the need to register. Moving jobs can also be a problem. The NI Human Rights Commission found that people were losing out because continuity of registration was invalidated when people moved jobs and failed to inform the Home Office. It is now a criminal offence for an employer to continue to employ a worker who does not register within one month of starting to work, or has not kept copies of registration forms. A fine of £5,000 is possible. This does not seem to be applied.

The requirement to register is strictly applied, however when it comes to workers claiming benefit and some migrant workers become destitute when they lose their jobs. They find themselves ineligible for benefits, despite having worked and paid tax.

The scheme was due to end in 31 April 2009 but the Government decided to renew it for a further two years, until 2011. In May 2008 the **Trade Union Congress** joined with the **Association of Labour Providers**, the **National Farmers Union** and the **Federation of Poles in Great Britain** to call for an end to the WRS because of the cost to migrants, the inaccuracy of the figures produced and the inconvenience to employers.

The **NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)** has investigated the situation locally and also called for abolition. They had found that the denial of essential services, homelessness support and welfare benefits

caused extreme hardship and note that

‘women are being forced to choose between extreme poverty and remaining in potentially deadly relationships. The Commission has also encountered a number of people forced to sleep rough on the streets of Northern Ireland having being denied access to temporary accommodation.’

The NIHRC has made the following recommendations about the WRS:

- It should be administered compassionately where there is a risk of destitution.
- Victims of domestic violence should be allowed access to services.
- The Government should ensure that employers are aware of their obligations.
- Employers should be sanctioned when they ignore their obligations.
- The £90 fee should be lowered for migrant workers.
- Rights guides should be freely available to migrant workers both before they come here and when they are here.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission evidence on the impact of the WRS, submitted to the UK Border Agency, 10 March 2009

www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/ddlfiles/1106/Submission_of_evidence_to_UKBA_regarding_the_Worker_Registration_Scheme.pdf

For more on the destitution that can affect A8 nationals see pages 69– 72.

Different treatment for Bulgaria and Romania (A2 countries)

Bulgarians and Romanians have a sense of grievance because they are treated differently from the nationals of other EU countries (see page 5). The fact that they can enter the country freely, but have restricted access to the legitimate labour market, leaves them liable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and criminal gangs. A similar situation exists in the South, and in November 2008, the Dublin-based Migrant Rights Centre Ireland claimed that the situation is reinforcing a two-tiered Europe and undermines EU integration and cohesion’.

These problems are compounded when it comes to the Roma people who have come here from Romania. When they were subject to attack in 2009 (see pages 66–67), they were ineligible for Housing Executive accommodation and had to be given exceptional emergency help to return home.

Because of the way that A2 countries have been singled out, Roma people are not entitled to welfare benefits, unless they manage to obtain permission to work as highly skilled migrants (see pages 5 and 16). This means that Roma children should not have been entitled to receive free school meals, but, in January 2009 Education Minister, Catriona Ruane agreed that the Department of Education would fund the meals. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7814352.stm Problems remain. The older children cannot access free transport to school. (This is also true of the children of people whose asylum claims are exhausted. (See page 73.) EMBRACE has helped both groups through its Emergency Fund (see pages 94–95).

Living in limbo; Forced Migrant Destitution in Europe

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has called on European states to change their policies so that they can access basic human rights such as housing social assistance and work, regardless of their legal status. Their research report can be found at www.jrseurope.org/news_releases/ANDES%20report2010.htm

Citizenship

It is unsettling to be in another country, hoping to settle in, but constantly aware that your passport is stamped 'No recourse to public funds', and to know that if you lose your job, you have no safety net and would be forced to leave the country. When the **Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act** changed the citizenship requirements (see page 21 above) it added to those feelings of insecurity. The immigration law barrister, Frances Webber, responding to the draft Bill has said:

'As one of the migrants who became affected when the rule for residency was changed retrospectively from four to five years in 2005, I strongly feel for the ones who have to face harsher and constantly evolving rules as it is now.'

Katrina Albarico of the Filipino Group within the Parish Pastoral Council of St Colmille's church in Ballyhackamore, Belfast.

'the minimum periods of stay in the UK before being eligible for citizenship have all been increased from the current statutory periods (three years for spouses of British citizens and five years for everyone else). Some candidates will have to wait for eight years, and even those who volunteer for 'prescribed activity' have a qualifying period of six years if they do not have a British partner or family member. Additionally, the proposal suggests that unemployment and relationship breakdown will lead not only to refusal of citizenship, but also to removal. It will be far more difficult to get permanent stay in the country without citizenship – the alternatives will generally be either to qualify for citizenship, or be booted out. While waiting for citizenship, candidates will not be able to apply for benefits or social housing.'

Frances Webber, published by Institute of Race Relations (IRR) 4 December 2008
www.justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk/articles/article164.shtml

People doing valuable jobs feel let down and unappreciated. In a combined briefing document for local politicians supported by trade unions, human rights and migrant worker support groups (including EMBRACE) a nurse, Ricky Gallo, is reported explaining how the Bill's proposals would inhibit community integration.

'I think this bill is making it harder for us to get involved in anything, not the other way round! You have to work and make sure nothing goes wrong with your work, because everything depends on you keeping that job. And then, you never know what will happen next. You always feel like they could send you home, so you don't really want to get involved in anything, because it doesn't feel like this is definitely going to be 'home' until you've got some kind of settled status.'

To read the full document, see www.lawcentreni.org/Policy/Briefing%20papers/Policy%20briefings.htm

Between August and October 2009 the Government held a consultation on earned citizenship. The process of acquiring citizenship would involve a points-based system where points are gained or deducted depending on the behaviour of the candidate during their probationary period. Local authorities will be expected to monitor as well as to assist immigrants while they integrate. As well as the existing English language and Life in the UK Test (see page 20) to obtain 'probationary citizenship, there will be another tougher test for full citizenship. Spouses will need to satisfy an English language requirement before they come here. The proposals have received a negative response from the Law Centre (NI).

'The phrase 'with rights come responsibilities' has almost become a mantra for UK policy makers. At the same time, the idea that 'with responsibilities come rights' is increasingly neglected. This is epitomised by these proposals that require migrants to shoulder ever increasing responsibilities and duties— such as language requirements, knowledge of the UK and active citizenship – while simultaneously making it more difficult for migrants to attain the rights associated with permanent status. ... During the making of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, politicians warned that the concept of probationary citizenship may risk creating a new category of second-class citizens. It is clear that the Minister's comments and these consultation proposals give credence to these fears. The increased focus on *citizens' rights* as opposed to *human rights* is particularly damaging. The events in Belfast during the summer months of 2009, where Roma families fled their homes to escape racial intimidation, highlight the stark reality of policies that create divisions between the 'indigenous' population and incoming populations while equally excluding migrants from social protection.'

[For more on this incident see pages 66–67.]

For the details of the Law Centre response see www.lawcentreni.org/Policy/Responses/Responses%202009/Earned%20citizenship.htm

Border issues

Both the Irish and British Governments plan to increase checks on our airports, ports and the border (see page 22 above), but people who require a visa to enter the UK or RoI are already unable to travel freely across the border. Local people are often unaware that permission to enter one part of the island does not always confer the right to travel across the border, and many people who have crossed innocently are turned back or subject to detention or removal. A number of organisations (such as the Immigrant Council of Ireland and the Law Centre NI) would like to see common visa arrangements. Unless we can develop a more sympathetic common approach to the regulation of immigration throughout the island of Ireland, the border will continue to have negative consequences on both residents and migrants, and a detrimental impact on tourism. These are some examples of the problems that arise.

- Minority-ethnic Derry GAA supporters have been removed from buses going to matches in Croke Park.
- The Christian group, SPIRASI, which works with survivors of torture in the Republic of Ireland, has had difficulty bringing people from Donegal to its Dublin centre. As the law stands people need permission to undertake the bus journey of 7 hours because the bus goes from Donegal via Enniskillen to Dublin.
- A Corrymeela Community volunteer from South America who was invited to spend a social weekend in Dublin was stopped on the journey and returned to Belfast, where she found herself alone at Central Station late in the evening.

The Home Office, in response to public consultation, already concedes the potential benefits of a common approach:

'The Government agrees that a common visa with the Republic of Ireland would be beneficial to the tourism industry and will continue to work with the Republic of Ireland on this proposal.'

UK Border Agency Strengthening the Common Travel Area Government Response to the Public Consultation, 15 January 2009

www.statewatch.org/news/2009/jan/uk-ireland-consult-response.pdf

Border areas already experience high levels of social exclusion and a 'grey economy' that allows employers to exploit irregular migrants more easily. Migrant support workers in the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) have encountered many people who say that they have been abused in this way.

The Bishop of Lincoln, Rt Revd Dr John Saxbee, during the Committee Stage of the Border, Citizenship and Nationality Bill, in the House of Lords on 11 February 2009, said that he believed that most people would prefer to be debating a Bill driven by the 'spirit of hospitality' which saw borders as meeting places rather than barriers. He was referring to potential migrant workers but his words are equally appropriate to visitors. Read his speech at www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90211-0005.htm

Strangers into Citizens Campaign

Some politicians and church people feel 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 people who have 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.' news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/12/hi/uk_news/6631193.stm

See also: 94.76.229.85/~coforuk/strangersintocitizens.org.uk/

How immigration policies are enforced

'I just wanted to take my Bible, but they didn't let me.'

A detainee interviewed by NI Human Rights Commission researchers, Our Hidden Borders: The UK Border Agency's Powers of Detention, page 52.

'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

The Government launched a new unified UK Border Agency (UKBA) in April 2008. Home Secretary Jacqui Smith claimed that this would

'help strengthen 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.’

ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2008/ukborderagencylaunch

In February 2008 the Government said that during 2007 63,140 people were removed from the UK – one person every eight minutes. UKBA officials have the right to detain anyone they suspect of committing an immigration offence, as well as people within the asylum system. Locally, this may include people who have strayed across the border, or asylum applicants who live in the community, but are thought to have broken the Home Office rules, e.g. by spending time away from home or by getting paid work. Others are detained where it is felt that their application has little hope of success, or the process seems to be exhausted. Around 900 people were picked up in Northern Ireland in the year up to March 2009, and detained on suspicion of breaches of immigration legislation. Of these, around 600 were removed from the country. Preliminary Home Office figures show that 64,750 people were removed from the UK (or left voluntarily before removal) in 2009. www.homeoffice.gov.uk/irds/pdfs/10/immig409.pdf

There are usually more than 2,000 people detained in **Removal Centres** at any one time and anxieties continue about how they are held. For example, the Refugee Council’s concerns: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/supportourwork/vulnerable-women/more/detention.htm

People picked up in N Ireland are now sent to Removal Centres in Scotland and England and there are worries that they may not get timely legal advice, that there is less scrutiny and that detainees, removed to GB 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 prepared an Information Pack in 2008 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 page 34 for contact details) or downloaded from RAG www.refugeeactiongroup.com/download?id=Nw==

Families seeking sanctuary here, whose applications have failed, are particularly vulnerable. In late 2007 people from Mountpottinger Presbyterian Church found themselves campaigning, with others, against the detention and removal of the Falode and Adefowju 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 and they were removed from the UK. Both these cases highlighted how children suffer and feel criminalised by the experience of detention. The leaders of the four largest churches interceded with the Home Secretary on behalf of families from the Mountpottinger area of east Belfast. (See p44.) They expressed their acceptance of the need to have an immigration policy but said:

‘I spent a lot of time at Oakington Immigration Reception Centre and it is not organised on the idea that human beings are infinitely worthwhile.’

Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, commenting on the immigration detention system, February 2008. www.reconciliationtalk.com/immigration/

Immigration Detention Emergency Helpline

RAG has established an out-of-hours helpline run by a rota of volunteers. They take details from the callers, and offer to pass on information about the detention to family and friends, and to an immigration solicitor. The scheme should also produce valuable information about what happens to people whose detention is normally impossible to research, as they do not appear in official statistics. So, it is hoped that travellers who observe someone being detained will also ring the helpline. Helpline cards can be obtained from EMBRACE.

RAG Immigration Emergency Helpline: 0800 400 495.

See also www.refugeeactiongroup.com/

'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, www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/News%20sheet%2011.pdf

'"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 [Adefowaju] 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/2007/12/130038

'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

In March 2009 the organisations within the **Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe** commented on proposed changes to European immigration legislation and specifically called on countries to ensure that people seeking asylum are not detained just because they are applicants for asylum, and that if detention is used as a last resort, people should have access to legal representation, their families and relevant support organisations. They also asked that EU states honour their obligation to provide adequate asylum reception and procedural conditions. See www.caritas-europa.org/module/FileLib/ChrGrp_CommonpaperonECproposalsforDublinII_FINALd.pdf

In November 2009 it was revealed that 1,300 children had been held in UK removal centres during a recent 15-month period. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8335602.stm This followed the publication in October 2009 of the results of the first paediatric study of children in detention. The doctors found that a majority of the 24 children detained at Yarls Wood Removal Centre were experiencing mental and physical health difficulties related to their detention. These included weight loss, sleep disturbance and bed-wetting, day-time incontinence (indicating severe stress), headaches, abdominal pain and behavioural problems. The study showed deterioration in the mental health of the parents as well as their children. See www.childrenssociety.org.uk/whats_happening/media_office/latest_news/18550_news.html and www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/dec/16/yarls-wood-immigration-children

Senior doctors including the Royal Colleges of Paediatrics and Child Health, GPs and psychiatrists as well as the UK Faculty of Public Health said that detention of children and their families causes 'significant harm' and should be ended as soon as possible. At the time of writing there was a petition against child detention on the internet. See petitions.number10.gov.uk/NoChildDetention/

Trafficking and people smuggling

'People who used to move drugs around now move people around.'
Phil Taylor, Scotland and Northern Ireland Regional Director, UK Border Agency, speaking at the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission Conference, Belfast, 20 April 2009.

'It wasn't alright then. It isn't alright now. Modern slavery traps more people today than in the entire 400 years of the transatlantic slave trade.'

Blue Blindfold campaign web site www.blueblindfold.co.uk/

'Trafficking involves transporting people away from the communities in which they live and forcing them to work against their will using violence, deception or coercion. When children are trafficked, no violence, deception or coercion needs to be involved: simply transporting them into exploitative conditions constitutes trafficking. People are trafficked both between countries and within the borders of a state.'

Definition by Anti-Slavery

www.antislavery.org/english/slavery_today/trafficking.aspx

‘Smuggling’ or ‘trafficking’ both usually involve crossing international borders in an unauthorised way. The difference is that people who are smuggled are assumed to have given their consent, and people who are trafficked are moved against their will. Those who are controlled by others in their own country are also trafficked people.

Families and individuals may have to move because of poverty or fear, and for some, travelling with legal documents is just not an option. Others may travel legally, thinking that they are going to proper jobs in a new country, only to find they are in the power of gangsters, or have been deceived about the work or remuneration. Often, in either trafficking or smuggling, individuals end up with large financial debts, owed to the people who smuggled or trafficked them. There can also be subtle ways in which they are ‘bound’ to the people or gangs back home, who arranged their transport and employment. To assert one’s rights can seem to be breaking a debt of honour, and family at home may be at physical risk.

Stricter border controls and entry requirements create an underground economy where money is made by providing fraudulent documents, help with transport, guided border crossings, and the facilitation of jobs and accommodation.

The difficulty in getting successful prosecutions has led to suspected traffickers being charged with other offences such as failure to pay tax or living off immoral earnings.

It is often assumed that people trafficking only refers to the movement of women for sexual exploitation but the economic exploitation of people is also common – a modern form of slavery, which is rarely prosecuted. The arrival of unaccompanied minors is another increasing cause for concern. Children may end up in domestic or sexual servitude, petty crime, or are used to facilitate benefit fraud.

The local situation

Rev. Becky Dudley who undertook some early research locally, says: ‘Hard data is difficult to find, but professionals and community workers have encountered a cause for concern about trafficking in four areas: exploited labour; women and girls who are exploited, including in the sex industry; unaccompanied minors arriving in Northern Ireland; and young people (born in Northern Ireland) who are being systematically sexually exploited.’ Her research was published in 2005, on behalf of Women’s Aid. www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/WomensAid%20B%20Dudley%20research.pdf

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 the 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. (BBC news report news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/northern_ireland/2407629.stm)

A scoping study commissioned by the Equality Commission NI and the NI Human Rights Commission was published in February 2010. In *The Nature and Extent of Human Trafficking in Northern Ireland*, by Agnieszka

The **Medical Justice Network** facilitates the provision of independent medical and legal advice for people who are seeking asylum and detained in immigration removal centres. They also campaign to improve conditions for people in detention. www.medicaljustice.org.uk Their literature gives a sense of how difficult traumatised people find the system.

