



Embracing diversity

Information Update 2011

Margaret McNulty
Embrace NI

Embracing Diversity

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Office of the

**First Minister and
Deputy First Minister**

www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk

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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 this a more welcoming place, where incomers are treated with dignity. As in previous years, some of the text is unchanged, but we also hope that this booklet will help to keep you up to date with new developments such as the recent ending of the Worker Registration Scheme for some European people. Immigration and asylum policy, law and procedures are complex and subject to change. Although we have tried to be as accurate as possible, there is always the possibility of inaccuracy. We also 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 more difficult to see people as individuals, with varied gifts and strengths, as well as vulnerability, just like the rest of us. We hope that this booklet does not lead to migrants or minority-ethnic residents being seen just as victims, but helps to ensure that all people are treated with respect. We need to move beyond the theology of 'welcoming the stranger' towards inclusive theologies of justice and reconciliation and love.

Recession has changed the context and nature of the debate over immigration and integration. 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?

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. Our Emergency Fund 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.

Margaret McNulty
Information Officer
EMBRACE NI

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, migrant workers and people who have been forced to flee from other countries. We want to help in the building of 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

'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.' See page 36

'... women are being forced to choose between extreme poverty and remaining in potentially deadly relationships.' See page 37

'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 46

'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 69

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

'Them bringing us furniture. It was wonderful.' See page 90

'The heart of Christianity is hospitality.' Jean Vanier See page 95

Migration

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 annually, many of them making permanent lives in other countries. That still happens – an estimated 23,500 people left Northern Ireland in the year to June 2009. 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 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. Chinese people came from Hong Kong in the 1960s, as immigrants, around the same time, the forerunners of our Chinese community that now numbers around 10,000 people. Refugees from Vietnam were settled in Craigavon in the late 1970s. We have also welcomed numbers of people from other countries, coming to further their education or work in our hospitals and 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 led to a reduction in the numbers of young people becoming available for work. The Troubles also contributed to continuing 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. 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 recruiting abroad more actively. In the next few years the numbers of incomers increased dramatically. In both 2005–6 and 2006–07 the number of residents increased by 10,000. The recession has reduced the inflow of people with only 2,100 extra residents in 2008–09.

In 2009 an Oxford Economics economic impacts study pointed out the difficulty of identifying numbers accurately but suggested 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. By 2010 the Labour Force Survey suggested that there were around 80,000 people living in N Ireland who were not born here, just 4.5% of the population. (The Office for National Statistics gives the figure for foreign-born people as 6% but they include people born in the Republic of Ireland or Ireland 'area unspecified'.)

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 English language skills. Most have found work in administration, food factories, building-sites, hospitals and nursing homes, fishing and fish processing, shops, hotels, fast food outlets

'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

and restaurants but can be found almost anywhere in the economy. (See page 4.)

Many people come for only a short time in the hope of improving their lives, or to earn 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?*, 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 people from other countries living among us, from a rich diversity of backgrounds. It is reckoned that there are people here from at least 120 different countries. Local research shows the complex nature of migration patterns.

‘Whereas in the past migrant communities were considered as either permanent or temporary, it is the case that modern migrants assume a much more fluid existence. There is no sense from this pilot study that Eastern European migrants will leave the UK as a result of the economic recession – for many the situation is much worse in their own country. More often than not, the life they left behind no longer exists. Circular migration and the existence of transnational communities seem to be a feature of modern life. Migrants retain strong (transnational) links with their country of origin. These links are played out through real connections such as visiting relatives, or accessing health services in their home country. Virtual links are maintained through modern telecommunications that give migrants access to essential emotional support.’

Dr Ruth McAreavey, Life as a Stranger; the Personal Stories of Migrants to Northern Ireland, 2010 www.qub.ac.uk/home/TheUniversity/GeneralServices/News/PressReleases/Title,208534,en.html

Immigration has contributed to rising numbers of births. Back in 2004, Northern Ireland still had the lowest birth rate in the UK. By 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 were now starting families, but immigration also had an impact. In 2009, 2,318 babies were born to mothers who were born outside the UK or the Republic of Ireland. Of these, 1,113 were born to mothers from the A8 central and eastern European countries, and 1,205 from other countries. (A total of 2,400 births were to parents neither of whom was born in N Ireland.) The overall birth rate fell by 3% in 2009, however, after six years of consecutive increases and it is still below that in the mid 1980s.

Changing Patterns of Migration

The first group of recent migrants included a substantial number of people from Portugal and its former colonies who have come here since 2001, to work, mostly in the food processing industry, many of them in mid-Ulster. At the same time, staff shortages in the health sector led to people being recruited in the Philippines, South Asia and, to a lesser extent, Africa.

‘I came to work

for the summer in a factory to save some money to BUY a stereo ... that was eight years ago!’

Andrius, Lithuania

‘_____ Recruitment Agency was looking for welders back in Poland ... They got a fellow recruited from a factory where I worked. He went and then few others and few more and it went like a snow ball. I came too.’ *Tomasz, Poland*

The New Workers: Migration, Labour and Citizenship in Northern Ireland in the 21st Century edited by B. Garvey, P. Stewart, J. Kulinska, R. Campuzano [www.strath.ac.uk/media/departments/hrm/pdfs/hrm-pdf-other/Main_template_Layout_1_\(2\).pdf](http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/departments/hrm/pdfs/hrm-pdf-other/Main_template_Layout_1_(2).pdf)

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.
- People applying for National Insurance numbers or counted in workplace statistics only include 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.
- Most figures are estimates compiled by a combination of samples and statistics from different sources including family doctor registration.

See how the 2009 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) population statistics are compiled at [www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/NI_Migration_Report\(2009\).pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/NI_Migration_Report(2009).pdf)

European Union enlargement in 2004 coincided with economic expansion here, and people from the new EU member countries, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (the Accession 8 or A8 countries), plus 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 N 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. Between April 2004 and the end of March 2009 a total of 36,550 people from the A8 countries registered for work here. Roughly 60% of these new migrants were from Poland with around 20,700 registering up to March 2009. (Between April 2003 and March 2010 40,228 Polish people were issued with National Insurance numbers.) The Worker Registration Scheme figures for May 2004–March 2009 showed that 81% of applicants were aged between 18 and 34, 55% were male and 44% female. Only 8% said that they had dependents. (Research on migrant workers in Belfast in 2006/07 revealed that there was a roughly 60/40 male/female split, most were within the 18-34 age range, and around 16% of new migrants were under the age of sixteen.)

People from outside the European Economic Area need permission to come here to work and the new points-based immigration system makes this increasingly difficult (see pages 18–21). The number of work permits issued to people from outside Europe was 3930 between April 2004 and March 2005, with the highest quarter being between April and June 2004, 1145 permits. Between April and June 2009 only 30 people from outside the European Economic Area (see page 4) were given permission to work here, as a result of stricter policies as much as the recession.

Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007 and their citizens were given limited access to our labour market. (see page 5) Between 2008 and 2010 just 412 Registration Certificates were issued to people from Romania and 358 to people from Bulgaria.

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. It is likely that some entered the country legally and overstayed their work permits or visitors' visas. In addition, some people become undocumented if they lose their employment.

In the past, immigrants tended to come to our cities and urban areas. 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 last published Home Office report on central and eastern European workers, up to March 2009, indicates the sectors where they worked.

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

(A word of caution. These figures may not be as useful as they seem as agencies may enrol workers in the administration, business and management category, for example, who go on to work in other areas of the economy.)

Who is Entitled to Come Here to Work?

- People from the **European Economic Area (EEA)** do not need permission to come here and work. In the same way, anyone with a British or Irish passport can go freely to Spain and Germany, for example, to seek work. (The EEA is comprised of the European Union States plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.) This includes people from the **A8 countries** that joined the EU in 2004 – Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- Although free to come here, people from the **A2 countries**, Romania and Bulgaria, that joined the EU in 2007, can usually only work here as self-employed or with advance permission as skilled workers. For more details see page 5.

- A few people from Romania and Bulgaria can also get permission to work for 6-month periods on the **Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme**.
- Under the **Points-Based System (PBS)** (See pages 18–21) employers must register as sponsors and apply for permission to employ skilled people from outside the EEA and demonstrate that they cannot fill the post from the domestic labour force. Entrepreneurs and very highly skilled people can also apply through the PBS.
- **Foreign Students** studying in university or publicly funded colleges may work part time.
- Some temporary staff, such as diplomats and representatives of foreign firms, are **Permit-Free Workers**.

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 (The restrictions are in place until 2012 but the Government has the power to extend the arrangements for an extra two years until 2014.)

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) enabling the worker to apply for an **Accession Worker Card** under the **Worker Authorisation Scheme**. See *Your Rights in Northern Ireland, A Guide for Migrant Workers from: Romania and Bulgaria*. www.lawcentreni.org/publications/migrant-workers.html

Some A2 nationals who meet the 'highly skilled migrant' criteria (see page 18) can apply for a work permit themselves (rather than through their employers). They can apply for a Registration Certificate immediately and therefore do not need to complete one year of 'authorised' work. Between 2008 and 2010 just 412 Registration Certificates were issued to people from Romania and 358 to people from Bulgaria.

Only 21,250 low skilled workers from the A2 countries are allowed to work for employers in the whole of the UK in 2010 and 2011 within the **Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS)** and 3,500 in the **Sectors Based Scheme (SBS)** for food processing. Some work here, for example, picking mushrooms. They need to apply for an **Accession Worker Card (AWC)**. If they have been working legally in the UK for 12 months without more than 30 days interruption, they are no longer required to be authorised to work and can change jobs without getting a Letter of Approval or an Accession Worker Card in advance.

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

Roma People

People are curious about newcomers they see on our streets. Some are Roma people who are thought to descend from groups who were forced out of northern India in the tenth to fourteenth centuries. They came to Europe where they were regarded with suspicion and have been persecuted throughout the centuries. The Nazis regarded them as subhuman and over 600,000 Roma people died in the extermination camps. Today they live in most European countries.