‘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

Martynowicz, Sarah Toucas and Anne Caughey of the Institute for Conflict Research, the authors confirm that the problem is difficult to quantify, with victims reluctant to admit the nature of their situation:

‘Due to the nature of trafficking it is difficult to establish the scale of the problem. This difficulty is further compounded given that co-ordinated action and the recording of suspected cases is still poor in Northern Ireland. A law enforcement officer noted that three types of trafficking are occurring in Northern Ireland:

‘I certainly think, if we were to put it in [some] order, I’d say at the moment in Northern Ireland forced labour is the biggest problem with trafficking, followed very closely by sexual exploitation, and third would be domestic servitude.’

The Nature and Extent of Human Trafficking in Northern Ireland, p. 38

Evidence suggests that women trafficked for prostitution come from a large number of countries with a predominance of people from China and other parts of Asia, although there seem to be more women from central and eastern Europe in the North West. Women are moved about to exert greater control over their lives.

[www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/71/The_Nature_and_Extent_of_Human_Trafficking_in_Northern_Ireland_\(January_2010\)_ECNI_NIHRC.pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/71/The_Nature_and_Extent_of_Human_Trafficking_in_Northern_Ireland_(January_2010)_ECNI_NIHRC.pdf)

Police raids rescue trafficked people

The UK Government published its Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/human-traffick-action-plan?view=Binary in March 2007, but until recently there was little official recognition that there was a serious problem in Northern Ireland. However, in a series of raids, in July 2008, five people were rescued from suspected sex slavery traffickers. Six people were arrested, suspected of controlling prostitution and people smuggling, within the UK. Money was also confiscated. The raids were part of a short-term, UK-wide police operation, **Pentameter 2**, aimed at criminals selling victims for sex or forced labour. At that time, Marie Brown of Foyle Women’s Aid complained of the difficulty of supporting rescued women because of the lack of funds. (eastern and central Europeans (A8) need a year’s continuous registered work before they can receive most benefits. People from outside the EU are usually not entitled to welfare support until they have residency.)

‘There are women from ethnic minority backgrounds who may not have come in trafficked but ended up being trafficked and have had to return back to situations (of threat) because we find them very difficult to support.’

www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2008/0702/breaking56.htm

Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, also complained in October 2008 that there was an urgent need for an adequate system of safety and support.

www.nihrc.org/index.php?page=press_news_details&category_id=2&press_id=360&Itemid=65

On 3 December, 2008, Paul Goggins, Chair of the Organised Crime Task Force, welcomed another operation against human trafficking:

'This operation demonstrates that law enforcement agencies from different jurisdictions are working as one to combat the threat from organised crime. These crime gangs are created to make money and they view the people they traffic as mere commodities to be traded and sold for profit. Human trafficking is a serious crime which destroys lives and we will continue to work together to bring those involved in this heinous activity before the courts.'

Disturbingly there were press reports that the four rescued victims had disappeared after making police statements. Anna Lo, MLA, said: 'These women were here illegally so they had no recourse to public funds, they did not know anyone and they spoke very little English.' The PSNI Superintendent, Essie Adair who had been in charge of the operation also said that proper refuges were needed urgently. The women were reported to be from Nigeria, Brazil and Namibia. See Philip Bradfield in the *Newsletter*, 5 December 2008 www.newsletter.co.uk/news/Human-trafficking-victims-39disappear39-after.4764843.jp

The UK ratified the **UN Convention Against Human Trafficking** on 17 December 2008 and this means that they signed up to the following:

- a new national referral mechanism, providing a nationally agreed process to help frontline staff identify victims of trafficking and offer them support
- strengthened arrangements for looking after victims, including a 45-day reflection and recovery period, and the possibility of a one-year residence permit for victims
- better support for victims in giving information to police, which will help authorities bring those who exploit them to justice

press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/government-ratifies-convention

New support services

Following ratification, on 25 March 2009, Paul Goggins (speaking on this occasion as NI Security Minister), announced the launch of new support services stating that we were 'no longer immune from the vile crime of human trafficking.' Assistant Chief Constable Drew Harris said traffickers were targeting 'females in sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe or the Far East with the promise of a far better life'. Read more at news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7962465.stm

The new unit has as its priorities the rescue of trafficked people and the successful prosecution of criminals who are guilty of crimes involving sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and forced labour. The unit was needed immediately, with at least one person referred, in early April, to one of the organisations subcontracted to look after the wellbeing of rescued people. Specialist PSNI officers have been trained to debrief rescued people, and all front line police officers are to be trained to recognise the key indicators that people may have been exploited. (It would be helpful if others who come in contact with foreign nationals here could also receive training to help them become more aware of the signs that people may be

Blue Blindfold

This is an international campaign to open our eyes to the horror of trafficking and to the possibility that we can help to stop it. Slogans include 'It's happening here' and 'See what you can do'. The campaign has produced excellent postcards to counterbalance myths, and information on the signs to look out for trafficking; these can be accessed on the campaign web site www.blueblindfold.co.uk/

victims of trafficking. This might include people such as clergy and pastoral workers, advice workers, teachers, etc.) To read more see www.nio.gov.uk/goggins-announces-extensive-new-support-services-for-victims-of-human-trafficking/media-detail.htm?newsID=15921

There are indications that police will look more carefully at the issues of labour exploitation in future. This occurs in many sectors with reports of debt bondage, and of workers exploited in care homes, whose passports were kept by their employers (see also page 54).

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland looks after adult female victims of sexual trafficking rescued here. www.womensaidni.org/ **Migrant Helpline** (an English-based charity that provides help to migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum in distress) looks after adult male victims of sexual trafficking and all victims of labour trafficking. It is partly funded by the Home Office www.migranthehelpline.org.uk/.

Support Leaflet for Trafficked People

The Law Centre NI has published a leaflet that explains to trafficked people how the Centre can help them. At the launch, Law Centre director Les Allamby said:

'Trafficking by its nature is an underground activity. Our own work shows that it is becoming more prevalent in Northern Ireland. Trafficking is a modern day slave trade with people forced into slave labour and sexual exploitation.'

The leaflet, *Exploited*, includes information in Albanian, Czech, English, French, Lithuanian, Malaysian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Thai. This choice of languages reflects the countries of origin of people who have been trafficked here. **Help can be accessed via the helplines Belfast (028) 9024 4401 and Derry (028) 7126 2433.**

The UK referral process

If an organisation or individual suspects that a person has been trafficked they are expected to take the information to a body that is on the list of **First Responders**. (Locally this includes agencies such as the PSNI, UKBA, NHS Trusts and some GB NGOs, but no support groups in Northern Ireland.) They complete a **Referral Form** that is sent to the UK Human Trafficking Centre (or if there are immigration law implications, the **UKBA**). A person may make a claim for asylum and those who are considering the asylum claim should be made aware of the **Trafficking Referral**. After 5 days there should be a **Reasonable Grounds** decision and then the person will have a 30 day **Reflection Period** during which they have time to decide whether to co-operate with the authorities; the reflection period may be extended to 45 days. If the **Conclusive Decision** is positive, they may be given one year's **Discretionary Leave to Remain**.

While there is concern that the time to allow traumatized people to feel able to tell their stories is too short, some people have said they would

If you have fears that someone has been trafficked and they are not happy about approaching the PSNI or you worry that their story might not be believed, it may be helpful to suggest getting confidential legal advice from the **Law Centre NI** via the helplines: **Belfast (028) 9024 4401 and Derry (028) 7126 2433.**

prefer a quicker decision if they could be sure that their co-operation would have a positive outcome. Others will never find it easy to co-operate as their fear is so great, especially if traffickers have made threats to their families at home. There can also be an abiding sense of shame about being sent home, and there can be outstanding debts to family or friends who thought they were sending people to a successful life in another country.

Outstanding issues

- Amnesty International is campaigning for a 90-day period of recovery and reflection.
- People need to co-operate with the police in order to get protection.
- It is not clear yet that front line professionals in health and social services, the police and immigration services will always be able to recognise the signs that someone has been trafficked. Support groups still have grave fears that bringing someone and making their suspicions known may result in a person being removed from the country.
- People only receive protection if they co-operate and may be just too scared to do so.
- There is a shortage of specialist accommodation for victims of trafficking and no specialist unit in Northern Ireland.
- If specialist organisations were given a role in identifying victims there would be more chance of providing protection at an earlier stage. See www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?newsId=17992
- Young people who have been rescued from traffickers continue to go missing from the UK care system. See news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8199867.stm
- There are fears that some victims of trafficking still end up in immigration removal centres.
- The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland/Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission report recommends a multi-agency approach to helping victims of trafficking, including more training, better awareness, and more effective communication within and between the support organisations.
[www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/71/The_Nature_and_Extent_of_Human_Trafficking_in_Northern_Ireland_\(January_2010\)_ECNI_NIHRC.pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/71/The_Nature_and_Extent_of_Human_Trafficking_in_Northern_Ireland_(January_2010)_ECNI_NIHRC.pdf)

The Conference of Religious in Ireland in the north, CORI (NI), co-hosted a seminar on the work of the Medaille Trust in April 2008. Read the talks. www.corl.ie/Northern_Ireland/relevantpublications/531-trafficking-in-persons--what-can-we-do

An ad hoc CORI anti-trafficking working group has issued a leaflet, *Trafficking of People; Modern Day Slavery*, to provide information for Catholic religious on the issue of trafficking.

The EMBRACE web site carries an extensive list of support organisations and further information. www.embraceni.org/category/information/trafficking/

Worker Exploitation

Trafficking and smuggling enable people to be exploited in the workplace because they have no legal status, but exploitation also affects people who are permitted to work here.

Agencies and Employers

‘We are all witnesses of the burden of suffering, the dislocation and the aspirations that accompany the flow of migrants. ... there is no doubt that foreign workers ... make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labour, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these [workers] cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.’

Caritas in Veritate (Love in Truth), *Encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI*, 29 June 2009.

‘The agency calls you in the morning ‘I need you today, come to work.’ People come and after half an hour, the manager says ‘Why are you here? I don’t need you, go home’. So people spend money for taxi – six or eight pounds – if the wife or husband is working in the same conditions – how can these people live.’

A Polish worker quoted in Migrant Workers and their Families in Northern Ireland; a Trade Union Response, by Robbie McVeigh, ICTU NI, nd.

[www.ictuni.org/uploads/67b098da-831b-4ef7-ba01-f5111705d2bc/Migrant%20Workers%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.ictuni.org/uploads/67b098da-831b-4ef7-ba01-f5111705d2bc/Migrant%20Workers%20(2).pdf)

Agency workers are people who are supplied by an employment business or agency to work for a third party. Many people are now working through agencies rather than directly for employers. Belfast agencies reported to Institute for Conflict Studies researchers that the majority of workers who they dealt with were employed in healthcare, construction, hospitality, or as manual workers. These employment agencies and employment businesses can exert great power, for both good and ill, over the lives of migrant workers.

Employers were beginning to make increased use of subcontracted agency workers before the dramatic increase in the employment of migrant workers. Tarya McKee of the Transport and General Workers Union reported to a conference in 2006 that migrant workers had sometimes been among the workers made redundant to make way for agency workers. It is important to remember that while many agency workers are foreign nationals, many local people also work for agencies.

Most contracts are for short periods, increasing levels of anxiety about future employment. For A8 workers who need 12 months uninterrupted work to become eligible for benefits, this is of particular concern (see pages 69–72).

There are indications that agency working strengthens the possibility of exploitation and ‘forced labour’. The **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** describes forced labour as including some of the following; violence and/or threats; restriction of movement; being tied to the employer or agency through debt; the withholding of wages or refusal to pay wages; passports or identity documents being withheld; and the threat to tell the authorities about someone who is without proper papers. All these happen through trafficking by criminal gangs, but also through the actions of unscrupulous local agencies and employers. A literature review into the role of agencies, by the Institute of Conflict Studies, found that agencies and employers had been reported to

- retain passports during the period of employment;
- deduct rent from wages and provide poor housing;
- withhold pay;
- pay unfair wages in comparison to rates paid to local workers;
- enforce long hours and bad working conditions;
- deny holiday entitlements;
- fail to fulfil the contracts promised before arrival here;
- impose disciplinary measures that are not applied to local people;
- and discriminate against people on grounds of gender.

John Bell, *A Modern Form of Slavery? A Literature Review of Forced Labour*.
Institute of Conflict Research, 2009.

In January 2008 the Irish Congress of Trade Unions called for the devolved executive to use its powers to agree a new deal for agency workers. Kasia Garbal, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NI) Migrant Worker Project Officer, said

‘An employer that uses agencies that rip off decent and hard-working people ... is cheating more than those workers. Those agencies are cheating every good employer and undercutting them by sheer theft. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive have a moral duty to control the activities of employment agencies and ensure that fairness happens as a matter of course. The alternative is for Northern Ireland to get a reputation as the sweatshop of northern Europe.’

www.ictuni.org/?module=datalistdetail&itemid=6b36fce4-a681-4220-836b-13b9c987e770

People are often unaware of their rights, but even if they are aware that they are being treated unfairly, they are often frightened to complain in case they lose their jobs. The recession can only make this worse. Researchers have found that employers take advantage of migrant workers.

‘I was supposed

to have a contract. There was no contract. Before we moved to Ireland we were supposed to have a contract. But I never saw a contract and I never signed anything. When we complained they closed the Foundation [recruitment agency] in Poland but they still supply people for the company.’

Worker quoted in *Migrant Workers and their families in Northern Ireland* p.43.

'Migrant workers can be more vulnerable than other sorts of workers, and therefore can be taken advantage of by bad employers. Increased vulnerability comes from often having few options other than the current employment, lack of knowledge of rights or paths to access rights, and fear of repercussions. For other non-EU migrant workers, the lack of a benefits safety net and the right to change employer can also lead people to be trapped in exploitative circumstances.'

Daniel Holder and C. Lanao, Case Studies of discrimination and disadvantage for Portuguese Migrant Workers.

Some workplace

difficulties call into question our assumptions that conditions here are better than in other countries. One nurse reported

'I was working in China for six years. Financially it is better here but in terms of quality in nursing homes, it is better in China ... We really want to help the residents but there is too much work. There is a lack of equipment in nursing homes here ... At feeding time you are too busy to help people, there is too much time pressure.'

Migrant Workers and their Families in Northern Ireland

The problems experienced by agency workers also occur when people are employed directly and employers are unscrupulous. Trade unions are currently reporting increasing numbers of the kind of abuses seen with agency workers (see above).

- No written contracts
- No pay slips
- No paid holidays
- Excessive working hours
- People who object to their conditions are threatened with instant dismissal
- Women sacked because they were pregnant
- Less favourable conditions than local people
- Dismissal for minor disciplinary offences
- People sacked by text message
- No written reasons for dismissal
- Racism

Oral presentation to the Belfast Migrant Forum by Kasia Garbal and Kevin Doherty of the ICTUNI Migrant Worker Support Unit, November 2009.

People who want to learn more about their rights can contact the **Pay and Work Rights Helpline 0800 9172368, Text phone 0800 121 4042** or www.payandworkrightscampaign.direct.gov.uk/index.html

Foreign language rights guidance is available at www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Understandingyourworkstatus/Migrantworkers/DG_180915

www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/employment/understanding-your-work-status/migrant-workers/introduction-to-working-in-ni.htm

Exploitation in the fishing industry

In December 2008 the news broke that **transit visas** (see page 21) were being used in the Co. Down fishing industry to employ around 160 Filipino men at local Philippines wages, some earning the equivalent of £375 per month including overtime, for 300 hours work. The **International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)** said that the minimum wage here would entitle them to more than £1,600 per month. Money does not go far for men who may wish to phone their families as well as sending money home. They may also have debts to pay to the person back home who arranged their employment. Some of the men spoke of physical ill treatment as well as exploitation. Many of the workers were being forced

to live on board the boats, as they had no documentation to entitle them to go ashore and be housed on land. The fact that they are here on transit visas makes it possible for employers to threaten them with deportation if they complain. At least one man was removed from the country, by the immigration authorities, after his employer learned that he had spoken about his problems to a local MLA.

This is an intractable problem. Scrutiny and a desire for social justice may only lead to workers having to go home. To read more, see the ITF report *Migrant Workers in the Scottish and Irish Fishing Industry*, November 2008, which has the subtitle 'forced or compulsory labour or just plain modern day slavery'.

www.ictuni.org/uploads/67b098da-831b-4ef7-ba01-f5111705d2bc/Migrant%20Fishers%20Report%20nov%20251108.pdf

News story: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7773255.stm

Employment within UK territorial waters is subject to immigration control. People from outside the EEA should have permission from the UK Border Agency to be employed inside the 12 mile limit. On 1 March 2010, a three-month scheme came into force for non-EEA fishermen. The temporary arrangements will enable a limited number of non-EEA crew to be employed on fishing vessels operating in UK territorial waters until 1 September 2011. Applications must be lodged before 31 May 2010. The eligibility criteria can be found here:

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/othercategories/contract-seaman/

The Gangmasters Licensing Authority

Following the death of 23 Chinese cockle pickers in Morecambe Bay, the **Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA)** was set up, with the aim of stopping exploitation in agriculture, horticulture, and shellfish gathering and the processing and packaging businesses that go with these areas of work. Penalties include up to 10 years imprisonment and unlimited fines. The abuse they have uncovered includes

- forced labour
- threats and verbal abuse against workers
- workers forced to pay exorbitant deductions from wages for unsuitable or overcrowded accommodation
- workers forced to travel to work in 'death trap' vans
- workers being paid below the minimum wage
- workers whose health and safety have been put at risk
- the use of illegal workers
- the manipulation of worker documents

It is a great pity that the GLA is not authorized and equipped to investigate other sectors of the economy because exploitation is not confined to the food industry. One particular area of concern is the social care sector, where both care assistants and domestic care workers are subject to exploitation, especially if they are employed through agencies. A briefing paper by Oxfam and **Kalayaan**, an advocacy charity for domestic care workers, described the typical experience of 'working excessive hours,

'They tell us...

"You can't leave us because we brought you into this country, so you can't work for anybody else apart from us."

Domestic care worker quoted in *Who Cares?*

extreme pressure to work overtime, an expectation that the worker will be constantly on call, spurious deductions taken from pay for petrol and other expenses, and non-payment of holiday and sick pay...'

Who Cares? How best to protect UK care workers employed through agencies and gangmasters from exploitation, Oxfam Briefing Paper 2 December 2009
www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/trade/downloads/bp_ukpp_who_cares.pdf

'It is unacceptable

that the food you eat could have been picked, packed or processed by an exploited worker. Anybody with information about exploitation or anybody supplying workers to agriculture or the food industry without a licence should contact us on 0845 602 5020 or anonymously at www.gla.gov.uk/report.
Paul Whitehouse,
Chairman of the GLA

There are similar experiences locally. Helen Sloan of 1st Bangor Presbyterian Church told the local migrant forum about a woman who attended language classes at the church.

'...she had been brought over by an agency and was working in a private house looking after two elderly people one of whom was bedridden. She was working 24/7 and was allowed off just two hours per week to attend the class. ... Over the weeks we watched as this woman aged before our eyes, finally she couldn't take it anymore and asked us for help. I am pleased to say she is now working in a care home, she is very happy and looks 10 years younger.'

www.northdown.gov.uk/news_detail.asp?id=376&area=8

Another hidden problem area is that of domestic helps, with at least two victims of trafficking already found in this form of employment in Northern Ireland. (See also the section on people trafficking pages 44–50).

In July 2008 GLA announced that the pro-active **Operation Ajax**, including surprise raids, would apply in Northern Ireland, and in October 2008 they revealed that over a third of agencies who supply workers for the food processing, packing, farming and horticulture sectors do not hold GLA licences. Operation Ajax led to 18 inspections and 6 formal warnings. Read the full GLA report at www.gla.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1013451

In November 2008 an English gangmaster who supplied workers to meat processors in Ballymena, Co. Antrim, had his licence revoked for refusal to pay the correct holiday money. www.recruiter.co.uk/news/gangmaster-licence/338489.article

GLA materials on workers rights, in a number of languages are available at www.gla.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1013184

Recognition of qualifications

Migrant workers are often employed well below the level of their qualifications and in industries that are different from their area of expertise. It is not unusual to meet a physiotherapist working as a cleaner in a supermarket. The minimum wage here may well be more than a professional wage in some other countries and young people, here to improve their English or to earn money quickly before returning home, may be happy to work below their skills level. Others, however, feel that they are meeting discrimination.

Equality legislation should ensure that equivalent achievements and skills are accepted here and the **Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)** accredits and regulates qualifications here. The **National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ)** indicates equivalent qualifications. (see www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/)

index.aspx) In reality however, employers may well apply their own internal methods of assessments. One group of researchers found that someone who had studied in South America was told that a qualification from a 'jungle university' was not acceptable. (D. Holder, C. Lanao, *Case Studies of discrimination and disadvantage for Portuguese Migrant Workers*. Dungannon: STEP, Animate, 2005.) Agencies say that checking foreign qualifications is very time consuming. For some applicants, their level of English language skill can be an added barrier.

Some people are able to progress from job to job and there is a happy ending:

'My qualification [from Poland] was in food technology. I started working in a chip shop in the village, then my English got better and I saw lots of opportunities to use my qualifications. I got a job as a quality control manager, what I always wanted to do in Poland.'

Worker quoted in "...Easy Life, Great People, Bad Weather" A Report on the Experiences of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland by John Bell, Anne Caughey, Ulf Hansson. Agnieszka Martynowicz and Maura Scully, Institute for Conflict Research, December 2009.

Negative attitudes and 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.

Negative Stereotypes about Migrant Workers

The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) publishes regular attitudinal surveys and these are some of the key findings from June 2009.

- 51% of respondents feel that the Government should place more restrictions on migrant workers.
- 26% of respondents thought Northern Ireland people were very prejudiced towards migrant workers, however, only 4% of respondents consider themselves to be very prejudiced;
- 48% of respondents agree or strongly agree that migrant workers are generally good for the local economy;
- 47% of respondents feel that migrant workers take jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland;
- 29% of respondents agree or strongly agree that migrant workers come to Northern Ireland just to get social security benefits;
- 15% of respondents felt that migrant workers were more law abiding than locals;
- 60% of respondents agree or strongly agree that migrant workers are more hard working than local workers;

'I felt very

downgraded because the local people are getting a different rate for the same work. And yet I'm qualified as a midwife. I have more qualifications than the local care assistants.'

Migrant Workers and their Families in Northern Ireland, p.42.

- 71% of respondents feel that the number of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland puts a strain on services;
- 74% of respondents feel that migrant workers mostly take up jobs local workers do not want;
- 84% of respondents think that migrant workers are prepared to work for lower wages than local workers.

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.

To access the full survey, *Attitudes to Migrant Workers: Results from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, December 2009*, go to www.delni.gov.uk/attitudestomigrantworkers

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

The Equality Commission also researches attitudes to minorities, for example, their Equality Awareness Survey, 2008 found that 28% of respondents would mind having a migrant worker as an in-law, and 23% and 22% respectively would mind having a migrant worker as a neighbour or a work colleague. www.equalityni.org/sections/default.asp?secid=7

While many people are welcoming and understand the reasons for increased migration (see page 1) negative stereotypes persist and seem to grow as our unemployment levels rise.

These are just some of the phrases that are widely used.

'They send money out of the country'

'They are costing the country money'

'They don't contribute to society'

Foreign workers pay national insurance, tax, food and housing costs and spend money in our local economy on necessities, in the same way as the rest of us do. Local people lodge money in banks whose headquarters are in other countries, spend money on foreign holidays and many of our purchases, such as food, clothing, furniture and electrical goods were produced abroad.

'They are only here for the benefits'

'Migrants are getting everything on social security.'

Newly arrived migrant workers are usually not eligible for most social security benefits. People from outside Europe usually have their passports stamped 'No recourse to public funds' and can only access benefits when they become recognised as residents or citizens, after several years

'They get priority in housing'

The Housing Executive allocates social housing from a common waiting list and a standard points-based system, based mostly on need. Many migrant workers live in privately rented accommodation, often in houses of multiple occupancy.

'The migrants are taking our jobs'

'They drive down wages'

Migrants are usually attracted by job vacancies. They fill skills gaps and labour shortages and often do jobs that local people are not trained to do or prepared to do. Industries such as the food processing industry cannot survive without migrant labour.

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

Police Experience

‘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}

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

Everyone is subject to the law and should behave. If a migrant worker misbehaves, that should not reflect badly on others from their country or ethnic group. Clear guidelines on our customs and laws should be made available to new arrivals.

‘Local jobs for local workers.’

Migrant workers are aware of the negative perceptions.

‘If there is redundancy I might be first one to go’ (*Bulgarian migrant worker*)

‘Because [migrant workers] are foreigners and maybe local people will be given the priority.’ (*White European migrant worker*)

‘The ideas of people like “local people first” puts us migrant workers at a disadvantage. Having no residency or citizenship status puts us more into danger of being affected by any job cuts; not being a member of the EU makes us more vulnerable.’ (Filipino nurse)

Migrant Workers, Racism and the Recession: Survey Results on the Impact of the Recession on UNISON Migrant Worker and Black and Minority Ethnic Members: UNISON Northern Ireland, October 2009

www.unionbook.org/pg/file/NathalieD/read/19153/migrant-workers-racism-and-the-recession

The Simple Acts Campaign

gives great ideas about getting involved with refugee issues. They say: ‘We believe that if everyone does at least one of these simple actions, we could make a big change to the way refugees are perceived in the UK. It sounds simple – and it is.’ www.refugeeweek.org.uk/simple-acts/

Negative stereotypes about people seeking asylum

Many local authorities in England have had to produce myth-busting material because of the negative attitudes towards people who are seeking asylum. See, for example *Mythbuster: Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Connexions in Tyne and Weir* www.connexions-tw.co.uk/index2.asp?http://www.connexionstw.co.uk/infolifestyle/refugees_asylum_seeker_myths.htm

They have had to counter the misinformation that people on very basic allowances (see page 30) have been issued with mobile phones, leather jackets or satellite TVs and that they bring crime when they are actually more likely to be victims of crime. They are also accused of queue jumping in obtaining accommodation. In Northern Ireland, people seeking asylum have their accommodation arranged by the Housing Executive but it is privately rented, not Housing Executive property.

Even the word ‘asylum’ provokes negative responses. The Independent Asylum Commission, in association with the Citizen Organising Foundation, commissioned a poll which found that

- only 18% of people responded positively to the word ‘asylum’
- 65.7% of respondents said that it was ‘very’ or ‘quite’ important for the UK to provide sanctuary to people from abroad who are fleeing persecution.
- 71.5% said that they did not know a lot about what the Government is doing about asylum seekers.
- 74.9% thought that the UK hosted more asylum seekers per capita than most other countries in Europe.
- 81.2% responded positively to the word ‘sanctuary’

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/

With this level of negativity and ignorance, it is not surprising that people seeking sanctuary here feel unwanted. To read about the campaign to restore faith in our ability to respond positively to ideas of sanctuary, see page 26.

Attitudes in Churches

‘live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers and sisters, be compassionate and humble.’ 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

Surveys of minority-ethnic people have shown that they are not always welcomed as equals. An All-Ireland Inter-Church body sponsored a survey, undertaken by the late Fee Ching Leong, who found that black

‘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 by Fee Ching.

and minority-ethnic people felt patronised and excluded by churches. In 2005 Canon Rajkumar Sathyaraj and David Maganda undertook a similar exercise locally for the Church Mission Society Ireland, a Protestant mission organisation with links to the Church of Ireland. They found much the same situation: while some minority-ethnic people were warmly welcomed in churches, many reported racist attitudes. They felt that they were viewed as ignorant and lacking competence. They thought people were suspicious of them and didn't trust them with responsibility, even in the local church.

'Many from Christian backgrounds commented that they had been in Northern Ireland for more than 5 years and are nothing more than "pew warmers". It's as if, in the eyes of local Christians and the Clergy, they have nothing valuable to contribute to the life and ministry of the church. They viewed that as indirect discrimination and racism purely on the basis of their background and colour.'

The words of Christians who have felt rejected demonstrate the deep hurt they feel.

'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

'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.

Far Right groups

It is unlikely that all the alarming press reports are true, but it is obvious that some attempts are made, from time to time, to establish groups here that are antagonistic to the presence of minority-ethnic people. In January 2007 the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that the Knights of the Invisible Empire, a white supremacist group, was active and apparently gathering support in the Ballymena and Craigavon areas. The same article suggested that Combat 18, the White Nationalist Party and the National Front were associated with an increase in racist activities. In May 2009 posters appeared in the Co. Down town of Comber, saying 'Save our land. Join the Klan.' The town had previously seen the distribution of flyers featuring images of the Battle of the Somme accompanied by swastikas. To read more see www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sunday-life/news/evil-klan-hoods-in-ulster-net-hate-campaign-13902207.html and [## All forms of racism](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

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.

telegraph/north-down/news/lsquomindless-idiotrsquo-behind-new-racial-slur-flyers-in-comber-14299561.html

BNP leader,

Nick Griffin's defence of 'Christian Britain' has drawn a response from some Christians. Writing in *Ekklesia* in October 2009, Vaughan Jones stated:

'As Christians in Britain (we are not the whole of it!) we have to be faithful to the narrative of our faith. This is a narrative, within the Bible itself, in which the constant struggle between the nomad and the settler is played out. It is a history which tells us that the fruits of faith are indeed totally rotten when ... aligned to power and wealth ... faith is powerful on a world stage when it defends the persecuted and the poor.' *ekkleisia.co.uk/node/10485*

There were complaints that loyalists distributed British National Party (BNP) leaflets in north Antrim around the time of attacks on foreign people. The BNP say that they distributed several thousand pieces of literature in Mid Ulster in February, 2009. They claim that Mid Ulster was chosen because it has the largest population of migrant workers and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland. (Migrant workers certainly, but the statement about asylum seekers is totally misleading as most of the small number of people seeking sanctuary here live in the Belfast area.) Kieran Dinsmore of the BNP said

'As the current economic situation continues to bite deeper into people's pockets, folk are now beginning to take an interest in a variety of issues which only a year ago would not have seemed that important to them. These issues include rising unemployment, lack of housing and health care provision, which is well and truly creaking under the pressure of numbers.'

bnp.org.uk/2009/02/bnp-northern-ireland-launches-2009-leafleting-campaign/

The dangerous implication is that the problems are caused by migrant workers, rather than by the international economic crisis. There has also been an increasing atmosphere of tension in GB, probably due to the recession.

In July 2009, the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Great Britain resolved 'that racism is a denial of the Gospel' and voted to prohibit members of the clergy from being members of the BNP. *www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.newsDetail&newsid=364*

As a result of concern following recent elections, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland held a conference on 5 October 2009 in London, 'Voting with Our Feet – The Churches' Engagement with Far Right Politics' and published 'Racial Justice & the Ballot Box: Exploring a Christian Response to Far-Right Political Parties', a paper to help Christians to articulate strong and informed responses. There was particular concern about 'the tactic of presenting a racist agenda as Christian'. This paper can be downloaded at *www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=92*.

Racist attitudes

Negative stereotyping in the wider community is a breeding ground for more overt racism and racist crime. Physical and verbal racial attacks are publicised. However, more subtle forms of racial discrimination and indifference can affect many aspects of people's lives.

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

- 46% of those who responded had 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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

This survey reflects the attitudes that are prevalent in society. In November 2009 the ARK research survey on prejudice and tolerance in Northern Ireland reported disturbing levels of prejudice that people 'self report'. Dr Neil Jarman describes how in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Surveys fifteen years ago only one in ten people described themselves as at all prejudiced; ten years ago it was one in four and by 2008, 32% reported themselves to be prejudiced to some degree. While most people say that they would not act on their prejudice, 15% said they would behave in accordance with the prejudice that they feel.

When people are asked which community is subject to most prejudice, the Chinese community used to be put in first place. This has now changed completely with the Polish community placed first in both the 2007 and 2008 surveys, with Irish Travellers in second place. People report having more contact with minority-ethnic people, especially in the work place, but the contacts are relatively superficial and there is still a lack of familiarity with other people's cultures. Read the research survey in full at www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update63.pdf

Members of the Polish community confirm the perception that they are likely to find themselves the victims of racist prejudice. These comments are from a more recent survey of Polish people living here, who were asked about their concerns:

‘I feel more and more unwanted in this country’

‘I’m worried about the harassment of Polish people and the lack of understanding towards my countrymen’

‘I’m afraid to speak out loud in Polish in east Belfast’

‘Anxiety. More racist attacks on my countrymen (Poles)’

Dr Robbie McVeigh and Chris McAfee ‘Za Chlebem’: The Impact of the Economic Downturn on the Polish Community in Northern Ireland, NICEM, 2009.