Roma people in Ireland are from countries in central and eastern Europe such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia. The majority in Belfast come from Romania. Under Communism in Romania there were attempts to enforce assimilation but work was freely available. With the fall of Ceausescu there was less access to unskilled work. In Romania they may still get casual agricultural work in summer but other times of year are difficult, so additional people move to cities in the winter. Those who come here may speak a Romani dialect but most also use Romanian. They have usually received little education and most do not speak English. Many are Christian and those who live in the Belfast area tend to be Pentecostal.

When Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU their nationals were free to come here but not given full access to jobs (see page 5). They can get permits as skilled workers or work here on a self-employed basis, but cannot apply for posts in the normal job market. They are excluded from welfare entitlements and social housing. As most Roma are not highly skilled, the main legal option is to do self-employed work. This is why they are often seen in car washes; selling magazines, newspapers or flowers; or begging. Their income is precarious and they are on the streets in all weathers, resulting in poor health. They tend to come here in extended family groups and may live in over-crowded conditions, but do not usually come under the multiple occupancy regulations because they are related to each other.

Roma people often experience racist harassment. Over 100 Roma people were affected by intimidation in the Lisburn Road area of Belfast in 2009 (see pages 70–1). They may be resented by local people, partly because so many live closely together. There have been accusations of anti-social behaviour in some areas but relationships are probably better here than in many parts of Europe. They don't like publicity and do not make any special demands. They say that they are hard workers and just want a chance to work. Unfortunately, even when regulations change and they can apply for jobs, without education and training, most jobs here will not be open to them. The children go to school, but cannot always get finance towards transport and uniforms. EMBRACE and other charities have helped with funding for this.

In Belfast there is currently a community liaison worker and integration projects with activities such as football and music, which is an important part of their culture. Recent funding is aimed at helping the children to make the most of educational opportunities. Some Roma volunteers have been helping to clean the alleyways in the Holyland in South Belfast and there have been cultural events in that area.

If you are approached by a family in need from the Roma community in Belfast it may help to contact the Roma community liaison worker at the **Multi-Cultural Resource Centre (MCRC)** Tel 028 9024 4639 E-mail info@mcrcli-ni.org who can advise on an appropriate response.

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.

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*

Pupils needing **English as an Additional Language (EAL)** support are now termed **Newcomer** children. (Not everyone is happy with this terminology, as it seems to ignore the needs of children from resident minority-ethnic backgrounds.) In May 2009 Stanley Goudie, Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate, said: ‘The last school census carried out showed we have around 7,000 newcomer children speaking 40 different languages.’ See www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/forty-languages-spoken-in-northern-ireland-schools-14312230.html#ixzz1FYWIM6qL By 2009–10 the numbers had risen to 8248. Language support is costly, but these children have the potential to be a wonderful resource for helping local children to begin to learn other languages.

The Impact of the Recession

When migration was at its height in July 2007, Northern Ireland had its lowest recorded unemployment figures, 3.7%. Since then the recession has caused unemployment to rise, so there has been speculation as to whether migrant worker numbers are reducing. Some migrant people, especially single men, have been returning home but many families have settled here. The numbers arriving have definitely decreased. In both 2005–6 and 2006–07 an estimated 10,000 more people came here to live than left. By 2008–09, however, immigration produced only 2,100 extra residents. The reduction in job opportunities here is not the only reason. There are new opportunities as other economies develop, and the decline in the value of sterling makes the UK a less attractive place to work. The Polish Embassy, for example, 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 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 The evidence for the whole of the UK, however, shows that unemployment rates for A8 workers remained lower than those for local people in 2009, probably because migrant people have the possibility to go home if they lose their jobs.

Translation services

The top 10 languages requested from the NI Health and Social Care Interpreting Service (NIHSCIS) between October and December 2010 were Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese Chinese, Slovak, Tetum (East Timor), Russian, Latvian and Romanian.

Between April 2009 and the end of March 2010 language support was provided in NI Housing Executive district offices mainly to people whose first language was Polish, Portuguese or Lithuanian. Sources NIHSCIS and NIHE.

EMBRACE runs a translation service for church notices. See page 100.

‘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

Many A8 nationals are still involved in the provision of public services. 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.

‘So I had this wee piece of paper that read “I am looking for job”. I showed it to a man and he said something. I didn’t know what he is saying so he written on the same piece of paper, “Come in tomorrow about 8”. So I was looking for work for three hours. It is harder now. I can’t imagine coming now and trying the same. It is impossible. They want the ones that can speak English. They are choosing now.’

Karol, Poland in The New Workers

‘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, remained 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.

Factors other than the recession affect people coming here from outside Europe. The more restrictive, points-based immigration system has contributed to a reduction in numbers. (see pages 18–21) It is too early to tell exactly how far this will go but the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) reported last year that the numbers of work permits issued here to people from countries where advance permission is needed, 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. Provisional figures for January 2009–September 2010 show permissions granted under Tiers 2 and 5 of the points-based system down to 565: 231 from India, 115 from China and 78 from the Philippines. Some existing work 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 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 (DEL) in December 2009 cited evidence that migrant movement (particularly inflows) is driven by market conditions, but other evidence tends to show that this recession is different and families are staying. For a discussion of the relevant studies see ‘Za Chlebem’. www.nicem.org.uk/uploads/publications/Za_Chlebem_Report.pdf

International Consequences of World Recession

The world economic downturn was bound to have impacts on migration. The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** highlighted the likely consequences in a policy briefing in 2009. The paper outlined

the likely human damage through job losses, the erosion of wages and working conditions, the risk of discrimination and xenophobia as migrants are mistakenly perceived as 'taking the jobs of local workers' (see pages 60–1), declining remittances to developing countries (see page 11), restrictive immigration policies and an increase in irregular migration and people trafficking. 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 of recession have been 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 more on Roma people here see pages 6 and 70–1.)

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

IOM's 2010 briefing continues to highlight the danger of the 'mismatch between rising emigration pressures and dwindling opportunities for legal entry' as states 'continued to follow mostly reactive and inward-looking policies':

'This has produced a string of perverse results: human and economic costs have risen sharply, while the opportunities for enhancing world stability and welfare gains have been largely forgone. The current economic crisis has worsened the situation. If joblessness and poverty continue to rise or remain at a high level in the coming years, derailing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) timetable and if, instead of strengthening their cooperation, nations become more inward-looking and reactive in their migration policies, it would be difficult to avoid domestic and inter-State tension; world recovery, too, would be delayed.'

http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/WMR2010_economic_crisis_human_mobility.pdf

The Causes and Effects of Mass Migration

People have moved from their home countries for centuries, for all sorts of reasons. Migrant numbers have risen rapidly in the last decade. There are now thought to be over 200 million people in the world who 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 it easier to access information.
- 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 are more likely to be respected.
- Many people in other parts of the world speak English.

Push Factors

Negative factors at home add to the reasons why people feel compelled to move.

- 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

Reporting on asylum and immigration issues

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=1236

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/download?id=Mw==

The Scottish Refugee Council has published *Fair Play: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Scotland, a guide for Journalists*. www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/0408/Fair_Play_Journalist_Guide_2007.pdf

Impacts on Countries of Origin

Economic disadvantage

Countries are 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 than at home, meant 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 a 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.

'Recorded migrant remittances to developing countries are estimated to have reached 307 billion dollars in 2009 ... These constitute 2% of GDP for developing countries and nearly 6% of GDP for ... low-income countries'.

Forecasting Migrant Remittances during the Global Financial Crisis
by Sanket Mohapatra and Dilip Ratha www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer?WDSPIIB/2010/12/30/000158349_20101230132625/Rendered/PDF/WPS5512.pdf

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.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/time-for-the-eu-to-acknowledge-the-advantages-of-migration/66139.aspx

The Immigration Debate

There is 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 2008 House of Lords Select Committee of Economic Affairs report, *The Economic Impact of Immigration* is one serious contribution. www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldeconaf/82/8202.htm It found the Government's

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: the Church of Ireland in a Plural Society by Patrick Comerford, p.29

claims of major economic benefits to be exaggerated and that immigration had made little difference. While immigration may help employers and migrants 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. Meanwhile, there were consequences on infrastructure expenditure in some areas and on the housing market. The report argues for better statistics and assessment; that we should help immigrants with language proficiency; and the need for better enforcement of workers' rights. The report did not 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

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.) Read more from the Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland www.delni.gov.uk/skillsimpacts/migrantworkers

While the arguments rage in England, the devolved areas are more aware of the benefits of immigration and increasingly concerned to see if the UK immigration policy framework can be tweaked to fulfil local needs in a better way. (See page 13)

Devolution in Scotland and immigration

In a devolved Scotland, discussions about immigration are coloured by the fact that their population numbers are still in decline and they feel the need to attract and retain migrant workers. This is contrary to the latest UK policy of discouraging settlement for migrant workers in the lower tiers of the points-based system. (See page 19.) 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 19) 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.

Positive impacts of immigration

- 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.hrmmagazine.co.uk/hr/news/1014483/uk-employment-figures-hit-dizzy-heights
- 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 the list of Nobel Laureates contains a disproportionate number of immigrants.) The UK Labour Force Survey revealed 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.
- 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

'All the best-

performing regions in the long term are expected to be those currently displaying the highest concentrations of migrants, including London, the South East of England and Northern Ireland.' *The Lord Mayor of Belfast Councillor Pat Convery, from the introduction to the Belfast Open Cities Action Plan, May 2011*

'OPENCities was initiated because of a growing body of evidence demonstrating that cities that attract international populations are more competitive than cities that don't.' *Belfast Open Cities Local Action Plan*

Negative impacts

- Depression of wages may occur, although research tends to show that any reduction in pay is temporary. (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 pages 11–12.)
- Immigration may serve employers more than the local population.
- Migrants may be exploited in the workplace and in housing (see pages 53–8).
- Increases in population put pressure on public services such as healthcare, housing and education.
- 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 – up to 500,000.
- Employers may fail to put proper training and apprenticeships in place if they are able to import workers who have skills already.
- 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 international terrorism, large movements of people lead to more security monitoring.
- There is anxiety about increased crime and anti-social behaviour when 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, including human trafficking (see pages 46–52).

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. 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 development of universal human rights. 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 faith backgrounds 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 newcomers, 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, and to get on with their lives, just as we would hope to be treated in other countries.

‘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

Immigration Policy and Legislation

Every country seeks to protect its borders and monitor who comes in and out of the country. Any developed or developing economy also needs additional workers. Immigration policy is a power that is retained at Westminster and the title of the previous 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 focused on internal interests rather than the needs of people who have to flee from their homes or are forced to look for work because of poverty. Successive governments have reacted to public opinion by legislating to tighten immigration controls and, more recently, have introduced measures to extend the time it takes to get permission to stay here on a long-term basis (see pages 39–40).

In *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*, May 2010 it was stated that 'The Government believes that immigration has enriched our culture and strengthened our economy, but that it must be controlled so that people have confidence in the system. We also recognise that to ensure cohesion and protect our public services, we need to introduce a cap on immigration and reduce the number of non-EU immigrants'. Other stated intentions include ending the detention of children for immigration purposes, the creating of a dedicated Border Police Force, as part of a refocused Serious Organised Crime Agency, 'to enhance national security, improve immigration controls and crack down on the trafficking of people, weapons and drugs'. They also intend to reintroduce exit checks, apply transitional controls for all new EU Member States and try to speed up the asylum application process. www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_187876.pdf

With the exception of the cap on non-European migrants this is a continuation of the trend set by the previous Government. During 2010 modifications to the immigration rules included a new English language requirement for people applying for leave to remain or enter the UK as the spouse or civil partner of a British resident or citizen and minimum qualifications to come here and study. Some welcome news was the intention to end the immigration detention of children (see page 45).

In a major speech in November 2011 the Home Secretary reiterated Government intentions to reduce net immigration to 'tens of thousands each year, not hundreds of thousands' during the life of this parliament. She said, 'We can attract more of the brightest and the best at the same time as we reduce the overall number.' www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/speeches/immigration-speech

Under the rules of the European free market most people from the European Economic Area (European Union states plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) have the freedom to come here to work, so in order to reduce numbers they have to look to people coming from elsewhere. They have kept the points-based system introduced by the previous government in 2008 but put further restrictions on some of its 5 tiers and introduced an overall cap on the numbers of people coming here from outside Europe. (The cap for non-EEA workers for the year from April 2011 is 21,700.)

E-Borders

The E-Borders programme provides for electronic collection and analysis of information from air and sea carriers about all passengers entering or leaving the UK. This controversial policy is due to be implemented by 2014 but there are logistical difficulties for both carriers and UKBA. (Each year Heathrow airport alone handles around 60 million passengers.) The programme is expected to cost the taxpayer £1.2 billion.

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmhaff/170/170.pdf

Experts are unsure that the policy will work and employers fear that they will be unable to find enough skilled workers.

The Government also hopes to restrict the large number of people from outside Europe coming here to study and ensure that this route of entry is not abused. 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. (The number of visas issued in 2010 for the purposes of study, including Tier 4 students and student visitors was 334,815, 2% less than in 2009.) It is not surprising therefore, at a time of cuts in government support for higher education, university vice-chancellors have been expressing concern about restrictions on the number of foreign students. In March 2011, however, the Home Secretary announced further restrictions on non-EEA students, with tougher entrance criteria, limits on work entitlements and the closure of the post-study work route to remaining here. Some commentators say that this will bring about a reduction of up to 80,000 in student numbers. (See also pages 19–20.)

For a succinct survey of the new policy and the issues around it see www.immigrationmatters.co.uk/qa-uk-immigration-cap.html or read the **background material** in this Migration Advisory Committee paper: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/workingwithus/maclmac-consultation-annual-limit/0610/mac-consultation-annual-limit?view=Binary

Who is Entitled to Come Here from Outside the European Economic Area?

People from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) who want to work or study in the UK must apply for permission through the **Points-Based System (PBS)**. This made up of five Tiers with different eligibility requirements. It is based on the assumption that most gaps in employment will be filled by people from the European Economic Area. People entering the country under Tiers 2, 4, or 5, must be sponsored in advance by an employer and the numbers allowed to enter are to be limited each year. Most now need to be either highly skilled or very wealthy.

Tier 1 (highly skilled migrants)

This includes professionals such as doctors, scientists, self-employed workers, 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 accumulate points by demonstrating that you are highly qualified, have been able to command high earnings previously, have experience of the UK, age, English language skills and ability to support yourself financially. Entrepreneurs need to be able to demonstrate that they can make a substantial investment in the UK.

Tier 2 (skilled people with job offers)

This tier includes people who ‘fill gaps in the United Kingdom workforce’. Since December 2009, employers must adhere to the ‘resident labour test’ and 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.) There are also a couple of other exceptions such as certain categories of graduates. Points are gained for qualifications; future expected earnings; English language skills; and the money you have for maintenance.

Tier 3 (low-skilled workers)

This would include people such as contract workers in catering and construction, 'to fill temporary labour shortages', but this Tier has been suspended indefinitely, to ensure that low-skilled job vacancies are filled solely by people from the EEA. If it is re-opened, people will no longer be able to gain citizenship by this route.

Tier 4 (students)

For non-European 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 also page 20.) From April 2011 colleges must become 'highly trusted sponsors'. Other visa requirements have changed, for example, students entering university need a higher level of English language skills, only people studying in university or colleges that are publicly funded retain the right to work part time and visas are time-limited. For a full summary of the revisions to the rules see www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2011/march/54-student-visas

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/employers/points/quick-guides-pbs/)

The **Migrant Advisory Committee** (MAC) advises government so that PBS entry points can be adjusted to reflect skills and labour shortages and has been consulting about the appropriate level of cap on non-EEA workers (see above). 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. A **Migration Impacts Forum** was put in place to examine the social impacts and benefits of migration as experienced at local level.

Sponsorship (Tier 2 and Tier 5)

Employers bringing in staff from outside the European Economic Area under Tier 2 must sponsor them, and this involves considerable obligations. If you are an employer who wants to act as a sponsor, you need to apply for a licence and be added to the register of sponsors. Applications for sponsorship are complex and 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. 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. A sponsorship licence can cost up to £1,000 and needs to be renewed

The words we use

In some countries the term 'Third Country Nationals' 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 18–21) 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

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: <http://www.lifeintheuktest.gov.uk/>

Migrants in Northern Ireland face particular difficulties in complying with these requirements due to the lack of local testing facilities. Some people are forced to travel to GB (at considerable expense) to sit the necessary tests.

annually. Licences can be suspended.

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

Tier 5 categories include creative and sporting; government authorised temporary exchanges and diplomats; and 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 as a student 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 under the sponsored skilled worker category.

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. The expense and complexity of the paperwork will be a deterrent to bringing people here to work for relatively short periods. Daniel Webster of Evangelical Alliance told *Christianity Today* in 2009 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. The late Dr David Stevens, then Leader of the Corrymeela Community, said that while they have successfully negotiated the ‘huge bureaucratic hassle’ there remains the ‘The danger ... 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

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/toll/news/politics/article5225907.ece

The introduction of ID cards for foreign students caused discomfort in university circles because there was the perception that the new measures were discriminatory and university staff were being asked to monitor compliance 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/lq/3/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/who-needs-a-card/

The introduction of compulsory ID cards for all British citizens was scrapped under the Identity Documents Act, 2010, but this change did not affect identity cards for foreign nationals, which continue to be required for many categories of migrants and students.

The Cost of Being a Migrant

Anyone moving to another country has travelling 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, as at Spring 2011 for applications made outside the UK; **£76** for short-term visitors; short-term student visa **£140**; **£400** for a skilled migrant worker from outside Europe, and between **£720** and **£800** for entrepreneurs or highly skilled migrants. www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/news/wms-fees-spring-2011.pdf

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**.

Application for Indefinite Leave to Remain

Postal application **£972** for the main applicant and **£486** for a dependent.

Application for Naturalisation

£836 for a single person, **£1,294** for a joint application and **£540** for a minor.

Permission to Marry

Immigrants from outside the European Economic Area are still required to obtain a Certificate of Approval from the Secretary of State, before they get married or register a civil partnership although the coalition government has announced its intention to abolish the scheme. 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 21 years of age in order that the non-resident person may enter the country as a spouse or partner of a person who is settled here.

www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/partnersandfamilies/partners/husbandswivescivilpartners/

The words we use...

Controversies have arisen 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 were 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 Co. Down fishing industry, with evidence of exploitation in terms of both pay and conditions. (See also page 58.)

UK Border Agency Office in Belfast

Drumkeen House at Gallwally in South Belfast 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 56–7) but numbers have expanded since then. There are members of staff with specialist training in human trafficking. Most people seeking asylum who have to report to the authorities now do so at Drumkeen House. 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, António Guterres, World Refugee Day, 20 June 2007 www.unhcr.org/admin/ADMIN/4678dfd34.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, then 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

Many people in Northern Ireland have never met a refugee or a person seeking asylum here but they may have misleading impressions caused by newspaper headlines and they do not know where to get answers to basic questions.

Q Who is an asylum seeker?

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

Q What is our obligation to people seeking asylum?

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

Q Who is a refugee?

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

The press has helped to turn the words 'asylum seeker' into a term of abuse and ensured that people think that we take too many refugees. Politicians have also not always been careful with their language. The

'On this, World Refugee Day, I ask you to help us help refugees find a place to call home.'

High Commissioner António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, World Refugee Day 2010 www.unhcr.org/pages/4bf4f2616.html

'The global dynamics of

asylum are changing. Asylum claims in the industrialized world are much lower than a decade ago while year-on-year levels are up in only a handful of countries ... We need to study the root causes to see if the decline is because of fewer push factors in areas of origin, or tighter migration control in countries of asylum. ... Overall, it's still the developing world that is carrying the lion's share of responsibility for hosting refugees'.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres, March 2011 www.unhcr.org/4d8cc18a530.html

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 an emotionally charged climate where politicians have vied to appear more strict on controlling numbers of people entering the country and done little to explain the difference between people who are forced to flee and others who have a different set of choices.

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 for asylum in the UK. 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, at 23,430.

'By the end of 2009, some 43.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to conflict and persecution, the highest number since the mid-1990s. This included 15.2 million refugees, 27.1 million IDPs [internally displaced persons] and close to 1 million individuals whose asylum application had not yet been adjudicated ...'