Recent research only reinforces the widespread existence of attitudes that have been experienced by people for a long time. Members of the Chinese community who have been here for several generations have experienced racism over the years, especially during their working lives.

‘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.

Local minority-ethnic people, and people who arrived in the early 2000s have also become used to casual remarks by people who may not realise that they are being insulting. Asian women in Fermanagh reported people asking ‘Are you a mail order bride?’ or expressing surprise that they can speak English.

‘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.’

Both quotations are from Fermanagh: Other Voices, 2002.

Public officials sometimes exhibit negative attitudes and stereotypes.

‘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 her job because she was pregnant. Case Studies of Discrimination and Disadvantage for Portuguese Migrant Workers, quoted in the Animate Research Compendium.

‘Foreigners can be more demanding and pushy.’

Social Security Agency official quoted in Roisin Devlin and SORCHA McKenna, No Home From Home, an Investigative Report into Homelessness and People who are Excluded from Accessing Public Funds.

‘Alcohol would be a big issue and domestic violence would be a big issue, especially with the Polish and the Romanians.’

Social Care Trust official quoted in No Home From Home.

Schools have had to adjust to the reactions of children.

‘When my eldest first went to school he encountered some problems. He is quite dark and other little boys told him that his hands were very dirty. They were 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.

In a divided community people have found themselves being asked to take sides, or it is assumed that they fit into stereotypes.

'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.

"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.

In Mid-Ulster many people have tended to adopt the word 'Portuguese' to describe all migrant workers, and people in other areas have also found themselves lumped together.

'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.

This warning is important. Even if it is not negative, the stereotyping of people can lead to misunderstanding. For example, we think of the Chinese population as well established, with good support organisations but this is not a homogeneous community.

'Whereas the more well-established population of Chinese people in Northern Ireland is Cantonese-speaking, increasingly new migrants are Mandarin speakers coming from a small number of provinces in mainland China. This research project corroborated undocumented observations that the more recently-arrived Mandarin speakers are less well integrated than the first wave of migrants who were Cantonese-speaking. They appear to have more limited financial resources than the earlier migrants now have and by choice have limited if any contact with existing community associations.'

'Moments of a Life in the Margin: migrant communities in Northern Ireland' by Katy Radford and Sara Templer in Shared Space, Issue 8 October, 2009, p.35.

Even apparently confident communities experience problems.

'Our community is confident in some respects – many of our community members are doctors, lecturers, business people and are very highly educated. But the community is not confident concerning the education of their children and racist attacks...we are living in a culture of fear...'

'Race/Ethnicity, Disability and Sexual Orientation in Northern Ireland: A Study of Non-Governmental Organisations' by Helen Lewis in Shared Space, Issue 1, 2005, p.82.

The word 'ethnic'

In reality 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' and '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.

Racist Crime

Negative attitudes lead to negative actions. The last decade saw a rising tide of hate crime against migrant workers and people from minority-ethnic groups. During the year 2007–08 there was a slight drop in racially motivated crimes reported to the PSNI. Between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009, however, there was a slight increase from 976 to 990. Of these crimes, 39.2% were violent while 59.7% were property crimes. There were 2 attempted murders, 17 threats or conspiracy to murder, 224 woundings or assaults and 44 cases of intimidation or harassment. The clearance rate was 12.5%, up slightly from the previous year. www.psni.police.uk/3_08_09_hate_incidents_and_crimes.pdf

These statistics all relate to individual people. For example, in June 2008 a Bulgarian man, Michael Sotirov spoke out after the third attack on his restaurant in Bushmills, Co. Antrim, which employed 40 people at that time.

'I think I'm going to leave because that's not the place I want to live.' ...
'At the time I decided to come here I was very happy and everything was going nice, but I have two kids as well and they're not happy at all, my wife's not happy – she can't sleep at night – we're all scared now, we can't really live this life anymore.'

Read more news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7476929.stm

'My car was burnt while parked in front of my home'

'Verbal abuse, Damage to property. Our wheelie bins were stolen, our fence was damaged and they peed at my door.'

'I was hit with a bottle on the head'

The experience of Polish people surveyed by Dr Robbie McVeigh and Chris McAfee, 'Za Chlebem': The Impact of the Economic Downturn on the Polish Community in Northern Ireland, NICEM, 2009.

'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.

Many people do not report attacks. These are comments from a survey among Polish people. Of people reporting harassment only about a third had gone to the police and were asked to explain why.

'Because I didn't have a clue where is the nearest station.'

'Going to Police won't change anything. You learn manners at home, that's what they [local youths] lack. Police can't teach them good behaviour'

'Because I think the Police would not do anything about it.'

'Because it doesn't make any difference. I spoke with my landlord, he put in new windows but he was afraid to go to the Police himself in case of retaliation.'

The experience of Polish people surveyed by Dr Robbie McVeigh and Chris McAfee, 'Za Chlebem': The Impact of the Economic Downturn on the Polish Community in Northern Ireland, NICEM, 2009.

Football violence results in a backlash

The potential for violence sometimes lies just below the surface. A football World Cup qualifying match between Northern Ireland and Poland in March 2009 was marred by violence, mostly, but not entirely, by Polish fans. Afterwards a number of homes in the South Belfast Village area were damaged, apparently in revenge attacks against Polish people. Windows were smashed and at least one door was kicked in, leaving people who had lived in relative peace for some years fearful. A number left the area. The

people whose homes were attacked included at least one Slovakian man, a Slovenian woman, a number of Hungarian men, and a French woman who was reported as saying 'We don't want it to stop us living here.' The positive side to this story is that there are people in the area who pull the community together. Community representative Heather Calvert said she and others were trying to keep the area calm.

'The residents of this area are up in arms. The ordinary Polish people living in this area are paying the price for these football hooligans who are causing mayhem. That's the price this community has to pay.'

Belfast Telegraph 30 March 2009

www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/raciallymotivated-attacks-leave-foreign-nationals-feeling-terrified-14248309.html

On rebuilding relationships see also the Community Telegraph, 1 April 2009

www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/south-belfast/community-looks-to-rebuild-relations-14252390.html

Attacks on Roma people and health workers

In a year of worrying racist incidents, one series of attacks stood out and was covered in the news media throughout the world. In June 2009, a group of Roma people gathered in the street, fearful to move back into their homes following a number of attacks on their houses in South Belfast.

The 113 people included very vulnerable families with small children and elderly grandparents. The men had been working, either selling the *Belfast Telegraph*, or in car washes, and were generating very little income; however, they all said that it was still considerably more than they could hope to earn even if they were able to access employment in Romania. The group was supplied with temporary accommodation, but once it became clear that there were no public funds available, to help rehouse them here, EMBRACE worked closely with the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) and Belfast Trust to enable all but two of the group to return to Romania. EMBRACE and a number of churches raised funds to provide for their immediate needs, ranging from food and clothing, prescription charges, nappies and toiletries to air fares. The crisis was exacerbated by the fact that people who have every right to be here because they are EU citizens, have no recourse to public funds, or easy access to the labour market (See pages 5 and 39.)

While some members of the group felt that they were too traumatised to remain here, many individuals and families had wished to stay in Belfast, but in the absence of any way of accessing housing, they felt their only recourse was to return home. EMBRACE helped to co-ordinate flights and, while the NIHE was able to pay for flights for families with children, donations received by EMBRACE paid for flights for the people who would otherwise have been on the streets. Many of those who returned to Romania in June have now felt able to return to Belfast, and have secured work and accommodation here, that would have been impossible in their own country. Denise Wright of EMBRACE says.

'Many of those people have made contact with me since their return, to express their thanks for all the help they received. There has also been recognition by the statutory agencies of the key contribution of the churches who were able to meet needs when public bodies were unable to, and they are looking to build working relationships to feed into existing emergency planning for the city.'

(Perspectives on the crisis from Jolena Flett of NICEM, Linda Hutchinson of NIHE and a number of other writers, and articles on the legislative and rights implications can be found in NICEM's *Minority Rights Now!* Issue 1, December 2009. www.nicem.org.uk/news/article/minority-rights-now-nicem-new-policy-magazine)

'In November, a page on a social internet interface, dedicated exclusively to abusing the Roma population of Belfast, attracted nearly 400 fans before it was shut down.

Minority Rights Now! Issue 1, December 2009, page 2.

In the latter part of 2009, attacks on foreign nationals continued to attract international press coverage. The *Times of India* reported that two Indian families had been forced to move. One family from Kerala had their windows smashed. The father who is a care worker married to a nurse at the Craigavon Area Hospital said

'We cannot understand it. We came here from the state of Kerala in South India for a better life and we found most people friendly. ... We hope to move to another part of Portadown as our jobs are here and we enjoy our work. We have been so frightened by the attack. We have been living here for six months and loved Portadown, but we cannot subject our two children to this sort of racist attack. ... We believe it was young people who are not typical of our neighbours, but we do not want our children to be the victims of such hatred.'

timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/world/uk/2-Indian-families-racially-attacked-in-Northern-Ireland/articleshow/5022263.cms

Reporting race hate crime

The **Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)** has appointed **Minority Liaison Officers** in each area to respond to the increase in racist incidents and have published *Hate Crime, Racial Incidents: Protecting your Rights*. This is available in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese. You can report a hate crime online at www.urzone.com/hatecrime/hatecrime.asp but in an emergency you should dial 999, and for non-emergency calls phone **0845 600 8000**.

The **Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)** has an **Online Incident Report Form**. www.nicem.org.uk/services/support-to-victims-of-racial-harassment-and-discrimination/report-an-incident

The **Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)** encourages reporting to their district offices. Contact details can be found at www.nihe.gov.uk/index/yn_home/your_nearest/district_office.htm They have also published a **Hate Harrassment Support Pack** for groups that are likely to be targeted, www.nihe.gov.uk/hate_harrassment_support_pack.pdf and, in September 2009 NIHE, in partnership with the PSNI, produced Hate Crime Cards in nine languages, the same size as business card, for distribution to those groups representing minority-ethnic people and other minority groups. For further details or copies of the card, contact Frank Mulhern, Community Safety Manager with the Housing Executive Frank.mulhern@nihe.gov.uk

District councils have developed community safety initiatives and some have anti-racism initiatives as well as having equality and good relations officers.

Language difficulties

Many migrant workers who come here already have excellent English. Filipino nurses, for example, are not just chosen because their qualifications are recognised here but also because they have been educated through English. Other medical professionals must satisfy an English language test before they are able to work here. However, many other new migrants are likely to be working below the level of their educational attainment and expertise, because their qualifications are not recognised, or their English is not good enough (see also page 54). Accents and local dialects can add additional communication challenges.

In some of our traditional migrant populations, such as the Chinese or Bangladeshi communities, a proportion of people may have very little English and this has made it difficult to integrate in society or to understand important information. Researchers listening to the experiences of the Bangladeshi community in 2000, found that 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.

Public services have become much more aware of language issues. The equality obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act have encouraged this.

‘Minority ethnic groups had difficulty accessing services due to the language barrier – now there are more efforts to inform them of the services available.’

*How Public Authorities Provide Services to Minority Ethnic Groups:
Emerging Findings Discussion Paper*

Northern Ireland now has a regional translation service for the health service.

For people seeking asylum, language can be a matter of life and death as it can affect the outcome of their cases.

‘I didn’t understand the interpreter and because I didn’t speak English I couldn’t tell anyone. The interpreter wrote down that I was Ethiopian but I’m Eritrean. This has caused me a lot of problems.’

*Submission by Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum to the
Independent Asylum Commission, Fit for Purpose Yet
www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/*

Translation services are more widely available for migrants in recent years in Northern Ireland, with most service providers using thebigwordGroup, the approved supplier of translation and interpreting services to Government departments. These services are not always used, however. Human Rights Commission researchers looking into homelessness were concerned to find that Housing Executive officials still used children as translators, although some realised that it was inappropriate.

‘Sometimes there are questions you wouldn’t want a child to be asking a mother, if domestic violence or something.’

No Home From Home, p42.

One of the biggest complaints is the cost of English classes. Some far sighted employers run free classes for their employees and some local authorities, support organisations, charities and churches also provide language and conversation classes. For most people, learning English remains an expensive matter and classes are often not available at times that can be fitted in around work. This has a significant effect on employment potential as well as integration. A report on European migrant workers notes that,

‘Many work irregular hours in isolated locations and cannot access classes in universities or town centres, and work-focused language tuition is most likely to improve labour market prospects.’

*The UK’s New Europeans;
Progress and Challenges Five Years After Accession, p. 32.*

People seeking asylum are only allowed to register for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) after they have been here for 6 months. The Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) uses volunteers to provide one-to-one teaching and will also access grants for Further Education English classes at Belfast Metropolitan College. Volunteering can also help people seeking asylum to improve their English and help them to feel more at home during the stressful period while their application is considered. (See pages 33 and 34.)

Poverty and homelessness

Welfare entitlement in the UK can be based upon whether you are a resident here, what type of immigration status you have, whether you are working or not, and if you are from the A8 countries, whether you have registered and worked for an uninterrupted year. This situation creates major difficulties not just for people unfortunate enough to find themselves locked out of the welfare state but also for service providers whose staff struggle with rules that can make compassion difficult.

Migrant worker destitution

‘Against the compelling urgency of the plight of immigrants ... the claims of legal compliance must give way to the more fundamental claims of our common humanity. If numerous immigrants are here because their families would otherwise live in abject poverty, the issue boils down to legal conformity versus possible starvation... In attempting to understand what is just, we have to imagine real persons and their concrete situations. ... The survival and growth of our own civilization may well depend upon our imagining better.

*‘Imagining the Immigrant - Why legality must give way to humanity’, John J. Savant, in America (The National Catholic Weekly) 26 Oct 2009, p 16
www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11932*

Problems occur when people are welcomed to the country but have no safety net if they cannot find work or lose their jobs before they have been here long enough to have any benefit entitlement (see page 38 and 39). In 2005 a young migrant worker from Ukraine, Oksana Sukhanova, had to have parts of both legs amputated because she had been sleeping rough in Coleraine during cold weather. Once she had lost her job, because of her

‘Many recent

migrants live in overcrowded temporary accommodation, at high rents, or in poor conditions (Audit Commission, 2007). Substantial numbers live in employer-provided housing (especially in sectors such as agriculture where local housing is insufficient to meet peak seasonal demand). This magnifies the risks associated with unstable employment, since workers who lose their jobs also lose their housing.’

An overview of the UK situation in The UK’s New Europeans; Progress and Challenges Five Years After Accession, p. 27. www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/new_europeans.pdf

country of origin, her work permit was no longer valid, her immigration status was tied to the work permit, so she could not look for another job and was not entitled to welfare support. People in her situation are not eligible for benefits and do not have easy access to hostel beds because the homelessness organisations are usually supported by public funds via the Housing Executive. The providers must fund the beds themselves or from charitable donations. There was much agonizing at the time about this welfare gap, but in 2010 charities are still forced to help out as best they can.

Foreign nationals are especially prone to sudden homelessness. A8 nationals (see page 38) 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 run out of money quickly. Others may pay to be brought here with the promise of work that does not materialise. Some people may experience unexpected health problems or are not supported following accidents at work. People on short-term contracts may send money to families at home and fail to reserve sufficient savings to bridge gaps in employment. People who have been living in tied accommodation become homeless as soon as they lose their jobs. The problems are particularly acute for agency workers and trafficked people who have large debts in their home country. Undocumented workers are also especially vulnerable as they will be afraid to ask for help.

Foreign rough sleepers are often subject to harassment and intimidation, and homelessness makes it almost impossible to obtain and hold down a job. Destitute local people usually have a prior history of social problems; for migrant workers it can happen the other way round. Unaccustomed destitution can lead from an ordered life to one with multiple social and medical problems. This can include resorting to crime and/or alcohol and drug abuse.