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) 2009 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons www.unhcr.org/4c11f0be9.html

In spite of world numbers increasing, applications for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, were 27% lower in 2010 (17,790) compared with 2009 (24,485), the lowest since 2002 when there were 84,130. (To read more see <http://homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/migration/>)

It is not easy to have an asylum claim accepted in the UK. Only 17% of initial decisions in 2010 were to grant asylum with an additional 8% granted **Humanitarian Protection (HP)** or **Discretionary Leave (DL)**. Refusals totalled 75%. Only 27% of appeals were allowed and 67% were dismissed, the remainder having been withdrawn.

During 2010 9,375 principal applicants were removed or departed voluntarily from the UK. Including dependants, and 9,850 asylum seekers were removed or departed voluntarily from the UK. Of these, 2,690 (2,480 principal applicants and 210 dependants) left under **Assisted Voluntary Return** schemes run by **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**.

From April 2011 **Refugee Action** rather than IOM will be assisting the UK Government on three major Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes: VARRP (Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme), AVRIM (Assisted Voluntary Return for Irregular Migrants) and AVRFC (Assisted Voluntary Return for Families and Children). www.refugee-action.org.uk/ourwork/assistedvoluntaryreturn.aspx For general enquiries to Refugee Action Tel: **020 7654 7700**.

The latest international figures for refugees throughout the world indicate how other countries, especially those in or near conflict zones, host much larger numbers of refugees. In 2009 the five top refugee-hosting countries were Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Germany and Jordan. Pakistan hosted the largest number, just under 1.8 million. The UK ranked 18th in terms of applications per head of the local national population, 4.1 per 1,000 inhabitants. To learn more from the **United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)** statistics see *2009 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons* www.unhcr.org/4c11f0be9.html and *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries 2009: Statistical Overview of Asylum Applications Lodged in Europe and Selected Non-European Countries* www.unhcr.org/4ba7341a9.html

Crises can break virtually overnight. On 1 March 2011, for example, the UNHCR announced that 140,000 people had fled from Libya to Egypt and Tunisia since 20 February.

‘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

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, dispelled 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.

‘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*)

Interviewees talk about their lack of choice in leaving their home country in Change or Chance? Understanding Why Asylum Seekers come to the UK

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

‘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*. They fear the drop in applications for asylum in the UK over recent years is because some people are not getting the chance to seek asylum. UK Border controls may now be in the country of origin of would-be refugees. www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/position/2008/remotecontrols/remote_controls_report.htm

The New Asylum Model (NAM)

From March 2007 all new applicants have fallen within the Government’s **New Asylum Model (NAM)**. NAM was 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 are: 1: people who could have claimed asylum in a third country; 2: Unaccompanied minors; 3: People from one of 16 ‘safe’ countries who may not be entitled to appeal in this country; 4: Applications that are regarded as ‘late and opportunistic’ (e.g. following arrest for working without documentation); and 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 was 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 anxiety that segmentation may be arbitrary and difficult to challenge. There are also fears 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 remove a greater number of people whose applications have failed. In 2009 the Home Office was able to conclude 60% of new asylum cases within six months. *The term NAM is no longer used.*

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 July 2011. www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/oldercases/. More 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** (2004–09) aimed to expedite the process, improve the assessment of cases and get more decisions right at the first stage. The **United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)** worked with the Government and felt it had made genuine efforts, but that improvements were still required. Over the years they 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. The use of **Country of Origin (COI)** information (see page 30) was criticised by the UNHCR in May 2009 because of over-reliance on Home Office information while additional sources in the public domain are ignored. 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 Their sixth report for the year 2008–09 continued to recommend improved training especially on ‘credibility assessment’ and had an emphasis on how children are treated in the asylum system. See www.unhcr.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/6_QJ_Key_Observations_Recommendations6.pdf

For a summary of the Quality Initiative Project see www.unhcr.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/QJ_DFT_Press_Release.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. 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 denied sanctuary to some who genuinely need it and ought to be entitled to it; was not firm enough in returning those whose claims are refused; and was 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. 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 29) 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 *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 locally. It is possible, however, to get some idea of the numbers from the applications for subsistence and accommodation, although there may also be a small number of people who are able to look after themselves financially.

‘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

'It makes me feel desperate not to know where my mother is and that she does not know where I am, that she might be dead. I cry and cry when I think about this ... If I remember I'm always depressed ... If I see police or immigration I am always crazy. It's affecting me. It's always giving me distress.'

An anonymous Nigerian woman, seeking asylum here, quoted in Distant Voices Shaken Lives Shaken Lives; Human Stories of Immigration Detention from Northern Ireland which contains the stories of people who have experienced immigration detention. www.refugeeactiongroup.com/download?id=MTg=

The asylum applications

forwarded by the Bryson One-Stop-Service for Asylum Seekers in 2010–11 were from a number of countries:

- 59 Somalia
- 35 Sudan
- 27 People's Republic of China
- 15 Iran
- 11 Nigeria
- 9 Zimbabwe
- 46 Others

The Belfast-based **Bryson One-Stop-Service for Asylum Seekers** which channels support services (see below), 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. 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/rds/pdfs/10imm1q409.pdf?version=1 From April 2010 to the end of March 2011 there were 202 main applicants (137 male and 65 female) with 91 dependents. There were 78 families and 70 single people on asylum cash support and accommodation at the beginning of April 2011.

There were 10 people on subsistence-only support at the end of the 2010. rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html There are an additional small number of young people, unaccompanied minors, who are the responsibility of Social Services.

Around 40 applications for Section 4 support (see pages 31 and 79) were made during the past year and at the beginning of April there were about 8 families and 8 single people receiving this support.

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.

Advice for People Applying for Asylum

For 24-hour advice and support services 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** www.brysongroup.org/index.php?option=com_alphacontent§ion=1&cat=1&task=view&id=139&Itemid=72

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 at March 2010 are as follows:

A couple	£70.34
A lone parent	£42.62
A single person aged 25, or over	£35.52
A young person at least 16, but under 18	£38.60
A person under 16	£51.37

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.uk/campaigns/default.aspx

In May 2007 the **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**

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. 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 <http://www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/pages/ten%20ways.html>. This group also initiated the work of the **Independent Asylum Commission** (see page 27).

'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.'

Medical Justice Network booklet, 2007 www.medicaljustice.org.uk/images/documents/medical-justice-booklet-july-2007.pdf

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

Social Care Trust. 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. Such assisted voluntary returns used to be provided by the **International Organisation for Migration (IOM)** but from 1 April 2011 are organised by the GB charity **Refugee Action** (see pages 24 and 80).

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 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, access to benefits and the right to work at this stage. After 5 years they can apply for **Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)**. At that 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 be rigorously enforced. To read more about Active Review see www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/asylum/outcomes/successfulapplications/activerewiew/

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. The UK Border Agency can now remove someone where there are still outstanding legal matters. In some cases, people who could not demonstrate that they fulfilled the criteria under the Refugee Convention, but who needed protection, could be given **Exceptional Leave to Remain**. This has been replaced by the more restrictive categories of **Humanitarian Protection** or **Discretionary Leave**, both of which are rarely given.

When applications fail people are expected to leave, and if they do not, they may be taken into detention (see pages 42–5) prior to **Forced Removal**. (People who are willing to risk going home have the option of **Voluntary Assisted Return** with Refugee Action (see pages 24, 30 and 80). 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, and meet the destitution criteria, they may receive **Hardship Support**, commonly known as **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 http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk/pdf/English/Azure_payment_card_English.pdf People have difficulty proving that they are destitute enough to receive support. For more details about this, and the hardship experienced, see pages 78–80.

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, however, none have been settled here to date.

A Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) used to be available for people over the age of 18 whose applications were successful and who fell within the New Asylum Model (NAM). As a consequence of cuts in Home Office funding, support for RIES is to be cut by 60% in April and contracts for this service will end completely from September 2011. www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/archive/press/310111_press_UKBA_cut_funds_refugee_services

When people are granted refugee 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. (See below pages 32–3.) 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 114 for volunteering opportunities.)

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.

People with refugee status are entitled to have their close family with them but **Family Reunion** involves difficulties and the process can be lengthy and difficult. The Red Cross can help to trace family members and can also process applications for travel assistance. Resources to reunite families have sometimes been limited and families have had to borrow from other people in order to bring their family back together.

'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 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

Problems for People Seeking Asylum

A successful six-week dialogue programme for members of the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) brought out many of the issues which asylum applicants find challenging. Many of those who took part were originally from African countries. One of the **Community Dialogue** facilitators, Seamus Farrell said 'It was like pushing an open door.' The Community Dialogue web site states: 'The process met the participants' desperate need just to be listened to – with respect and with no agenda. For those for whom belonging is at the root of personal identity, this being with others and sharing in safety and mutual respect was huge.' These are some of the issues that emerged.

- Anxiety and a sense of isolation among many of the participants
- Separation from families and concern about loved ones living far away
- Lack of a common language with those sharing the same hostel which potentially creates a climate of suspicion and mutual distrust
- Lack of take-up in accessing medical services
- Coming to Belfast from a different culture where cultural norms are different e.g. in various countries in Africa it is very normal to greet a stranger and make that person feel welcome which is not always the reality here.
- Fear of detention / deportation – 'who will be next?'
- Anxiety about the outcome of their asylum claim
- Inactivity – not allowed to work, time hangs heavily, compounding anxiety
- Poverty – those seeking asylum live on £5 per day (70% of income support) to cover food, clothing, transport etc

Source: *Community Dialogue* www.communitydialogue.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=83

For information on taking part in this project or learn about other volunteering opportunities with refugees see page 33–4 and 114.

Refugee Support and Community Integration

Refugee-led support

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

NICRAS has two main areas of work: an Advice & Support Service, which includes welfare benefits advice, accommodation and accessing funding for education and welfare needs and an Activities, Events and Training programme (including youth provision) to assist with integration. There are now two football teams one for men and one for women. 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 Common Grounds café, short-term volunteering with the Corrymeela Community in Ballycastle and facilitating with the Corrymeela/ NICRAS Inclusive Neighbourhood Project (see below).