In 2009 the Law Centre NI submitted a discussion paper ‘Gaps in welfare support for migrant workers’ to the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) best practice working group on migrant workers, around the time that 20 Romanian families were forced out of their homes in Belfast and were ineligible for benefits or housing support. The Law Centre has been liaising with Council for the Homeless to compile information to support their case. Their paper describes how some categories of migrant worker become destitute quickly, following unemployment or relationship breakdown, suggests research to audit the extent of the gaps in welfare provision, and recommends the creation of a support fund. Conversations have been taking place with officials in the relevant local departments. You can download the paper at: www.lawcentreni.org/Policy/Briefing%20papers/Social%20security%20system%20and%20Migrant%20Workers.htm

The issue was highlighted further when research by Roisin Devlin and Sorcha McKenna of the NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) was published in September 2009. Their report, *No Home From Home, an Investigative Report into Homelessness and People who are Excluded from Accessing Public Funds*, confirmed the Law Centre’s concerns, and demonstrated how restrictions in current immigration legislation often prevent access to even the most basic levels of support from government agencies. Personal accounts from homeless individuals reveal their

experiences of domestic violence, ill health and racial intimidation.

The study found that some Housing Executive staff were sympathetic to ineligible people, but others did not seem to know the official position and the researchers were disturbed to find that vulnerable families were rarely referred to Social Services, who should be made aware if children are at risk as they can give emergency support. Some officials will try to help individuals if they can prove priority need. Most housing officials refer ineligible foreigners to voluntary support organisations who then have to look for finance from charities such as EMBRACE (see pages 94 and 95). As one interviewee said to the investigators

'The voluntary and community sector is supporting the state and they're at saturation point. There is a human rights alliance between the voluntary sector and churches for support and accommodation – it is for bed and food, but this is only short-term, all the safeguards are gone.'

Women whose immigration status, right to work and access to funds depends on their partners are in trouble if that relationship breaks down, and especially if they are being abused. In these circumstances official bodies will refer a woman to Women's Aid who struggle to find the money to support people who have no recourse to public funds. Some officials find this situation hard to bear.

'That case hit me hard because she was on her own, with twins, and we couldn't pay her and, much as I felt dreadful about it and the case has stuck with me and I am waiting to hear how it goes [on appeal]. I truthfully felt that I had applied the legislation correctly, but I felt dreadful about it...'

Social security official quoted in No Home from Home p.73.

The NIHRC report includes a number of recommendations, the most pressing of these being that, regardless of nationality or immigration status, no one should be allowed to fall into destitution. A PDF version is available [www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/108/No_Home_from_Home_\(September_2009\).pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/108/No_Home_from_Home_(September_2009).pdf) (See page 28 of the report for a very helpful table of categories of people who are specifically excluded by legislation from homelessness assistance.)

As the recession deepened, homelessness organisations noticed increasing need among foreign nationals. For example, between July and December 2009 the **Welcome Organisation** assisted at least 68 people from at least 12 different countries, at their drop-in centre in the Lower Falls, Belfast. Thirty-six of these were from Poland. Welcome is frustrated in their aim to give 'unconditional care for the vulnerable' by their inability to ensure that they can provide an alternative route for people who are forced into a pattern of rough sleeping, on the streets or in squats.

Further calls for change followed the death from exposure in South Belfast at Christmas 2009, of Robert Kowalski, a Polish man who had been in contact with statutory authorities and homelessness groups over a number of months. **The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)** immediately asked for more to be done to bridge the gap in providing welfare assistance.

'We bought into free movement of labour across Europe. Why can't we have a European transitional migrant fund? Instead, we now have 'home-made' migration rules not based on, and sometimes in violation of, European legislation and these are the 'cracks' that vulnerable people fall through, an example of this is the UK ineligibility of support to those who were unaware of the Workers Registration Scheme and did not therefore comply with it. ... We cannot, as a society, accept the concept of human beings being ineligible for human dignity or compassion.

Bernadette McAliskey, South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) Plugging the Gaps? Migrant Workers – Rights and Entitlements, Inter-Agency Workshop to Explore Our Responsibilities and Legal Obligations Towards People with No Access to Public Funds, 1 October 2009.

‘Sean Smith, who manages Homeplus’s 25 volunteers and five interpreters, says the vast majority of visitors to the centre [for foreign nationals] are Polish, and the rest are Czech, Romanian and Russian. “There is a noticeable difference between the homeless people from Belfast and homeless migrant workers,” he says. “Homeless people from Belfast are there often due to alcohol problems, family break up, etc, and they have often worked their way through hostels. Migrant workers are truly genuine but a vicious cycle begins – they can’t get employment because they have no address and they can’t get benefit and then they have no address. If a migrant worker came over today without a job he or she will be sleeping rough tonight. This is an area of great need.”

www.eauk.org/Inostrangers/upload/DBAS-Booklet-pdf.pdf

‘In light of the economic downturn leading to more migrants losing their jobs and thus heightening the potential for tragedy, NICEM strongly recommends that OFMDFM [the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister] set up a crisis fund to assist those workers who have been made unemployed but are unable to access public funds. Such measures would reduce the risk of poverty and ultimate destitution. Currently Charitable organisations mostly provide such support. ...

We also call upon the Department of Health to extend their Misuse of Drugs and Alcohol Scheme to migrants. In times of economic downturn migrant workers face compounded vulnerability accentuated by unemployment and mental health problems. Often the accommodation arrangements of migrant workers are tied to their jobs and as such they are more likely to become homeless if they become unemployed.

Preventative measures and support mechanisms would not only avert tragedy but would also lessen the strain on the budget to deal with such tragedy in the long run.’

NICEM press release, 30 December 2009

www.nicem.org.uk/press_index/article/press-release-on-crisis-fund-and-human-rights

Destitution within the asylum system

People who come here seeking sanctuary often have no money when they arrive and it can take a while for them to be able to access support. They receive payments and accommodation while their application is heard (see page 30).

The UK group, **Refugee Action** has found that people on asylum support find it hard to provide enough food and clothing for their children, afford expenses such as school uniforms, that 70% had been unable to buy fresh food and vegetables in the previous week, 94% were still wearing the clothes they arrived in and more than 60% could not afford medical goods such as painkillers. Their briefing can be found at www.refugee-action.org/documents/AsylumSupport_Refugee%20ActionFeb2010.pdf

Failed asylum applicants are not entitled to work and may lose their benefits. They may be forced to live on what handouts they can manage to obtain or slip 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 people they remove, it is unable to enforce removal 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. An 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 Charitable Trust** has undertaken a **Destitution Inquiry**. Research in Leeds 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 the 2007 report *Moving on: From Destitution to Contribution*, and the 2009 report *Still Destitute; A Worsening Problem for Refused Asylum Seekers* see www.jrct.org.uk/text.asp?section=0001000200030006

The Refugee Survival Trust and the British Red Cross in Scotland have highlighted the destitution experienced at various stages of the asylum system. *Destitution and the Asylum System: Application, Decision, Confusion, Deprivation, Destitution, 21 Days Later* can be accessed at www.redcross.org.uk/news.asp?id=90673 and the Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP), *Not Destitute Enough*, a report documenting UKBA's failure to apply the correct legal definitions of destitution in asylum support decisions and the poor levels of assessment can be accessed at www.asaproject.org/web/images/PDFs/not_destitute_enough.pdf

Locally, it is hard to assess how much destitution there is at the end of the asylum process. There were 26 men, 3 women and 21 families on Section 4 support (see page 32) in March 2010 but obtaining this support is not easy. Recent examples of inability to access Section 4 support quickly in Belfast include the following.

- A pregnant homeless woman was said to have applied too early because she was over 8 weeks away from her due date.
- Further submissions were required of a homeless, destitute man from Darfur who requires treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- A homeless family of 4 was told that the case was awaiting review after 3 months.

People who are entitled to support and who have no chance of return to countries such as Sudan or China may end up facing destitution for months. They must rely on the generosity of others or starve on the streets.

For those who do receive Section 4 cards the difficulties continue. The scheme is now administered by a private company Sodexo. The personalised Azure Cards can be used in Sainsbury, Boots, Tesco and Asda. There is no possibility of saving money out of the £35 per week. If there is more than £5 left at the end of the week Sodexo reclaims the money from the card. (Families receive one card and money is not reclaimed from family cards.) This cashless existence means that people have no possibility of buying even such basic items as bus tickets and phone cards.

Those who have not agreed to leave and receive no payments, live in fear of removal. They are likely to avoid official bodies and recognised charities. They may stay with friends for a while, work in the black economy and only resurface if they are in desperation. 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 forced into abject poverty in an attempt to drive them out of the country. *stillhumanstillhere*.

wordpress.com/ To see Nick Broomfield's documentary film on destitution go to www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=10398

'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

IOM

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. People should be made aware that an application to IOM will result in their asylum application being withdrawn and may result in a re-entry ban to the UK for up to five years.
For further information
Tel: 0800 783 2332
www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp

Suicide

'Mistreatment because of racism can lead to depression. And depression is the number one cause for suicide.'

Kevin Caruso writing in a USA web site, Suicide.org,
www.suicide.org/racism-and-suicide.html

'We have people killing themselves who were working for agencies. They can't deal with these things – they lost their jobs and then they start to think in a bad way...'

A Polish worker quoted in Migrant Workers and their Families in Northern Ireland; a Trade Union Response, by Robbie McVeigh.
[www.ictuni.org/uploads/67b098da-831b-4ef7-ba01-f5111705d2bc/Migrant%20Workers%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.ictuni.org/uploads/67b098da-831b-4ef7-ba01-f5111705d2bc/Migrant%20Workers%20(2).pdf)

'I am made to feel as if I smell and there is zero tolerance for the non-existent smell of an asylum seeker. I escaped from Kenya because I wanted to live, but in Middlesbrough all I can think about is how much I want to die.'

Kamwaura Nygothi, a Kenyan business woman, on being 'dispersed' to Middlesbrough, Guardian 8 July 2004.

It is widely accepted that having confidence in your place in society and a sense of self-esteem are plus factors in preventing suicide. Isolation is dangerous and feeling undermined, through workplace bullying and humiliation, or racist attacks, can be devastating. Money worries or fear of job loss can also be crucial in pushing someone over the edge. It is not possible to give statistics but, anecdotally at least, some of the suicides of migrant workers in recent years have been associated with a sense of humiliation through being publicly reprimanded at work – especially shameful in some cultures. The instability caused by the demands of working for unscrupulous agencies has also been blamed for producing suicidal thoughts (see page 50–54).

Honorary consuls are reporting suicide as an area of concern and the Trade Unions have drawn attention to the vulnerability of migrants. Pamela Dooley of UNISON, speaking at an Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) conference said

'The failure of the British and Irish governments to protect migrant workers is leading some desperate immigrants to take their own lives, the biennial conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) heard yesterday. ... We recently faced the worst possible case of a nurse who took her own life because of the treatment she faced.'

Michael Farrell, writing in the *Irish Examiner* in June 2005, noted that Ms Dooley's speech came just two days after three Polish workers were attacked in Fermanagh, and other harrassment against Chinese, Pakistani, Ugandan, Portuguese, Filipino, Lithuanian and Latvian workers had been reported. archives.tcm.ie/irishexaminer/2005/06/22/story420103293.asp

The following year, the NI Committee of the ICTU, in response to the DHSSPS NI Suicide Prevention Strategy, said that appropriate responses needed to be developed for vulnerable groups such as migrant workers,

'Many migrant workers in Northern Ireland, for example, do not have the social supports of family and community that others enjoy and we are aware of significant levels of social disadvantage amongst this community.'

There have been a disturbing number of suicides in the Craigavon/Portadown area and (just as a locally-based suicide prevention web site, www.xchangesuicideprevention.org.uk/ was being launched in July 2008) the *Portadown Times* reported two suicides from the town's migrant worker community. A Lithuanian man died near Seagoe and a Portuguese man, who had lived in Portadown for four years, had returned to Portugal where he had jumped to his death from a train.

For people seeking asylum, not allowed to work, concerned for their future, the situation can be even worse. They have little possibility of gaining control over their lives and helplessness and despair can take over. Research among women seeking asylum in Scotland, published in September 2009, revealed that 57% were suffering from post traumatic stress disorder, 22% had already attempted suicide, while one in five had considered ending their own life in the seven days prior to interview. (See Scottish Refugee Council news release www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/Media_women) An Institute of Race Relations report in 2006 catalogued 57 cases where people seeking asylum had killed themselves. See a *Guardian* article by Melanie Mc Fadyean, 10 March 2010, tinyurl.com/lyhq7457.

People who are detained in **Removal Centres** also come under severe stress. In 2004 it was noted that 10 people had taken their own lives in UK removal centres since 2000. www.irr.org.uk/2004/july/lak000016.html Helen Ireland, **Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID)**, told the Independent Asylum Commission that

'Our visitors ... see the profound hopelessness, despair and suicidal urges caused by the experience of detention.'

3rd IAC Report, Deserving Dignity, p.16.
www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/

Foreign prisoners

The figures for foreign prisoners committed to Northern Ireland jails showed a 61% increase between the two years, April 2006 to March 2008, making up 5% of the prison population during the later period. In 2007/08 foreign national prisoners comprised 32% of women prisoners compared to 9% of male prisoners. Some people are there because some immigration offences are now criminal offences. Some, for example, are held because of charges that they had been using false travel documents.

In April 2009 Hydebank Young Offenders Centre (which also houses adult women), held 13 women and 6 young men from other countries. Six of the women were Chinese, the others being Dutch, Polish and Nigerian. The young men were from Argentina, China, Liberia and Mauritius. For these prisoners, and the staff looking after them, there are all sorts of difficulties, from racism, language problems, food, isolation from family and friends, to the difficulty in finding solicitors who are experienced in both criminal and immigration law. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, has a number of concerns, including the reliance on the UK Border Agency, rather than an independent organisation, to provide specialist immigration advice.

See NIHRC, *Response to the NI Prison Service's Draft Foreign National Prisoner Strategy 2008–2010*, July 2008.

[www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/100/Response_to_NIPS_draft_Foreign_National_Prisoner_Strategy_\(July_2008\).pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/100/Response_to_NIPS_draft_Foreign_National_Prisoner_Strategy_(July_2008).pdf)

Working with Women Prisoners – A Guide For Staff; Northern Ireland Prison Service, July 2009

www.niprisonservice.gov.uk/uploads/docs/Final%20Working%20with%20Women%20Prisoners%20-%20A%20Guide%20for%20Staff%20-%20with%20cover.pdf

Official Responses

Incomers and members of minority-ethnic groups have not always felt welcome locally and report negative attitudes and unequal treatment by official bodies as well as individuals in society. (See pages 60–63.) **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 sound fair, but may disadvantage a group whose needs are not met by this policy. There is increasing awareness of this danger, and policies are being put in place locally to redress them.

Until very recently we have had a focus on **Community Relations** strategies that attempted to address the divisions between Protestant and Catholic communities. The term **Good Relations** is applied to dealing positively with other forms of 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 promote equality of opportunity between different groups of people, including 'racial groups'. They are also obliged to promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Public bodies are obliged to have **Equality Schemes** and to submit their policies to **Equality Impact Assessments** that are open to public scrutiny. The NI Equality Commission research has found that

'Awareness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act has declined over the past three years (from 28% in 2005 to 16% in 2008). However, for those who were aware of Section 75, knowledge of the specific duties placed on public authorities appears to have improved considerably for example, 80% knew that public authorities were required to develop an equality scheme (compared with 31% in 2005).'

Equality Awareness Survey 2008

www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECSurvey2008.pdf

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

There is frustration in the voluntary sector that a **Single Equality Act** has not been achieved here in order to provide more consistency in the protection of rights and equalities. There are also concerns that an incoming British Conservative Government may repeal the Human

Rights Act and that rights bodies here may come under threat from the Executive. In July 2009 Finance Minister Sammy Wilson attacked the 'wasteful equality industry' and reiterated DUP policy that bodies such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission and the Office of the Children's Commissioner should be merged in order to save money. www.newsletter.co.uk/news/Wilson-attacks-wasteful-equality-industry.5442557.jp

Following racist incidents in South Belfast (see pages 66–67), he accused groups of exaggerating the race problem in order to sustain public funding. Patrick Yu of the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities responded that he was playing into the hands of racists, that the number of incidents can be seen from PSNI figures, and that many anti-racism groups received no public funding. See news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8186978.stm and www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/markdevenport/2009/08/i_offend_therefore_i_am.html

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

Government set up an inter-departmental **Good Relations Panel** to shape policies and institutions, including faith representatives. The **Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)** has a policy role and is responsible for challenging racism, undertaking research and monitoring progress. The 2007 ministerial pledge of office included the words 'and will promote a shared future'. OFMDFM announced in January 2008 that it was about to bring forward detailed proposals for a 'programme of cohesion and integration for a shared and better future'. It is intended that equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations will be at the heart of all policies and programmes across Government and that the programme will build on existing good practice, particularly in district councils and community organisations. This **Cohesion Sharing and Integration (CSI)** strategy has yet to be published but there have been signs of progress in early 2010.