Local people who support the aims of NICRAS can also volunteer in a number of ways, such as assisting with English and IT classes, translation and interpreting, doing research for information packs, administration and office work, helping at social events, advocacy, updating the website and assisting asylum applicants in accessing funding for education and welfare needs. NICRAS also welcomes donations of money, clothing, toiletries etc. see www.nicras.btck.co.uk/SupportUs

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.btck.co.uk/

Corrymeela/NICRAS Refugee and Inclusive Neighbourhood Project (INP)

The **Corrymeela Community** and the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) project encourages positive relationships between the local community or host community and the small but growing numbers of refugees here. It aims to develop mutual understanding and common action between the host and refugee community, through formal and informal training, and working equally with both local people and refugees. It promotes ways of dealing with difference that 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. Local people and refugees have been trained to help with training and social activities. The project has funding up to the end of 2011. At the beginning of the INP Project Officer Ann Marie White said

'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/

'... it is a project that is definitely going to build a unity between the host community groups and the ethnic minority groups as refugees or asylum seekers ...' *Teurayi Rugoyne, INP Community Facilitator www.inclusiveneighbourhood.org/index.html*

'... the thing I really enjoy about being a facilitator on the project is meeting a wide range of people from diverse cultures and life experience and the friendships that are built up...'
Paul Fitzsimmons, INP Community Facilitator www.inclusiveneighbourhood.org/index.html

'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.'

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

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.

For information on taking part in other volunteering opportunities with refugees see page 114.

'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 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 challenges experienced are examined below.

In a recent consultation exercise for the **Belfast Migrant Forum**, co-ordinated by the Belfast City Council, 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, establishing where they live in order to get a library ticket and proving identity so that they could 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 (see page 37); the UK Border Agency holding onto passports too long; and difficulties with police, especially for people who had experience of authoritarian regimes. (For a list of contact details for honorary consuls see <http://lca-ni.org/>)

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 www.concordiapartnership.org/files/2006321115822__Concordia%20migrant%20w%20LR.pdf

As far back as 2006 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), had produced a policy document challenging Government to improve the support mechanisms for people who come here. They asked for

- 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/files/2006321115822__Concordia%20migrant%20w%20LR.pdf

Access to Healthcare

People from anywhere in the world have a right to emergency medical treatment here. Hospitals know this but some family doctors are unaware that their contracts oblige them to give any medical treatment that is 'immediately necessary'. Some people are not entitled to sign on with a family doctor but the legal situation in N Ireland is unclear. It is normally necessary to prove that you have the right to live here and are 'ordinarily resident', usually by showing that you are in legal employment. People – such as A2 nationals (see pages 5 and 39) including some Roma people, and those at the end of the asylum process who can not be sent home (see page 31) – are often denied access to primary healthcare by general practitioners. Rather than assuming that everyone from a certain category is not entitled to care it would be helpful if doctors would submit applications to the NI Health and Social Care (HSC) **Business Services Organisation (BSO)**. The BSO website www.hscbusiness.hscni.net has information on entitlement to NHS services in a number of languages. Failure to be able to register with a family doctor has a knock-on affect on free entitlement to such things as children's vaccinations. www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/Family%20Practitioner%20Services/Entitlement%20to%20NHS%20services%20and%20first%20time%20registration%20with%20a%20OGP%20in%20the%20United%20Kingdom/index.html#TopOfPage For more information see **Access Denied – Or Paying When You Shouldn't**, a NI Human Rights Commission research paper, January 2011. [www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/711/Access_to_publicly_funded_medical_care_\(January_2011\).pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/711/Access_to_publicly_funded_medical_care_(January_2011).pdf)

The Effects of Immigration Policies

While all newcomers can experience difficulties in learning how to navigate our systems, some migrant workers experience more hardships than others because they have different entitlements depending on where they come from and how they are regarded by complex immigration rules or the asylum system. In addition, Government budgetary cuts will affect migrant people like everyone else, with cuts to the UK Border agency of up to 20% that may make for less efficiency in processing visas etc. and costs for visas have been increased several times in recent months. www.migrantsrights.org.uk/blog/2010/10/how-will-savage-government-spending-cuts-affect-migrants

Worker Registration Scheme (WRS)

Under transitional arrangements the UK Government placed restrictions on nationals from some of the states that joined the EU in 2004. Under the **WRS** migrant workers from the A8 accession countries (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) had to pay £90 to register with the Home Office and needed one year's uninterrupted work before they could even be considered for entitlement to full welfare and medical benefits here. The requirement to register was strictly applied and some migrant workers became destitute when they lost their jobs. The **Trades 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)** investigated the situation locally and also called for abolition. They found that the denial of essential services, homelessness support and welfare benefits caused extreme hardship for jobless people and women in abusive relationships.

For more on instances of destitution see pages 74–8. From May 2011 the WRS ceased to exist but foreign nationals still have pass a strict **Habitual Residence Test** before they are eligible for benefits. See page 38.

'... 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.'

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/ddl/files/1061Submission_of_evidence_to_UKBA_regarding_the_Worker_Registration_Scheme.pdf

The Habitual Residence Test

There were opposing reactions to the fact that transitional arrangements for A8 nationals ended in May 2011 and nationals from these countries now have the same rights as other EU citizens. Some people supporting migrants who are destitute because they have no recourse to public funds (see pages 75–8) hoped that their problems would disappear overnight. Opponents of mass migration acted as if welfare floodgates were about to open, ignoring the fact that all European states have had to open their job markets to A8 workers this year and some are much more attractive than the UK. A *Daily Mail* headline on 4 March 2011 screamed ‘Hundreds of thousands of migrants will gain full access to Britain’s generous benefits system within weeks.’ www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1362451/100k-Eastern-European-migrants-free-claim-UK-benefits-EU-ruling.html#ixzzIFdouChAL

The situation is much more complex. A8 nationals will not have an automatic right to benefits until they pass the **Habitual Residence Test**, first introduced in 2004 to prevent ‘benefit tourism’. It is applied to people who have recently come here when they try to access some social security benefits or get housing assistance. First, applicants must demonstrate that they have the **Right to Reside** or **Right of Abode**. This is not just about being allowed to live here but about having certain rights under the EU Rights of Residence Directive. These Treaty rights attach to EU citizens who are working or studying here and usually apply only when they have enough money to support themselves. People usually only retain this status while they are working; temporarily unable to work due to, maternity/paternity care, accident or illness; or are in involuntary unemployment and registered as a jobseeker for no more than 6 months, having already worked for a year or more before becoming unemployed, and are genuinely looking for work, with a real chance of getting a job.

Only after the Right to Reside element of the test is satisfied can habitual residence be decided. This depends on the following:

- length and continuity of residence
- future intentions e.g. how long they intend to stay, and if they will still have links to other countries
- employment prospects
- reasons for coming to the UK e.g. are people returning after living here for some time previously?
- where the person’s ‘centre of interest’ lies: e.g. do they own property, have all their belongings here and whether their family have joined them.

Habitual Residence unfortunately has no statutory definition and individuals are assessed on a case-by-case basis. It remains to be seen how the rules are applied, but it is clear that many people will be disappointed. Many rough sleepers, for example, will be unable to say that they have a genuine prospect of work and so fail the right to reside element and may be required to leave. For more details see House of Commons Standard Note 22 January 2010 www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snsp-00416.pdf

Different treatment for Bulgaria and Romania (A2 countries)

When Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU even stricter transitional arrangements were put in place than for the A8 countries (see above page 37.) Bulgarians and Romanians can enter the country freely, can work as self-employed or get permission in advance to come here as highly skilled workers, in the same way as people from outside Europe. Once in the UK they cannot easily apply for other jobs and this leaves them liable to exploitation in the black economy by unscrupulous employers and criminal gangs. A similar situation exists in the Irish Republic, 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'. When Roma people from Romania were subject to attack in Belfast in 2009 (see pages 70–1), they were ineligible for Housing Executive accommodation and had to be given exceptional emergency help to return home. Roma children are ineligible for support towards uniforms and transport to school. (This is also true of the children of people whose asylum claims are exhausted.) EMBRACE has been able to help both these groups through its Emergency Fund (see page 100). Transitional provisions for A2 workers will remain in place at least until December 2011 and the Government can extend them until December 2013.

Citizenship

People from outside Europe are also ineligible to benefits if they are not in employment. It is unsettling to be in another country, hoping to make a home here, but aware that your passport is stamped 'No recourse to public funds', and know that if you lose your job, you have no safety net and would have no right to stay in the country. When the **Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act** proposed future changes to the citizenship requirements it added to those feelings of insecurity. The immigration law barrister, Frances Webber, commenting on the legislation while it was in draft form said:

'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 felt 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

Living in limbo; Forced Migrant Destitution in Europe

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has called on European states to change their policies so that migrant people 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/AND_ES%20report2010.htm

'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 Colmcille's church in Ballyhackamore, Belfast

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/policy-briefings/199.html

Between August and October 2009 the Government held a consultation on **Earned Citizenship**. 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. ...

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 70–1.] Law Centre response www.lawcentreni.org/learning-the-right-to-stay-a-new-points-based-system-for-citizenship.html?q=earned+citizenship

Many people from outside Europe left to pursue jobs in countries where the citizenship requirements were less stringent. In a welcome change, however, the Coalition Government has dropped these proposals as too bureaucratic. Non-EEA nationals can apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain after five years residence here and naturalised British citizenship after an additional year.

Border issues

By a longstanding agreement UK or Irish citizens are supposed to have freedom of movement between GB, N Ireland and RoI, within what is known as the **Common Travel Area** but both the Irish and British Governments have had plans to increase checks at our airports, ports and the border. The UK Border, Citizenship and Nationality Bill had included proposals to increase internal checks within the Common Travel Area. During the Committee Stage of the Bill on 11 February 2009, the Bishop of Lincoln, Rt Revd Dr John Saxbee, 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 (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90211-0005.htm).

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 proposals were defeated at that stage but appeared again in the **Policing and Crime Act 2009**. Customs and immigration officials were 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. Assurances were given that this would not apply outside customs operations but, as customs and immigrations powers have merged, it is not clear how this can be guaranteed.

People who are subject to immigration control, having required a visa to enter either the UK or RoI, are not entitled 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 a 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.

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.

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/1/hi/uk_news/6631193.stm

In 2009 London mayor Boris Johnson, who supports an 'amnesty', commissioned a study which indicated that regularising the UK's 600,000 plus undocumented migrants would boost the economy by £6 billion. www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/jun/15/migrants-amnesty-immigration-london-johnson

Liberal Democrat policy in the run up to the General Election in 2010 proposed a form of regularisation but this policy did not survive the Coalition agreement.

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

The Medical Justice Network campaigns to improve conditions for people in detention, their booklet contains examples of how people feel.

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

www.medicaljustice.org.uk/images/documents/medical-justice-booklet-july-2007.pdf

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

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, which is usually not permitted. Others are detained where it is felt that their application has little hope of success, or the process seems to be exhausted. There are usually more than 2,000 people detained in **Removal Centres** at any one time and anxieties continue about how they are held. See for example, the Refugee Council's concerns: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/supportourwork/vulnerable-women/more/detention.htm In 2010, 57,085 persons were removed from the country or departed

voluntarily from the UK, of those 18,060 were people who were refused entry and 5235 were foreign national prisoners.

Locally, the enforcement of immigration controls, at our ports, airports and the border, through **Operation Gull**, the joint PSNI, Garda Síochána and UK Borders Agency (UKBA) operation, causes concern. It is believed that 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.

Because some immigration infringements are now criminal offences, some foreign nationals may also be in the NI prison system because they are suspected of offences such as the carrying of irregular documentation. There is no independent oversight of Operation Gull and it is suspected that people are targeted because of their ethnicity. A number of visitors have had to be compensated following their detention. Jamiu Omikunle, a Nigerian student, was detained at Aldergrove on his way from London to Belfast to act as godfather at a baptism. He was awarded £20,000 in February 2009 because of unlawful detention in Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre in Scotland. www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/eamon-mccann/eamon-mccann-why-some-deportations-are-a-black-and-white-issue-14184389.html

This is not an isolated case. For other concerns about Operation Gull see Law Centre (NI) briefing, October 2008. www.lawcentreni.org/operation-gull.html?q=operation+gull

People picked up in N Ireland used to be detained in the prison system here but 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 the **Refugee Action Group (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 anyone who is campaigning on behalf of someone in detention, and it can be obtained from NICRAS (see page 33 for contact details) or downloaded from RAG. www.refugeeactiongroup.com/download?id=Nw==

'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/page/2/

Jamiu recounted how his immigration status was disputed while in transit to a christening in Belfast, and he was detained:

'I was panicked and confused and fearful and lonely. I knew that no one knew where I was. ... I find it impossible to concentrate. I have recurring dreams and flashbacks. I have developed what I can only refer to as a phobia of the police. I can't really discuss my feelings with anyone ... I have never been in any trouble of any kind in my life ... No matter how long I live this ordeal will be with me for the rest of my life.'

Distant Voices

RAG has established an out-of-hours Immigration Detention Emergency Helpline 0800 400 495 operated by a rota of volunteers who 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 also produces information about what happens to people whose detention is normally impossible to research, as they do not appear in official statistics. Travellers who observe someone being detained have also rung the helpline. Helpline cards can be obtained from EMBRACE. See www.refugeeactiongroup.com/content.jsp?id=Nw==

'I have been a Helpline volunteer since the service began in June 2009. On two occasions I have received calls in the middle of the night from distressed family members wanting to report the 'disappearance' of loved ones. The sheer panic in the callers' voices was alarming, particularly in the dead of night. Imagine waiting at a ferry terminal or airport arrival hall and your partner never arrives.'

DistantVoices

Short Term Holding Facility at Larne

The UK Border Agency (UKBA) plans to open a short term holding centre in Larne in late summer 2011, because quite a number of people may be picked up at any one time under the Operation Gull joint police and UKBA immigration enforcement project and a difficulty arises in removing them to GB immediately. They are usually taken out by ferry and the operators will only allow a small number of immigration detainees to be on each boat. This can cause delays for some people and they are held presently in the custody suites of Police Stations during this time, a situation that is far from ideal. This is why UKBA are adapting part of Larne police station so that up to 22 adults can be held for no more than 7 days, before transfer to a Removal Centre in GB.

Local people whose houses are close to the station have been concerned that extra fencing and security lights are a refortification of the police station and will impact on their lives. The British National Party worked on these fears and made alarmist and tasteless statements about Larne being 'earmarked as a dumping ground for illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers'. This in turn led to other local politicians speaking in favour of the centre – not always understanding the situation fully. The Refugee Action Group has spoken out against the use of immigration detention for people, such as those in the asylum system, who have not even been accused of a crime.

The proximity to the international airport will mean that more people will be directly removed to their home countries, rather than routed through GB.

In April 2009 the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission published the results of research on the application of immigration legislation here, *Our Hidden Borders: The UK Border Agency's Powers of Detention*. See [www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/109/Our_Hidden_Borders_immigration_report_\(April_2009\).pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/109/Our_Hidden_Borders_immigration_report_(April_2009).pdf) Researchers Dr Nazia Latif and Agnieszka Martynowicz examined the way Operation Gull operates, as well as the day-to-day interviewing of people in their homes and workplaces. They call this 'traditional enforcement'. They painted a disturbing picture of insufficient legal safeguards and oversight, a need for human rights training, greater awareness by magistrates, inconsistent practice in informing people about their legal rights and access to interpreters, sometimes determined by cost. The report emphasises the importance of challenging myths and popular discourse, and quotes one immigration officer who expressed the view that 'Whatever the Daily Mail and Star have a rant about is what gets listened to.' In 2010 the **Refugee Action Group (RAG)** published *Distant Voices, Shaken Lives; Human Stories of Immigration Detention from Northern Ireland* a report that challenges the system by including the first hand accounts of 8 men and women who had been detained and suggesting alternatives to detention. www.refugeeactiongroup.com/download?id=MTg= Among the arguments against detention is the fact that many people who are detained are not removed subsequently. The system is expensive and there is little evidence that failed asylum applicants will abscond if they feel the system has treated them fairly.

Families seeking sanctuary here are particularly vulnerable when their applications have failed. In late 2007 people from Mountpottinger Presbyterian Church found themselves campaigning, with others, against the detention and removal of the Falode and Adefowoju families who were part of their congregation. Both families had fled from Nigeria. In spite of a hard-fought campaign, it proved impossible to persuade the authorities to allow the families to return to Belfast 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. They expressed their acceptance of the need to have an immigration policy but said:

'It should not over-ride basic human rights and the religious freedom of each individual. These, we believe, must always be protected.'

www.presbyterianireland.org/News/news2007/news0624.html

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 June 2010 the Jesuit Refugee Service published a report on how detention contributes to the vulnerability of migrants in Europe. www.detention-in-europe.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=220&Itemid=242

The results of the first paediatric study of children in detention were published in October 2009. The doctors found that a majority of the 24 children detained at Yarl's 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/news-views/press-release/first-uk-study-finds-immigration-detention-seriously-damages-childrens-phy 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 In May 2010 the new coalition Government announced its intention to end child detention. By February 2011, however, anxieties were being expressed that detention of families was being reintroduced through 'pre-departure accommodation facilities'. See 'New Centres "to detain child asylum seekers"' in the *Independent newspaper*. www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/new-centres-to-detain-child-asylum-seekers-2203843.html The Home Office has contracted the children's charity Barnardo's to run a new holding centre for families at Pease Pottage, Sussex. This secure 'pre-departure accommodation' may well be seen as detention under another name. <http://ncadc.wordpress.com/2011/03/10/barnardos-to-help-run-new-family-detention-centre/>

'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

'"They make you feel like a criminal, when you haven't done anything wrong," says Adebowale.' [Adebowale Falode aged nine.]

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

Both quotations from the *New Statesman* 'No place for children', Alice O'Keefe, 13 December 2007 www.newstatesman.com/uk-politics/2007/12/yarl-wood-children-immigration

Human Trafficking

'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/

'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

'According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), about 12.3 million people worldwide are in forced labour, bonded labour, forced child labour or sexual servitude at any given time. Other estimates range between 4 million and 27 million. According to US Government-sponsored research, about 800,000 people are trafficked across national boundaries each year, about 80% of whom are women and girls and "up to 50%" are children.'

House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, The Trade in Human Beings: Human Trafficking in the UK, Sixth Report of Session 2008–09 Volume 1 p.1 www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmhaff/23/23i.pdf

'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

'A young man, in his late twenties or early thirties, came to the attention of the UK immigration authorities. He had never slept on a bed, had never sat in a chair and had never been paid any money. He had been brought here at the age of 11 from Pakistan into a family home and had no documentation and no evidence of ever having been here.'

A story from GB, from the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, The Trade in Human Beings: Human Trafficking in the UK, Sixth Report of Session 2008–09 Vol. 1

Trafficking differs from people smuggling. People who are smuggled are assumed to have given their consent, and people who are trafficked are moved against their will or by deception. In reality, the distinction may be irrelevant if someone consents to be smuggled only to be sold into prostitution or forced labour. 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. 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. In either trafficking or smuggling, individuals can 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. Trafficking is a crime that is hidden from view, isolating victims and destroying them psychologically.

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 PSNI say that one child picked up in Belfast reported being required to steal 25 mobile phones each day.

Key findings from UK Research in 2008–09

- There are estimated to be at least 5,000 trafficking victims in the UK.
- About 8,000 women work in off-street prostitution in London alone, 80% of whom are foreign nationals.
- Over 1000 women trafficked into prostitution have been referred to the Poppy Project (funded by the Office for Criminal Justice Reform) since March 2003.
- 200-300 victims of trafficking for domestic labour register with the relevant NGO each year.
- An estimated 330 child victims are trafficked into the UK each year.
- About 60% of suspected child victims in local authority care go missing and are not subsequently found.
- There is long-term government funding for just 35 places for victims in safe accommodation.
- 92 people were convicted of sex trafficking and four for labour trafficking between 2004 and December 2008.
- There are only 100-300 prosecutions for trafficking across the EU each year.
- Each sex trafficker earns on average £500-£1000 per woman per week.