Meanwhile a number of departments are working on integration issues. For example, OFMDFM administers a **Minority Ethnic Development Fund** that distributes funding to the voluntary and community sector. EMBRACE was awarded a grant for the year 2010–11 towards a development worker post.

The **Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)** continues to steer a Migrant Worker Thematic Group where a network of civil

service departments, voluntary and statutory bodies, business and trade unions can meet to network, and highlight events, information and research; government policy and its application and best practice, relating to migrant workers. DEL has developed good practice guidelines on the use of interpreters. They have also sponsored useful research including 3 major reports, published in December 2009: *The Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland*; *The Experiences of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland*; and *Attitudes to Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland: Results from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey 2009*. These can be accessed at www.delni.gov.uk/index/press-releases/press-releases-oct09-dec09/departments_publishes_reports_on_migrant_workers_in_northern_ireland_.htm

The **Northern Ireland Office Community Safety Unit** has helped to find local initiatives, for example, the production of a *Racism Ruins Lives* CD in Craigavon, in October 2008. See www.nio.gov.uk/racism-ruins-lives-goggins/media-detail.htm?newsID=15492

There have been worries about the exploitation of agency workers. The UK Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform includes information for N. Ireland in its new information leaflet, **Agency Workers: Know Your Rights**. It can be downloaded at www.nidirect.gov.uk/dg-10027514-177027.pdf See also campaigns.direct.gov.uk/agencyworkers/ **Your Rights at Work** guide was revised in February 2009 and the English version can be accessed at www.delni.gov.uk/yourrightsatwork

The **Community Relations Council** (www.community-relations.org.uk) has an enhanced role in good relations work, independent of Government and representative of civic society. **Good Relations Officers (GROs)** in district councils often fund good relations activities at local level.

In July 2005, to complement **A Shared Future**, the Government published:

A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005-2010

This strategy has 6 aims

- To eliminate racial inequality through ensuring equality of opportunity in all aspects of life
- To provide equal protection and redress against racism and racist crime
- To ensure 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. Without the Cohesion, Sharing and

Integration strategy document, this strategy has lost some of its impetus.

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. As well as the Racial Equality Unit, a **Racial Equality Forum** was set up to help draw up an action plan, to implement the strategy, and to monitor and review progress. The **Department of Employment and Learning** co-ordinates 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.

The Forum itself had been in abeyance but on 5 October 2009, the NI Assembly passed the following resolution:

‘That this Assembly notes the economic, social and cultural contributions from migrant workers; and calls on the Executive to review the migrant workers strategy and to re-establish the Racial Equality Forum to consider further support for immigrants.’

www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2009/091005.htm#10

In November 2009 the forum began to meet again and it is hoped that themed sub groups will make it more effective.

There is now an **All Party Assembly Group on Ethnic Minority Communities** that aims to promote and monitor the establishment of appropriate racial equality strategies within Government departments and in society in general. The parties represented are Alliance, DUP, PUP, SDLP, Sinn Féin and UUP.

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.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/04/PSNI%20racial_crime.pdf*

OFMDFM, the Equality Commission, Community Relations Council, Northern Ireland Office Community Safety Unit and the PSNI have initiated the **Unite against Hate** campaign, which was launched in September 2009, in order to challenge the prejudices that result in hate crimes. This provides opportunities for ordinary people to demonstrate their opposition to the minority who carry out all forms of hate crime, including racism. Groups such as the Irish Football Association, Gaelic Athletic Association, Belfast Festival at Queen’s and Culture Night Belfast, have pledged support for the campaign. A number of events have taken place already, including the Indian Community Centre conference on Race Related Hate Crime on 25 January 2010, and Holocaust Memorial Day, also in January. To find out more or sign a petition of support, go to *www.uniteagainsthate.org.uk/campaign/*

Useful documents:

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

A Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005–10 OFMDFM www.ofmdfmini.gov.uk/race-equality-strategy.pdf The OFMDFM web site also contains other useful research texts on racism and racial equality. www.research.ofmdfmini.gov.uk

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

The UK Department of Communities and Local Government published **Guidance on Building a Local Sense of Belonging** in 2009, which can be found at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1112832.pdf

In addition, the Department has published **Guidance on Meaningful Interaction**, which is intended to increase community cohesion. This guidance is at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1112887.pdf

Positive Local 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 is an increasing body of research, collaboration, and a developing number of support groups. It would now be difficult to compile a comprehensive list, so only a few examples are listed here.

District Councils continue to develop strategies to deal with integration at local level and they are administering Peace III funding, some of which can be used for furthering integration and social cohesion. Belfast City Council, for example, has a **Migrant Worker Forum** that allows council staff and representatives of other statutory and voluntary bodies to network and share good practice. They have recently consulted migrant groups and honorary consuls, commissioned research and hosted receptions for local cultural and national groups. The Council's Good Relations Unit also offers Migrant Awareness and Ending Hate in our Communities training in conjunction with the South Belfast Roundtable, and is currently working to ensure that comprehensive information of relevance to migrant workers is available on its website. www.belfastcity.gov.uk/migrants/index.asp. The Council has commissioned the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) to establish a cross-border programme to support the employment related needs of migrant workers. They have commissioned GEMS to develop and deliver a training programme that will address key issues that will assist new communities in Belfast to integrate, including modules on rights, access to services, community safety issues, working in the UK and how to get involved in the community. Civic receptions have been hosted to strengthen links between the Council and local minority ethnic communities

Belfast City Council is also leading the **Open Cities** project, along with nine other European cities and the British Council. The project explores how cities can become more open in attracting and retaining migrant workers in order to become more successful cities. To read more see www.belfastcity.gov.uk/opencities/index.asp

Most local authorities have also been active in undertaking consultations with migrant workers and commissioning other research and have used these to inform their integration strategies, welcome packs and information events. Some areas have inter-ethnic forums or other networks. As well as **Good Relations Officers**, and Equality Officers, some now have Migrant Worker Support Officers or Diversity Officers and a few have had additional staff such as an Anti-Racism Officer or Ethnic Minorities Co-ordinator. Councils, community groups and partnerships between statutory and voluntary bodies work to develop strategies in the area of integration. There is also considerable cross-border sharing of information between rights organisations and other groups.

Anti-racism

As well as the Unite Against Hate campaign and other reporting schemes (see pages 67 and 80 above), there are other local initiatives, for example:

- A bilingual community safety advocacy scheme involving the Chinese Welfare Association and the Polish Association NI aims to reduce the fear of crime and improve communications with public services in Belfast. Witnesses to incidents, victims of racism or vandalism, or people who are feeling vulnerable can contact the bilingual community safety advocates, Simon Ling, CWA, on Mobile 07888 398630, Tel: 9028 8277, E-mail simon@cwa-ni.org or Aleksandra Lojek-Magdziarz on Mobile: 07916 574225.

Information

There are now more sources of information about the complexities of life here including

- 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. 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. (See also pages 111 and 112.)
- 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 has some of its web advice available in European languages www.citizensadvice.co.uk. They also have some multi-lingual advisors and volunteers.
- **C'Mon Over: Living and Working in Northern Ireland**, on the NI Direct government website, gives information about living and working here, aimed primarily at people returning from elsewhere. www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/education-and-learning/cmon-over/cmon-over-living.htm
- The official government website for people in Northern Ireland is NI Direct www.nidirect.gov.uk/

Language

- As part of their work to help people become more employable, **GEMS NI** runs **Language for Work** courses in Belfast, tailored to learning English for the workplace. They also organise a regular job club. See www.gemsni.org.uk

- As well as training community diversity facilitators **SEEDS** in Londonderry runs courses for community translation and interpretation. www.seeds.ie/training.html

Rights

- 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.
- The Equality Commission also runs an **Anti-Racism in the Workplace Week** each year to encourage reduction in discrimination and harassment in the workplace and positive responses to the needs of minority-ethnic employees and customers.
- 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**, Dublin, 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 provide support services including translation.

Networks and support groups

- The **Migrant Worker Support Network (MWSN)**, organised through **STEP**, allows its member voluntary and community groups and practitioners to share information and expertise. See www.iconebusiness.com/stepni/site/migrantSubPage.aspx?pageID=260
- **The Black and Minority-Ethnic and Faith Network** meets regularly in Belfast and produces a regular electronic newsletter. To receive the e-bulletin, send a blank E-mail to: bmefnetworkni@gmail.com
- Forums are developing in towns and cities, such as the **Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum, Foyle Multicultural Forum, Down Diversity in Action Forum, Omagh Ethnic Communities Support Group, Fermanagh International Communities Support Group, North Down Ethnic Minority Forum, and Ards Intercultural Forum**.
- Some district councils have grouped together to tackle good relations issues. The **Southern Cluster Partnership** – Newry and Mourne District Council, Craigavon Borough Council, Banbridge District Council and Armagh City and District Council as well as Louth and Monaghan Council regions have a **Challenge of Change** programme which co-ordinates training, events, networking and is responsible for advice and support for minority-ethnic people.
- **The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)** continues to bring people together to discuss issues, especially the need for a single coherent Equality Bill and to support minority-ethnic support organisations.
- The more established minority-ethnic communities continue to promote a wider knowledge of their cultures and faiths. The **Chinese**

'Our aim is to

facilitate greater involvement of people from black and minority ethnic communities in civic, community and political life, and increase community cohesion.'

Challenge of Change
Co-ordinator, Justyna McCabe of Newry & Mourne district Council at the *Challenge of Change* project launch, November 2009.

www.newry.info/business-news/165-challenge-of-change-project-launch

Community invites others to join their annual New Year and other celebrations. The **Indian Community** also involves local people in their festivals such as Divali and Holi. The **Belfast Islamic Centre** organises regular training, “Islam for Service Providers.”

- The **Polish Association of Northern Ireland (PANI)** organises cultural festivals and a Polish magazine, **Kropka PL** was launched in 2009. Other newer migrants are developing national associations and running events, e.g. the **Lithuanian Association’s Lithuanian Cultural Day** in Dungannon. The **Bulgarian Association NI** has held events such as **Slovanic Literature Day**, and information session on rights in the UK. The **Bangor Malayalee Association** celebrated the Indian harvest festival of Onam in September 2009.
- As well as many new national support groups, pan-national groups are also emerging. The **Afro Community Support Organisation NI (ASCONI)** launched its strategic plan at Stormont in January 2010. There are a number of Filipino support groups here and some of them are grouped in **Filcom–NI**, the **Filipino Communities in Northern Ireland** and its website, www.filcom-ni.org.uk/, lists other useful sites, such as service providers. Local Polish associations come together in a Polish Community Forum. In 2000 **Latino America Unida (LAU)** was formed mainly as a support group for Spanish speaking Latin Americans.

Young people

- The needs of young people are being recognised increasingly in communities. For example, the **BELONG** family support programme was developed by the Southern Areas Children and Young People’s Committee (SAYPC) Working Group on the Rights and Needs of Black and Minority-Ethnic Children and Young People. It works with children between 7 and 12 years.
- In February 2010, 21 children who were either seeking asylum, refugees, or from a migrant background met OFM DFM junior ministers, and the Children’s Commissioner, at Stormont to launch campaign postcards designed as part of an **National Children’s Bureau (NCB)** project, ‘Strengthening the voice of children & young people in Northern Ireland’. Celine McStravick, Director of NCB NI said

‘Northern Ireland is currently home to 6,500 children and young people who have English as their second language and it is crucial that their experiences are shared so that their communities can hear their ideas and understand the realities of being a newcomer in Northern Ireland.’ www.ncb.org.uk/default.aspx?page=3257

Labour exploitation

- The **Irish Congress of Trade Unions NI (ICTU NI)** has responded to increased migration by setting up a **Migrant Workers Support Unit** to help prevent exploitation. With the Equality Commission ICTUNI launched a *Your Rights at Work* leaflet in five languages which can be carried in a wallet. For further information Tel: 028 90 247140 or E-mail: Migrant Worker Support Officer

Kasia.Garbal@ictuni.org Within the support unit there is the **A Shared Workplace, A Shared Future** rights-based project to support migrant workers and their families. Kevin Doherty is the project worker.

‘This project is a simple extension of the services which trade unions offer to all workers. The fact is that migrant workers are in a weaker position to avail of the rights which many workers from Northern Ireland take for granted.’

Peter Bunting, ICTU Assistant General Secretary, 11 November 2009
www.ictuni.org/?module=datalistdetail&itemid=b75eca93-15e5-4a26-858b-47e72a5af9aa

ICTU NI also offers employment advice clinics and runs seminars and information sessions for migrant workers on employment rights and trade union membership.

An idea to try

The NI Housing Executive launched a **Living Library** project in 2009. Minority-ethnic people became ‘living books’ for a few hours so that staff could chat to them and find out more about them. While this can be light-hearted it is an easy way of having questions answered and stereotypes challenged. NIHE Race Relations Officer Linda Hutchinson said

‘Looking at the 2008 Life and Times Survey, 63% of people do not socialise with, or have friends from a minority-ethnic background and 41% of people said that none of the people they regularly come in contact with at work are from a minority-ethnic background. When asked about the type of contact with people from the main minority-ethnic communities only 22% had a close interaction such as a lengthy conversation. Living Library is about starting such conversations.’

The **Living Library** has now been renamed the **Human Library**. It has strict rules (and copyright) but you could adapt the idea locally. Could your local library or other community or church building be used as a safe space where incomers can increase knowledge about the area from local people, or migrant workers could talk about their lives to people they do not usually get to meet? Find out more from *human-library.org/*

Good employment practice

- Some employers have adopted positive practices to help migrant workers. For example, companies are investing in multi-lingual workplace signage.
‘Some companies reported having signage in up to 12 different languages’

Economic, Labour Market and Skill Impacts of Migrant Workers in NI

- Local businesses and other organisations, such as Belfast City Council have signed up to the **Voluntary Code of Practice for the Employment of Migrant Workers** produced by **Business in the Community (BIC)**. The guide is being revised currently.

www.bitc.org.uk/northern_ireland/what_we_do/in_the_workplace/diversity/opportunity_now.html

Genesis Breads demonstrate good practice

“Many of the skills required to produce these breads are provided by foreign nationals who are mainly Polish,” Damian McErlain, Genesis operations manager said. “These individuals are a key part of the Genesis operation and the management have made great efforts to ensure they settle and enjoy work and life in Northern Ireland.”

Practical steps taken included:

- All foreign national staff were given assistance in finding good accommodation, setting up bank accounts and local GP services
- HR [human resources] carries out WRS [Worker Registration Scheme] for each individual.
- All inductions and internal communications are carried out in Polish
- HR helps book flights home for Polish staff at holiday periods
- There is flexibility in holidays to allow staff longer periods to go home
- English classes were set up for staff to attend at the local college

Belfast Telegraph, 20 October 2009 in *Anti-Racist Workplace Week*.
www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/business-news/working-together-to-stamp-out-racism-14536467.html

Good neighbourliness

‘I think we were very surprised by local people being so helpful. We really didn’t experience that back in the Czech Republic. It was three years ago and there wasn’t any support initiatives, no interpreting services. I remember our first day – it was an empty house, totally unfurnished and our neighbours, local retired people coming to our house and offering us help. Them bringing us furniture. It was wonderful.

A Czech in Newry & Mourne, quoted in Dr Robbie McVeigh ‘We Asked for Workers but Human Beings Came’ Report on the Economic Impact of Migrants Workers in Newry and Mourne and Louth for Challenge of Change, 2008, page 27.

Research

- The **Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)** migrant workers branch 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, prepared by the Law Centre, are in a number of languages. www.delni.gov.uk/index/erler-migrant-workers.htm
They have also commissioned a number of useful reports on the attitudes, experiences and impact of migrant workers (see above pages 78 and 79).
- The **Institute for Conflict Research, Human Rights Commission, Equality Commission** and **NICEM** are among the groups that have completed recent studies in the areas of new migration, racism, human trafficking, forced labour, homelessness and immigration detention.
- **STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Partnership)** produces a helpful **Policy and Research Newsletter** each month. Other resources are available to the members of the **Migrant Worker Support Network (MWSM)** of which EMBRACE is a member. MWSM has held a number of useful conferences and seminars. See www.mwsn.org. For the history of STEP’s migrant programme, see www.iconebusiness.com/stepnpi/site/migrant.aspx

Christian Responses

‘You are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens with everyone else who belongs to the family of God.

Ephesians 2:19 Contemporary English Version

‘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

What the Bible says about welcoming outsiders

At the first EMBRACE Annual General Meeting in 2004 Sr Brighde Vallely (then 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
- Be informed and learn to ask the right questions, of Churches, politicians and policy makers
- Churches and church communities should be communities of the inclusive charcoal fire.
- Wash the feet of others

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.

Some Christian resources

What the Bible Says about the Stranger

An expanded version of *What the Bible Says about the Stranger: Biblical Perspectives on Racism, Migration, Asylum and Cross-Community Issues*, by Kieran J O'Mahony, OSA, was put together by the All-Ireland Churches' Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR), and published in 2009 by the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. This new edition is a lively mixture of Bible studies, questions for reflection, prayers, suggestions for dramatisation and group work. The biblical themes start with the God of All Creation and move through the Bible to conclude with Pentecost. There is a useful index of biblical citations and a good users guide. Copies are available from the Inter-Church Centre, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast and EMBRACE, price £5.00 or less, if buying multiple copies or download it at www.irishchurches.org/files/StrangerBook.pdf

Unity and Diversity in Our Churches

The **Parish-Based Integration Project** in Dublin has published *Unity and Diversity in Our Churches*, to assist local parishes and congregations with the integration of new residents into their faith communities and Irish society. Topics include diversity in the early church, guidelines for integrating immigrants into a local parish and models of good practice. It can be downloaded from www.irishchurches.org/files/PIPmanual.pdf

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 E-mail or phone. The CD can be used for group study, to inspire sermons, addresses, or for prayer.

'Christians believe

that all people are created equal in dignity, made in the image of God.'

One of the core principles in Migration Principles; Statement for Churches Working on Migration Issues, p. 1.

'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 themselves 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, originally from Nigeria, interviewed for Once We Were Strangers.

Bible resources for migrants

The United Bible Societies has produced an illustrated resource, *On the Road: a Journey through the Bible for Migrants*, put together by the French Bible Society, in conjunction with a group of migrant people. It is a combination of Bible stories, prayers and personal experiences and suggested questions for discussion. It could be used for personal or group work, by migrants, or local people – or to help bring them together. See www.la-bible.net/doc/dons08072.pdf

Prayer of a migrant

I don't know what lies ahead,
But I believe that in your love
You will give me a new start in life,
Somewhere far away from the pain
That pushed me to leave

A Tunisian proverb

When I saw him from a distance,
I thought he was my enemy.
When he came closer,
I recognised a human being.
When I shook his hand,
I found a brother.

Two extracts from On the Road

The Bible Society (27 Howard Street Belfast, Tel 028 9032 6577, E-mail gsec@bsni.co.uk) stocks Bibles in 50 languages, including some children's editions, and can order up scriptures in 100 languages. Some bi-lingual texts are available. See www.bsni.co.uk/pages/20-non-english-scriptures

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.

The role of the church

'The heart of Christianity is hospitality.'

Jean Vanier in 'Something Understood', BBC Radio 4, Palm Sunday, 2009.

'When a stranger lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him. The stranger living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt. I am the Lord you God.'

Leviticus 19: 33

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 have left their home country, but the arrival of numbers of people who are different can also cause a range of emotions, from unease and fear to hostility and aggression 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.

Politicians see a role for the Churches. Speaking at the Church of Ireland conference on migration, 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.*

In February 2010 there was a NI Assembly debate on the role of faith groups in the wider community. Social Development Minister Margaret Ritchie used the opportunity to announce her intention to invite the Churches and faith groups to a Faith Forum to discuss areas of policy concern, which will inevitably include migration issues. The authors of *Unity in Diversity* in our Churches also identify the potential and post a warning:

‘Churches and other faith communities in a receiving country have a role to play in the migration process. They can become a resource to bridge different cultures and communities, but if they shun this responsibility, or if they are too exclusive or dominant, or do not share values, power and resources, then they may exacerbate negative experiences of alienation, frustration and marginalization on the part of migrants.’

Each year, since we began to experience greater immigration, there has been an expansion in the numbers of Christians from other countries living here. They have choices. They may integrate into the local congregations of their own denomination or the closest to the form of theology and worship that they were used to, or they can attend churches with other people from their own ethnic or national background (see pages 95–96). Some may do a bit of both. For example Polish Catholics may attend local Catholic parishes during the year, but go to a Polish language mass to have their Easter food blessed. Either way they bring blessings.

‘The first Mass specifically for the Polish community in Derry was held in St Eugene’s in October 2005. Although it was to be conducted in Polish local members of the parish were also invited to attend in order to welcome the Poles into the community. Mass began at 9.00 pm with half an hour set aside beforehand for hearing confession. The local community was amazed to see rows of young men waiting to have their confessions heard – a sight not seen in Irish churches since the 1960s.’

‘New Communities in Northern Ireland: The Christian Response’ by Mary Delargy, in Shared Space Issue 5, March 2008, p.23.

While some newcomers have had negative experiences in local churches (see pages 58–59), others have found unconditional welcome.

'I have been living in Northern Ireland for almost 10 years now. In 2004 when European Union was enlarged, Irish Catholics were confronted by a large influx of Polish Catholics and you were all very welcoming. I represent a parish which is integrating very well, parish of St Anthony's in East Belfast which is integrating Polish people ... Our parish is actually growing not only by Polish people who joined the parish in large numbers ... but also by local people who are coming back to the church. ... You certainly still understand what does it mean "Love one another".'

A Polish doctor speaking in a discussion on the future of the Catholic Church, on Sunday Sequence, Radio Ulster, 21 February, 2010.

Churches responses to immigration, asylum and racism

'When you get into problems you get a label and people looked at me as that label instead of an individual. I was labelled as an illegal immigrant and as such they didn't want to know. However, Christians look at the person themselves and want to help them as an individual. When I got out [of prison] I had no job, no place, nothing. Christians are the only people who will help you out of these situations. They fight for our human rights as a person and embrace you as a person. How many people have strangers in their homes when they don't know anything about them? They took that risk when they took me in – they didn't know me – that is being a Christian.'

Mavis Henry, a South African nurse now living in Belfast, talking about her experience following imprisonment while her papers were sorted out.
www.eauk.org/nostrangers/upload/DBAS-Booklet-pdf.pdf

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. 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 www.usairish.org/iece.html.

At the initiative of the Bishops' Conference, each diocese now has a priest 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 was set up in Dublin in 2006 and included Fr Mariusz Dabrowski, based in Belfast, to serve the Polish community in the north. By November 2009 there were a total of 11 Polish priests serving in N Ireland and two priests and one nun serving as chaplains to the Filipino community.

Helen Young has been appointed as the **Field Officer** for the **Irish Episcopal Council for Immigrants (IECI)**, which aims to develop and

foster initiatives between the Bishops' Conference and parishes, in relation to outreach and pastoral care of immigrants. Following an assessment of needs within the dioceses, pilot immigrant pastoral outreach schemes will follow, at parish level.

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. www.vatican.va/roman_curial/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/lrc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html. The message of Pope Benedict for the 96th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2010) emphasizes the plight of minor migrants and refugees, many of them children who are separated from their parents.

The **Presbyterian Church in Ireland** has adopted a document, *Policy on Asylum Seekers and Refugees; a Report by the Race Relations Committee to the 2003 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. It is more comprehensive than the title suggests, as it also explores issues of immigration, racism and welcome. The responsibility in this area lies with the **Race Relations Panel**. More recently, the Panel has been actively concerned with how immigration enforcement has impacted on people at congregational level (see for example Mountpottinger, page 43), and they have ongoing meetings with **UK Border Agency** officials. Reflecting concern at congregational level, a paper on undocumented workers was put before the General Assembly in 2009 and the following resolution was passed:

'That the General Assembly commend the paper entitled "Irregular Immigration: responding to a dilemma faced by congregations and individuals" as a source of information and a contribution to encouraging engagement with this topical issue.'

The **PCI Peacemaking Programme** has a module on Relating to our Neighbours in its Gospel in Conflict: Loving our Neighbour course. www.presbyterianireland.org/peacemaking/gjc.html.

The **Methodist Church in Ireland** has adopted the Presbyterian policy document and addresses the issues through their **Council on Social Responsibility**. The Reconciliation Programme at Edgehill Theological College also continues to contribute to the work with the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (see below pages 96–97) and is in partnership with EMBRACE.

The **Church of Ireland** has completed the three-year Hard Gospel project that aimed 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* was 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. Some dioceses have planned welcome strategies and appointed advisers on diversity and migration. 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 ireland.anglican.org/archive/hardgospel/index.php?id=11

Embracing Difference: the Church of Ireland in a Plural Society by Patrick Comerford was published in 2007 under the auspices of the Society and Justice Theology (Republic of Ireland) Group of the Church in Society Committee. While the background material is about the southern experiences, the Bible studies, worship materials and action points are valid north of the border.

‘For me the Bible

actually speaks about people moving across lands in very positive ways. It challenges the Israelites that if they did not welcome the stranger – or orphan, or widow, or people who are moving from country to country – with respect and dignity, then their own identity, their own sense of who God is for them, was brought into question.’

Rev Arlington Trotman quoted in the Don't be a Stranger booklet www.eauk.org/Inostrangers/upload/DBAS-Booklet-pdf.pdf

Quakers raise awareness among their members through workshops, seminars and regular exchange of information. They also work closely with other churches and faiths. With the co-operation of the NI Prison Service, Quaker Social Services has been involved in the piloting of a visiting scheme for isolated prisoners, including foreign nationals, in Maghaberry Prison.

Christian groups such as **Evangelical Alliance** have worked to raise consciousness around the issues and in January 2009 facilitated The ‘World on our Doorstep’ event in Belfast Bible College, with **Mission Agencies Partnership (MAP)** (which is comprised of 43 mission agencies). It aimed to educate and empower Christians to reach out to the ever-growing numbers of minority-ethnic people coming here. The lunch was cooked and given as a gift by local Polish, Chinese, Philippine and Indian churches. Brazilian Pastor Jose Carlos of Latin Link delivered the keynote address on the Biblical mandate of ‘welcoming the stranger.’ Seminars on the cultural mindset of Muslims, Asians and Europeans were also held, and worship was led by the Lisburn Portuguese-speaking congregation. To read more see www.eauk.org/articles/world-on-our-doorstep.cfm MAP held a further ‘World on Our Doorstep’ event, ‘Who is my Neighbour?’ in February 2010.

In 2007 Evangelical Alliance produced a briefing advice booklet, *Alltogether for Asylum Justice: Asylum Seekers’ Conversion to Christianity*, which examines how persecuted Christians and Christian converts are treated in the UK asylum system. See www.eauk.org/public-affairs/socialjustice/upload/alltogether-for-asylum-justice.pdf as well as their useful advice for churches trying to cope with new immigration legislation (see pages 18–19).

The Evangelical Alliance 2008, **Don't be a Stranger** campaign, challenges and inspires Christians by showcasing the stories of migrants who have come to the UK and the churches who are working with them www.eauk.org/Inostrangers/. They make it clear that their concern is not with whether immigration policies are right or wrong, but with how people are treated when they are here.

EMBRACE projects

Emergency Fund

This fund receives donations from groups and individuals. EMBRACE has distributed these to meet a range of needs, through partner organisations such as NICRAS (the N Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers), NICEM, The Welcome Organisation, Homeplus, Bryson One Stop Shop, CWA (Chinese Welfare Association) and BELB Education Welfare. In every case there was no recourse to public funds to meet the presenting needs. The fund has paid for flights home for destitute migrant workers to a range of countries and provided hostel accommodation and

food for destitute migrant workers and people seeking asylum. It has also contributed towards funeral costs and paid prescription charges. It pays for bus fares for Roma children who would otherwise not be able to attend secondary school, as well as providing school uniforms. Over the past twelve months, EMBRACE has seen an increase in donations, which were £5,000 more than the previous year and this money has been needed to meet increasing need.

A separate appeal for donations allowed this fund to play a key role during the Roma crisis in June 2009 when it provided for a wide range of needs.

EMBRACE on the Street

This EMBRACE project raises awareness of migrant destitution and provides practical assistance through the donation of clothing, bedding, toiletries and non-perishable foodstuffs. Collections are undertaken by a variety of churches throughout NI on a rota basis. These include the Crescent Church, Fitzroy Presbyterian, Lowe Memorial Presbyterian (Finaghy), St Jude's Church of Ireland, Cooke Presbyterian, the Good Shepherd Catholic Church, Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian, and Portaferry and Glasry Methodist Church. Special thanks are due to Edgehill Theological College where the items have been stored before being distributed to specific aid organisations (for example Homeplus, the Simon Community, St Vincent de Paul and the Welcome Organisation) to destitute people on the street and in hostels. The actual requests for donations vary depending on the time of year and current need of the aid organisations.

If you would like your church to be involved in the EMBRACE on the Street project contact Dr Scott Boldt at Edgehill College by phone 028 90686933 or E-mail rec@edgehillcollege.org.

Migrant-led Churches

Some local churches are led by migrant people. In December 2008 the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) (see pages 96–97) produced a **Directory of Migrant-led Churches and Chaplaincies**. Dr Scott Boldt (EMBRACE chairperson), Yvonne Naylor, Rob Fairmichael and Naomi Brown carried out the research in the north. The booklet provides a snapshot in time, so the information is inevitably going to change and will be updated regularly on the Irish Council of Churches web site and can be downloaded from www.iccsi.ie/resources/directory2009.pdf. It indicates that at the time of publication there were 361 new local faith communities, congregations or chaplaincies run by migrants and for migrants in Ireland, of which 33 are in Northern Ireland. For the most up-to-date information go to www.irishchurches.org/migrant_directory.

Michael Earle the then General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches and Executive Secretary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting explained in the introduction why new churches are formed:

‘Many of our new neighbours come from strong church-going backgrounds and look for an identity with their homeland that helps them make the huge adjustment to living in a new country’.

The Corrymeela Community

continues to provide an annual holiday break for refugees and people seeking asylum and is a partner in the **Refugee and Inclusive Neighbourhood Project** with the Northern Ireland Community of Refugee and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS). (See page 35.)

Across the denominations, congregations, church forums, parish and community projects, individuals and specialist groups, such as St Vincent de Paul, continue to be involved in a range of activities from diversity training, language teaching, conversation classes and parent and toddler groups. It would be helpful if there could be a mapping exercise to identify all these activities so that people could be made aware of and inspired by good practice.

This is in addition to the many others who are ‘adding to the significant growth taking place within indigenous churches’.

Fr Irenaeus du Plessis, of the Antiochian Church of St Ignatius Belfast, formally launched the book with a moving address that emphasised the positive potential in the situation. Christians are all strangers on this earth with a theology that instructs us to make foreigners welcome. If we despise people here, what will we say to them in the hereafter? ‘The womb of the church is much wider than our concept.’ He sees his own newly opened church of St Ignatius in North Belfast as a house of prayer for all nations. It is housed in the former St James’ Church of Ireland building on the corner of Antrim Road and Cliftonville Road, Belfast. People from many countries, including Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine attend services and find fellowship there. They have a pan-orthodox policy and a Romanian Orthodox congregation also uses the church regularly. Read more on their web site: www.belfast.antiochireland.org/

Other churches listed in the directory include the Chinese church in Belfast, as well as African congregations; Indian Orthodox; a Polish Mission Church and Chaplaincies; Romanian Orthodox and Romanian Pentecostal; and Syrian Orthodox congregations.

Inter-church structures

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is an 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 a pamphlet on asylum principles and more recently *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 **Racial Justice Network** of CTBI has representatives from member Churches and the national structures, known as the ‘national ecumenical instruments’ (**The Irish Council of Churches (ICC)**, **Churches Together in England, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS)** and **Churches Together in Wales (CUYTN)**). Their aim is to work for racial justice in GB and Ireland.

‘We aim to make a real difference in the Christian community and far beyond by raising awareness, encouraging effective working together and facilitating imaginative local initiatives.’

www.ctbi.org.uk/CB/14

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. The **All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR)** was set up in 2003 to ‘provide an all-island focus and vision to complement the work of other Christian agencies in the field such as the Parish-based Integration Project (PIP), Refugee and Migrant Project, Churches Asylum Network (CAN), and Embrace’. Research by the late Fee Ching Leong was published by

the AICCMR 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**.

AICCMR has also produced a revised edition of *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, E-mail: rec@edgehillcollege.org. The group has circulated a set of **Affirmations** based on Gospel values that they hope

‘will inform and drive the plans, processes and programmes of our Churches as, individually and together, strive to live out the mission of Christ in an increasingly diverse and intercultural society.’