House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, The Trade in Human Beings: Human Trafficking in the UK, Sixth Report of Session 2008–09 Vol. 1 p.3

The UK National Referral Mechanism (NRM)

The UK ratified the **UN Convention Against Human Trafficking** on 17 December 2008 and this meant signing up to a new national referral mechanism, providing a 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. There should be better support for victims in giving information to police, which will help authorities bring those who exploit them to justice.

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 based solely in N Ireland.) They complete a **Referral Form** that is sent to the **UK Human Trafficking Centre** in Sheffield (or, if there are immigration law implications, the **UKBA**). A person may make a claim for asylum and

‘Katerina was a student in Romania. She built up a friendship with a friend of a friend named Alex, who invited her to the UK and told her that she could stay at his house; he would even help her with the air fare. When she arrived in the UK, Katerina was held prisoner in a flat where she was repeatedly beaten and raped. Alex told her that she could have her freedom, but she would have to work as a prostitute to pay back the money that he had paid to bring her here. Katerina eventually gave in and began work, paying all of the money she made to Alex.’

A story from GB, from the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, The Trade in Human Beings: Human Trafficking in the UK, Sixth Report of Session 2008–09 Vol. 1

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 should be given one year's **Discretionary Leave to Remain**. Between March 2009 and April 2010 a total of 706 people were referred to the UK Human Trafficking Centre through the NRM with people from outside the EU accounting for 80% of the referrals. 74% of referrals were female. www.soca.gov.uk/about-socal/about-the-ukhtc/statistical-data?format=pdf

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 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 outstanding debts to family or friends who thought they were sending people to a successful life in another country.

Support organisations are concerned at the number of negative decisions where cases had appeared strong, and fear that failure to be recognised as trafficking victims may have the effect of reducing the credibility of people who also have asylum claims.

The coalition government unveiled its vision on trafficking in October 2010 and will publish a new strategy in spring 2011. www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/trafficking-vision There has been criticism of the UK failure to sign up to the EU Trafficking Directive but there were signs in March 2011 that they were now preparing to do so. Home Office Minister, Damian Green said 'Applying to opt in to the directive would continue to send a powerful message to traffickers that the UK is not a soft touch, and that we are supportive of international efforts to tackle this crime.' www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/about-us/parliamentary-business/written-ministerial-statement/eu-direct-human-trafficking-wms/?view=Standard&pubID=869472

The local situation

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 there is more scrutiny on arrivals in London and Dublin, regional ports and airports are now favoured routes. 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 be exploited by farmers who just wanted cheap labour. (BBC news report news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/northern_ireland/2407629.stm)

In 2004 a Chinese woman, Qu Mei Na, was murdered in Belfast. Speaking in February 2008, following the sentencing of one of the men convicted of the murder, politician Anna Lo said that 'it was widely believed in the Chinese community that the woman had been trafficked and that she had been trying to get out of prostitution.' She also quoted police sources as

saying that there were up to 70 brothels in N. Ireland, run by foreign gangs and paramilitaries, and that, as well as women, children as young as 11 were being smuggled into the country. www.newsletter.co.uk/news/MLA-and-Womens-Aid-voice.3751911.jp

Rev. Becky Dudley's research was published in 2005 by Women's Aid. She said

'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.'

www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/WomensAid%20B%20Dudley%20research.pdf

In *The Nature and Extent of Human Trafficking in Northern Ireland*, by Agnieszka Martynowicz, Sarah Toucas and Anne Caughey of the Institute for Conflict Research, published in 2010, the authors confirmed that the problem is still difficult to quantify, with victims often reluctant to admit the nature of their situation. They quoted a law enforcement officer who quantified the three types of trafficking.

'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

Sometimes these categories can be blurred. For example, people in domestic servitude or forced labour may be subject to sexual exploitation.

Evidence suggested that, at that time, women trafficked for prostitution were 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 were being 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)

A report of the Public Accounts Committee in June 2010 stated that

'The Committee is disturbed by the increasing evidence of human trafficking, a heinous crime which preys on the vulnerability of individuals, often women and children, who are lured by the prospect of a new life, better education and a job, only to find themselves in what amounts to slavery and subject to sexual exploitation. The Committee was told that the sexual exploitation of these individuals is prevalent across Northern Ireland.' www.niassembly.gov.uk/public/2007mandate/reports/2009/report_63_09_10r.html#5

In the early years of the 21st century there was little recognition by the authorities that trafficking was a problem locally, but in 2008 five people

'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.'

Marie Brown, Women's Aid www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2008/0702/breaking56.htm

were rescued from suspected sex slavery traffickers in raids as part of the UK-wide anti-trafficking operation **Pentameter 2**. Six people were arrested, suspected of controlling prostitution and people smuggling, within the UK. Money was also confiscated. At that time, Marie Brown of Foyle Women's Aid spoke about the difficulty of supporting rescued women because of the lack of funds, a difficulty that still exists today. (People's entitlement to state welfare benefits often depends on their immigration status and this hampers charities that rely on public money to support their clients.)

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

New support services

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 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7962465.stm The new PSNI 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. www.nio.gov.uk/goggins-announces-extensive-new-support-services-for-victims-of-human-trafficking/media-detail.htm?newsID=15921

Specialist PSNI officers have been trained to debrief rescued people, and all front line police officers are supposed to be trained to recognise the key indicators that people may have been exploited. Support workers, however, sense that some are still more likely to perceive people as

irregular migrants (and therefore criminals) rather than victims. (It would be helpful if it could be ensured that everyone who comes in contact with foreign nationals here receives training to help them become more aware of the signs that people may be victims of trafficking. This would include people such as clergy and pastoral workers, advice workers, teachers, etc. in addition to health and social services professionals.)

The officers directly involved in trafficking operations encounter distressing situations and have to undertake painstaking work. Intelligence and evidence gathering and criminal proceedings can take years. They are also aware that they cannot rescue all victims. Dougie Grant of the PSNI told the Irish Baptist Network conference on 22 March 2011 (see below page 52) that on one occasion they went to a house and found an empty room where blood and pieces of finger nails showed that a woman had tried to claw her way out. DNA tests showed that she was a woman who had disappeared in the south of England 5 years previously.

Extreme labour exploitation 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 pages 53–8). Partly because of victims' fears, it is more difficult to get evidence to convict people than it is for other forms of organised crime. So, as Justice minister David Ford told the Irish Baptist conference, the authorities use collective expertise and are creative in using the Proceeds of Crime Act to recover assets and the proceeds of money laundering, as well as unpaid tax. Read about his speech at www.dojni.gov.uk/index/media-centre/ford_addresses_human_trafficking_conference.htm

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland looks after adult female victims of sexual trafficking rescued here. www.womensaidni.org/ **Migrant Helpline**, now known as **Migrant Help**, (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.migranthepline.org.uk/). They now have workers in Northern Ireland. These charities have to care for very traumatised people, sometimes bearing the signs of torture or suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, having had poor nutrition, difficult to communicate with because of language barriers and having lost their trust in other human beings. Some have suffered terribly as they were being moved in the first place, come under gunfire in war zones, forced into the boots of vehicles, or made to swim for their lives during their painful journeys.

During 2009–10 police identified 25 victims of human trafficking locally and 20 more up to March in 2010/11. There are also a number of charges for people trafficking offences going through the criminal justice process currently. A court was told in March that up to 70 Hungarian women had been brought into Ireland for prostitution by one group. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-12832097 The NI Policing Board and PSNI Policing Plan 2011–14 stresses the need to address people trafficking and increase organisational knowledge of trafficking and the issues of prostitution. www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/policing_plan_web.pdf It is to be hoped that the other forms of trafficking, such as forced labour, will also be addressed by the authorities.

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.

There are many criticisms of the present system and especially the fact that people are still likely to be seen as irregular migrants rather than be identified as trafficked people. 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) See www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=18820 for Amnesty's summary of the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group's report, *Wrong Kind of Victim*, and to access the report which was published in June 2010. Among other recommendations they would like to see a NI Human Trafficking Group, the establishment of a local referral mechanism, and the appointment of local NGOs as First Responders who have expertise and experience with working with trafficked people.

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.cori.ie/Northern_Ireland/relevantpublications/531-trafficking-in-persons--what-can-we-do

In 2011 there have been a number of Christian initiatives to highlight this issue locally. In March 2011 Irish Baptist Networks held an important inter-agency conference which had contributions from the Justice Minister, PSNI, Migrant Help, Women's Aid, keynote speaker Rev. Dr Luran Bethell, who has given her life to working with trafficked women throughout the world, and smaller presentations from Christian groups including EMBRACE. (The major presentations will be put on the Department of Justice web site www.dojni.gov.uk/)

What Can You Do about Trafficking?

Be aware of the danger signs yourself. The international **Blue Blindfold** campaign www.blueblindfold.co.uk/ has produced excellent postcards that counterbalance myths, and give information on the signs of trafficking to look out for. These can be accessed at www.blueblindfold.co.uk/thesigns/ The EMBRACE NI website has other information on trafficking and on support groups. See www.embraceni.org/category/information/trafficking/

If you see suspicious activity you can report your fears through the **Crimestoppers** confidential line **0800 555 111**

Individuals can be advised through the 24-hour **Migrant Helpline 07766 668 781**
E-mail mhl@migranthelpline.org

(The **Migrant Help** general helpline for distressed foreign nationals is **01304 203977**.)

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 free confidential legal advice from the **Law Centre NI** via the helplines: **Belfast (028) 9024 4401** and **Derry (028) 7126 2433**.

Where a child is concerned, the PSNI or local **Health and Social Care Trust** should be contacted. The five Northern Ireland Trusts can be accessed at www.healthandcareni.co.uk/index.php?link=trusts and you should contact the duty Social Worker.

Worker Exploitation

Trafficking and smuggling enable people to be exploited in the workplace partly 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

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 the Institute for Conflict Research that the majority of workers who they dealt with were employed in healthcare, construction, hospitality, or as manual workers. The advantage for migrant workers is that they can get into work quickly. The effect of working as an 'agency worker', however, is that the person has far fewer rights than an 'employee'. Agencies and employment businesses exert great power, for both good and ill, over the lives of migrant workers.