They have also asked Churches to report on grassroots progress by Christmas 2010. Adrian Cristea of the **Parish-Based Integration Project** is available to assist Churches with this task and 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 and also *Unity and Diversity in Our Churches*, see page 89 above. 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 E-mail: adrian@iccsi.ie Web: www.iccsi.ie/

Research on church responses

Many churches have responded to the challenge of increased migration and diversity with warmth and imagination, but a recent survey of faith leaders and laity in Ireland, by Dr Gladys Glaniel of the Irish School of Ecumenics, reveals that such actions are patchy. To read the results of the surveys see www.ecumenics.ie/research/visioning-21st-century-ecumenism/

The northern responses reveal that

- 62% of lay people stated that there are immigrants or minority-ethnic people in their congregations.
- 55% of clergy and faith leaders say that they have preached or taught on immigration, diversity or welcoming strangers in the last 12 months.
- 44% of clergy, pastors, ministers, and faith leaders have never done anything to accommodate minority-ethnic people.
- 19% said that the languages of minority-ethnic people had been used in services during the last 12 months. (This was more common under the heading ‘Other Christians’ which may well include migrant-led churches.)

‘We ... asked clergy to provide examples of what they had done, that was out of the ordinary, to accommodate ethnic minorities. Examples included assisting with asylum claims/tribunal hearings, financial support for accommodation, education, transportation or other needs, assistance in finding jobs, translation of bibles, sermons, or other reading materials, providing English language classes, conducting open air religious services in areas where ethnic minorities live, visiting Chinese takeaways with religious materials, organising cultural evenings in which people share food and customs from their native lands; inviting ethnic minorities to take part in St Patrick’s Day celebrations; visiting their homes; organizing special welcoming committees or parish groups; encouraging prayer during worship services in native languages; using the music and dance from immigrants’ home countries in religious services; helping children settle into schools; use of church buildings, halls and car parks; and including special sections for newcomers on congregational websites. Some clergy remarked that such activities should not be considered out of the ordinary – for them, these were the ‘ordinary’ works of charity with which Christians should be engaged.’

Extract from the clergy leader survey.

www.ecumenics.ie/wp-content/uploads/Clergy-Survey-Report.pdf

Clergy were asked about how they had preached and taught about immigration, diversity and welcoming strangers and some included the practical difficulties facing people. These are some of the northern responses.

‘Preached about justice in and outside the workplace, especially with rents and accommodation.’

On the other hand, some leaders reported that their preaching focus came partly because of resistance in their congregations to making special accommodation for minority-ethnic people.

‘Matthew 25 (welcoming the stranger) is very important to me, especially as one of my churches has a habit of getting rid of strangers.’

Others regretted their own shortcomings.

‘I cannot minister very effectively – can only smile, and speak & pray in English.’

The lay survey also revealed a mixture of responses. Here are two contrasting contributions from Belfast:

‘Immigrants give us a global perspective on our faith and remind the church of our underlying unity in Christ. ... A church composed of such people is a foretaste of heaven which will consist of people of every race, tribe and language.’

‘The most challenging aspect of ethnic minorities is to keep all of them equally cared for and happy. All tend to have slight variations on practices such as prostrations and bowing or kneeling ... however our priest states repeatedly that there is no need to conform to Antiochian practices and that it is equally acceptable to stand or to kneel if this is what people are used to.’

Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

There are a number of groups here that advise about money management. CAP is a debt-counselling charity, centred in England, that first extended its services to Northern Ireland through the Church of God Glenmachan, Belfast. They provide debt counselling locally and telephone advice is available from Bradford, England, on 0781 2201188. To find out about their services and free courses contact 07837624449 or E-mail info@capuk.org

Other CAP centres have now been opened in Derry, Belfast North & Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus, Dungannon and Lurgan and more are planned. Among the people CAP has been able to assist are some from other countries who are not always entitled to the same benefits as local people, and may miss the support of family and wider circle of friends. Learn how your church could become involved: www.capuk.org/yourchurch/churchpartnership.php

European Churches and migrants

The Light of Christ shines upon all!

'We recommend that our Churches should recognize that Christian immigrants are not just the recipients of religious care but that they can play a full and active role in the life of the Church and of society; offer better pastoral care for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees; and promote the rights of ethnic minorities in Europe, particularly the Roma people.'

One of the recommendations accompanying the message from the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly, Sibiu, Romania, September 2007.

www.eea3.org/documenti/final/FinalmessageEN.pdf

In 2008, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe and Nova Research Centre produced a study, *Mapping Migration, Mapping Churches' Responses; Europe Study*. As well as describing patterns of migration in modern Europe, it examines theological approaches to migration, the differing church responses to migrants and migration and stories from some migrant Christians. One emphasis is on migration and Pentecost:

'If the Gospel is to speak to people with intimacy and more than a veneer of spirituality then it must be spoken in their mother tongue. This stresses the importance and beauty of the language and culture of every person who is addressed.'

The authors suggest that an appropriate Christian response to policy-makers must pay proper attention to

- a. The essential unity of the 'one human race' (or humanity).
- b. The reality of nationhood.
- c. The fact that national borders are permeable to people but not necessarily to values.
- d. The loving care and welfare of the alien.
- e. The rights of immigrants.
- f. Reminding immigrants of their responsibilities within the host society.
- g. Urging a willingness to integrate the migrant.
- h. Urging a similar willingness on the part of the migrant to accept integration.

- i. Compassion for the vulnerable.
- j. The Church as a model of cross-cultural community.

To read the whole study see www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Mapping%20migration%20report%202008-05-28.pdf See also the multi-lingual *Theological Reflections on Migration*; a CCME Reader, Brussels 2008. www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/Theological%20Reflection.pdf

Under the auspices of the **Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe** 30 representatives of churches (including migrant-led churches) from six European countries met in March 2009 to discuss best practice models for the active participation of migrants in the life of European churches. They considered concepts like 'integration', 'identity', 'mainstream churches' and 'migrant churches'. Recent migrants underlined the importance of the initial welcome in traditional European churches, which is often disappointing. 'Newly arrived are knocking on the doors of European churches – can we still hear them?' one participant asked. Others highlighted the need for greater inclusiveness: 'We cannot limit ourselves to filling empty church benches'. Some other participants asked, self-critically, if migrant-led churches tended to be too self-sufficient and not making enough effort to relate to traditional churches. Participants learned about secular methods of attracting migrants to become members of political parties and trade unions and about a project to test these methods in a religious context. Over the following 15 months, a series of events and training was to examine how best to become united in diversity. www.ccme.be/secretary/NEWS/index.html

In a press release after the **13th Conference of European Churches (CEC)** in Lyon, the following declaration was made

'While we eagerly work for, and anticipate, a reconciled and united Europe, we mourn that new walls of separation are being erected between nations, cultures and religions. We see new divisions appearing – between the settled and the migrating, rich and poor, employed and unemployed, those whose rights are respected and those whose rights are put aside.' ... 'At this CEC Assembly we have celebrated closer co-operation with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe. This will be further manifested in 2010, a year of "European churches responding to migration", when together we have the opportunity to witness to our Christian commitment to refugees and migrants.'

To read more and access the themes for each month, go to the **Migration 2010** web site migration.ceceurope.org/index.php?id=627

The CEC call to value migrant people was accompanied by the following commitment for churches:

- to speak out publicly against violations of migrants' rights and to denounce any acts of racial discrimination and institutional racism;
- to set up and maintain services for the vulnerable among migrants and refugees in Europe;
- to address fears in societies about migration and to facilitate churches' initiatives on finding ways to live peacefully together:

- to include migrants who are fellow Christians as equal members of our churches and to encourage their full participation and leadership within the churches, and to promote fraternal relations with migrants and minority-ethnic churches;
- to commemorate those who have died on their journey to find a dignified life in Europe through an annual day of prayer;
- to support and accompany churches living under critical conditions in other parts of the world.

They agreed as churches in Europe to ask the public authorities

- to improve the social and legal protection of the most vulnerable migrants in particular of trafficked persons;
- to ensure basic human rights of undocumented migrants, particularly those in detention centres;
- to remove legal and other obstacles to the family life of migrants;
- to guarantee effective access to refugee protection for those in need;
- to create a clear legal framework to combat racism;
- to refrain from any discriminatory legal or administrative measures which result in the singling out of particular racial groups;
- to strengthen development aid amongst the poorest of the world.

assembly.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/asse/Assembly/Documents/Official_documents/GEN_PUB_1_EN_Migration_Final.pdf

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 a 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 words we use

We are often unaware that our everyday English contains a lot of jargon. For example if we ask someone from another country if they have signed on with a GP it means nothing to them. ‘General practitioner’ is not much better as we are one of only a few countries to use this term. ‘Family doctor’ would be much better.

The authors of *Welcoming Angels*, published by the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin's Working Group on Combating Racism outline 3 stages of Christian welcome

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

Welcoming Angels, Dublin 2005, pp37–51.

www.iccs.ie/resources/welcoming-angels-copy.pdf

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.

Some ideas for 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 other community leaders, employers and Further Education Colleges to find out about incomers and how best to get to meet them.
- Ensure that the building is welcoming from the outside, with clear meaningful 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.
- 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.

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 do research in order to find out where to access expertise – legal, social, and medical.
- You may be pressed to find *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 is to make public your sense of outrage. The victim of the attack must be consulted and may ask for *privacy*. The victim's wishes must then be paramount.

'Acts 2:11

"And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

All heard in their own tongue. Members of the early church spoke a variety of languages and came from different cultural backgrounds yet still had a strong sense of belonging.'

From the Parish-Based Integration Project, Unity and Diversity in Our Churches, page 24, advising on the use of language in church.

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

- In some cultural backgrounds women should never be visited by a man, on his own, so it is helpful to make at least initial *pastoral visits in pairs*, a man and a woman.
- Be aware that immigrants and *minority-ethnic groups are not homogeneous*; there is great diversity, and sometimes animosity, within and between ethnic groups.

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. Individuals became proud to be ‘black’, but some may now prefer to be referred to as ‘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.

- 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 include different modes of expression, 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*. For example, failure to make eye contact may appear a sign of untrustworthiness or trauma, when in reality it may be what is regarded as respectful in the country of origin.
- We all make *cultural mistakes*, whether in 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 proper documents.
- Above all you will not be human if you do not experience *frustration and anger, pain and guilt*, as there is often little that can be done to assist in immigration cases, which are governed by laws and procedures which seem beyond influence.
- 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. 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.
- 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** or visit their local **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**. 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. (See page 48.)

A multi-lingual document on how to access free and confidential immigration advice can be accessed at www.lawcentreni.org/Publications/Migrant%20Workers/Immigration%20Advice%20Booklet%202006.pdf

The value of encouraging contact

Researchers on cross-community projects and their outcomes have concluded that the reduction of sectarianism has an effect on other forms of prejudice.

‘Neighbourhood contact had an impact not only on attitude to the other community, but also on attitude to racial minority outgroups: more positive cross-community contact led to less racial prejudice towards ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland.’

Can Contact Promote Better Relations? Evidence from Mixed and Segregated Areas of Belfast,
(Summary Report) page 4.

Helping to build more inclusive communities

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

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

Welcoming Angels, *Dublin 2005*, p. 40.

<http://www.iccsi.ie/resources/welcoming-angels-copy.pdf>

‘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.*

Some of the strangers we welcome will eventually go home and, depending on the welcome they receive from us, will become involved in the life of the churches in their own home areas. ... But some of those strangers will stay on in Ireland, and will contribute greatly to the social, cultural, political, economic and religious life of this island, their children will marry our children, and their grandchildren will be our grandchildren. In welcoming strangers we will soon discover we are bringing angels into our churches and into our families.

Patrick Comerford, Embracing Difference: the Church of Ireland in a Plural Society, p.80.

The Churches Rural Group in England

has positive examples and suggestions about relating to rural migrant workers, see www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk.

How we can learn from 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.
- 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/.

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
- Parent and toddler groups for refugees or the families of migrant workers
- After-school clubs, helping incoming children to adjust to 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 Bureau (CAB).
- Recreational facilities for minority-ethnic groups

The experience of Polish people

As a community interpreter working for the NHS I get to know many Polish migrants and hear about their stories. In the waiting area of a hospital or a surgery, people often open up and tell me about how they came to live/work in Northern Ireland. Some people had it easier, some had to struggle and went through hell. ...

Life in a foreign country is easier for migrants when some parts of its reality relate to their own culture. That's why there are a growing number of shops selling Polish food. Tesco and Dunne's Stores have a range of Polish products. Almost every Polish family has access to Polish TV, people have a chance to go to a Polish mass at least once a month, there are Polish nights at some bars, Polish welfare associations are increasing in number.

... Migration is much easier for people when they can speak the other country's language. They assimilate more quickly, get involved in social life, get to know the locals. At work, they are able to ask for a pay rise, make sure their rights are respected. They can get a better job; are more independent and so much more. It is so easy to exploit workers who cannot speak English. Not to know the language is like being socially disabled ... But there is help available. People from Northern Ireland have turned out to be sensitive to the needs of migrant families. Churches or technical colleges run English classes. ...

Justyna Pers from Poland, speaking as part of the British Council's Ordinary Lives project.

*To read more of her story and those of people from other countries go to
www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland-society-ordinarylives-poland1.htm
Or read *Ordinary Lives* by Malachi O'Doherty, Belfast 2008.*

Have You Thought of a Friendship Club for Your Area?

The South Belfast Roundtable has established the **Belfast Friendship Club** that meets at the Common Grounds Café in the South Belfast. They say 'New to Belfast or just want to meet some new people? Come along and join us. All welcome.' To find out more about how to set up a club contact Stephanie Mitchell who coordinates this initiative on (028) 9024 4070 or E-mail stephanie.mitchell@sbrtr.org.uk

'I discovered that what is important to human beings is to celebrate life together.'

Jean Vanier in 'Something Understood', BBC Radio 4, Palm Sunday, 2009.

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. For details see page 34.

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: 9073 5350 or E-mail nmkittrick@redcross.org.uk. They can also help with the work of providing practical assistance such as clothes and other necessities for people who are seeking sanctuary.

The **Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (MCRC)** works with people from many countries to promote integration and good relations with local communities. They access funds to pay for language classes and translators for people seeking asylum, refugees and vulnerable families and run volunteer led English language classes. They also challenge racism, help incomers with information and offer volunteering opportunities for their clients and for local people. If you want to volunteer with MCRC, contact Margaret Donaghy on (028) 9024 4639 or E-mail margaret@mcrc-ni.org.

Some Useful Sources and Resources

Web Sites

Belfast City Council, Migrant and Minority Ethnic Project resources

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/migrants/index.asp

Blue Blindfold anti-trafficking campaign

www.blueblindfold.co.uk/

City of Sanctuary

www.cityofsanctuary.org

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

www.ctbi.org.uk/12/

Citizens for Sanctuary

www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/

Concordia

www.concordiapartnership.org

Independent Asylum Commission

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk

Institute of Race Relations

www.irr.org.uk

Medical Justice Network

www.medicaljustice.org.uk

Migration Advisory Committee

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/indbodies/mac/

Migration Impacts Forum

www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/managingmigration/migrationimpactsforum/

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns

www.ncadc.org.uk

NI Direct

www.nidirect.gov.uk

Police Service of Northern Ireland

www.psni.police.uk

Refugee Council (UK)

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

UK Border Agency

www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/

UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees)

www.unhcr.org.uk

**Further lists of useful addresses can be found on our web site,
www.embraceni.org**

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Difference or sameness?

'There is a tendency here in Northern Ireland to speak about difference. I want to speak about sameness. No matter where we go in the world, to Poland or wherever, the great lesson we learn is that people everywhere are looking for the exact same things in life. People everywhere of all ages especially young people have the same wish to be respected and to be understood.

Whether from Eastern Europe or Africa or America, whether from the Falls Road or the Shankill Road, they all want the same basic rights and opportunities of life, just as you do.

They want to follow their football team, play their music, and dance to their favourite tunes just as you do. They want to watch their films, enjoy their holidays, visit their friends, play their games with the same interest and passion as you do. When you meet or see a group of people from whatever part of the world, you are looking at a mirror image of yourself. These are people with the exact same longing for self worth, the same sense of happiness, the same willingness to accept responsibility, to be creative, to contribute to society.

You are not seeing difference. You are seeing sameness. I hope there are some lessons there for us all.'

Conclusion of a speech by Jerome Quinn, Polish Honorary Consul, at the Lord Mayor's reception for the Belfast Migrant Forum, 2 March 2010.

'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.*