There were around 270 employment agencies and employment businesses operating in N Ireland in 2009, around 84,000 people registered with them and more than 22,000 people employed through them. www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Understandingyourworkstatus/Migrantworkers/DG_180915

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, an increasing number of local people also work for agencies. Most contracts are for short periods, increasing levels of anxiety about future employment. A **Fair Work Coalition** report *Fair Work: Fighting Poverty through Decent Jobs*, highlights how people are increasingly denied fair treatment in the workplace because they are classed as 'workers' not employees and falsely classified as self-employed. www.tuc.org.uk/fairwork/fairworkreport.pdf

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

'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.'

'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.'

Two workers quoted in Migrant Workers and their Families in Northern Ireland by Robbie McVeigh

'We'd like a proper job...where at the end of each week I would know how much I would get; with the agency you never know. Normally people working through the agency have shifts ... We work Friday, Saturday and Sunday, normally, we just work when they call us but the boss makes sure work at least two shifts each week, because this is enough money for the rent, and he owns the house.'

Tiago from Brazil quoted in The New Workers

'I worked at a large supermarket chain but it was through an agency. Most of the local people would be directly employed and most of the foreign people would be employed through an agency and would be paid less, and also we would be made to work on the night shift and the local people would just do the day shift.'

Gedi from Lithuania quoted in The New Workers

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 for Conflict Research, 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 for 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.

'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

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

The Equality Commission for NI undertook an investigation as to whether the involvement of employment agencies and businesses in the employment of migrant workers has rights implications. Their main findings confirm that

‘Migrant workers employed by recruitment agencies as temporary agency workers will not necessarily have the same terms and conditions as direct employees. We found that their main terms and conditions of service, including their pay, was generally inferior to that enjoyed by direct employees, even when they were employed as agency workers for substantial periods, or when they worked alongside direct employees.

Migrant workers employed by the recruitment sector generally fill jobs that attract National Minimum Wage and offer irregular hours and little in the way of job security.’

Employees tend to be employed on the basis of the English language skills apparent at their first interview (see also page 73) and so ‘the majority of migrant workers who find work through the recruitment sector are placed in minimum wage jobs that are not commensurate with their qualifications and experience’. 72% of participants found the language barrier significant. There were frequently reported errors and delay in receipt of pay. Workers reported favouritism in the allocation of work to fellow nationals by foreign staff or supervisors. Some said that they were barred from speaking any language other than English even during social breaks. In their recommendations the Commission places particular stress on the translation of documents for migrant workers. To read more see *The Role of the Recruitment Sector in the Employment of Migrant Workers: A Formal Investigation*, 2010. www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/ECmigrantreport.pdf

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

‘We paid 600 euro to the agency and then £500 to a contact in the UK who said he would get us work documents. We never got these. We knew only that we would be doing unskilled work in Belfast. We work on a farm and the job is not what we expected.’

‘I got a contract written in English. The agency staff completed it and I signed it. But I didn’t understand it.’

Evidence to the Equality Commission, The Role of the Recruitment Sector in the Employment of Migrant Workers

'We have trouble getting holiday pay from the agency. They don't want to speak to us about it. They said that if we don't like it we could always go back home.'

'The same people get picked for work all the time, and to do overtime. The supervisors only choose people of their own nationality.'

Evidence to the Equality Commission, The Role of the Recruitment Sector in the Employment of Migrant Workers, 2010

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.direct.gov.uk/en/D11/Directories/DG_177940

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

or the leaflets in different languages on the **Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA)** web site www.gla.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1013184 Make a complaint to the GLA through anonymous online reporting on www.gla.gov.uk or by telephone to multilingual staff **08456025020**

The Labour Relations Agency website www.lra.org.uk has an 'Alternative Languages' section and they have a telephone helpline **(028) 9032 1442**.

The **Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)** now has an **Employment Agency Inspectorate** with two inspectors responsible for ensuring that recruitment agencies and businesses comply with the law. They are concerned that they are not receiving all the complaints that they should be and are currently finding ways to make people more aware of their work. Contact the inspectors by E-mail ea.inspectors@delni.gov.uk Tel. **(028) 9025 7554** or make an online complaint www.delni.gov.uk/index/er/employment-agency-and-business-regulations-2/employment-agency-complaints.htm

You can also get advice on workplace rights from the **Law Centre NI** helplines **Belfast (028) 9024 4401** and **Derry (028) 7126 2433**.

HM Revenue and Customs is responsible for the enforcement of the minimum wage.

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

In July 2008 the 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. www.gla.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1013451 In their 2008 annual review they found a particular problem in one area: 'our ... shellfish case-study puts unlicensed activity at 85–95%.' www.gla.gov.uk/embedded_object.asp?id=1013505 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 There have been other prosecutions locally.

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, 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_uk_pp_who_cares.pdf

There are similar experiences locally. In 2009 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 human trafficking already found in this form of employment in Northern Ireland. (See also pages 48–51).

'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

'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."'

'Even if we had worked the night shift, there was pressure to work during the day.'

Domestic care workers
quoted in *Who Cares?*

'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
www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland-society-ordinarylives-latvia.htm*

Exploitation in the fishing industry

In December 2008 the news broke that **transit visas** (see page 22) 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 experienced physical ill treatment as well as exploitation and some were forced to live on board the boats, as they had no documentation to entitle them to go ashore. The fact that they are here on transit visas makes it possible for employers to threaten that they will be deported 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%2020251108.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. A three-month scheme for non-EEA fishermen came into force in early 2010 but has now ended and there are heavy penalties for employing non-EEA nationals in breach of immigration law. www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/newsarticles/2010/275292/14-warning-to-employers

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. When the Equality Commission NI was researching the role of agencies (see also page 55) they found that

'Many migrant workers who participated in this investigation indicated that they were prevented from registering for work with some recruitment agencies because they lacked English language skills; including agencies that were recruiting for the type of work that would require very little verbal communication.'

... many workers encounter problems, find it difficult to obtain work that matches their qualifications and are confined to irregular and temporary work. ... For some the job was not as expected.

For example, one man was told he would be working using his physiotherapy qualifications but on arrival there was no such job and he was actually distributing leaflets.'

The Role of the Recruitment Sector in the Employment of Migrant Workers, 2010

They stress that 'The language barrier also creates difficulties in terms of the recognition of the equivalency of foreign qualifications.' Agencies say that checking foreign qualifications is very time consuming. In some cases it is clear that difficulty with language would prevent migrant workers from working effectively at the level of their skills and qualifications. In other cases, however, employers lack the language skills to allow them to understand and accept foreign qualifications. Negative attitudes may play a part. 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.)

Employers currently check qualification equivalencies through the **National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC)**. www.naric.org.uk/ This is the only official agency to provide information and advice to employees and employers, but not all migrant workers will know about it. There is a cost involved and additional charges for the English language certification which most employers require. The **Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)** is licensed by NARIC and is currently piloting a scheme in Belfast and Dungannon (European Employment Services (EURES) in Belfast, 9025 2270 eures.section@delni.gov.uk or Dungannon Jobs & Benefit Office 8775 4854 E-mail: Dungannon.jc@delni.gov.uk) whereby job seekers can be given a **Qualification Equivalency** letter with the DEL letterhead indicating how their qualifications compare with those in the UK. In order for DEL to check, they need to see copies of qualification certificates or their details. This free service can also be accessed by post or E-mail. Find out more www.delni.gov.uk/index/finding-employment-findingstaff/fe-fs-help-to-find-employment/qualifications-recognised-uk-english.htm

The implementation of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) will make it easier to compare the level of qualifications from different national systems thereby assisting the mobility of migrant workers within Europe. **Ofqual** (England) and the **Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)** (Northern Ireland) are the joint EQF National Coordination point (NCP) for England and Northern Ireland.

Some people are able to progress from job to job as their English improves 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, Belfast, 2009

'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

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

The words we use

It is common to hear people talk about 'non-nationals'. This is demeaning as well as inaccurate. Nearly everyone is a national of some country. 'Foreign nationals' or 'people from other countries' would be more appropriate.

Attitudes and Stereotypes about Migrant Workers

The Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) publishes regular surveys. Key findings from the 2010 Omnibus Survey included positive reactions towards migrant workers but also some that are more negative.

- 52% of respondents felt that the Government should place more restrictions on migrant workers
- 28% of respondents thought Northern Ireland people were very prejudiced towards migrant workers
- Only 4% of respondents considered themselves to be very prejudiced, but 29% described themselves as a little prejudiced
- 48% of respondents felt that migrant workers take jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland
- 30% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that migrant workers come to Northern Ireland just to get social security benefits
- 70% of respondents felt that the number of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland puts a strain on services

Attitudes to Migrant Workers:

Results from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, November 2010
www.delni.gov.uk/es/attitudes-towards-migrant-workers-report-2010

The Equality Commission also researches attitudes towards minorities, for example, their Equality Awareness Survey, 2008 found that

- 28% of respondents would mind having a migrant worker as an in-law
- 23% and 22% respectively would mind having a migrant worker as a neighbour or a work colleague
- 20% said that they felt negative towards Eastern European migrants

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.

'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. In some cases employers would have had to move their factories abroad if they had not been able to attract foreign workers. Research has shown that when wages drop it is usually temporary.

‘They don’t contribute to society’

‘They are costing the country money’

‘They send money out of the country’

Foreign workers pay national insurance, tax and rent, and spend money in our local economy on necessities such as clothes and food in the same way as the rest of us do. They do send money to their families but 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 are 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 welfare 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 which can now take up to 8 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. Some migrant workers are not eligible to apply for social housing. Many still live in privately rented accommodation.

‘They are putting pressure on our schools and the health service’

Increased numbers of people do put increased pressure on local services and extra resources are needed to support special costs e.g. interpretation and helping newly arrived children with their English. On the other hand children from other countries have helped to save some schools from closure and are a cultural and language resource. The health and care services could not function without the many doctors, nurses and ancillary staff from other countries.

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

When someone from another country commits a crime it stands out and we forget how many local people are convicted of criminal acts. People from other countries are actually more likely to be victims rather than perpetrators. 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.

International Comparisons

65% of people surveyed in the UK thought that immigration is more of a problem than an opportunity compared to 44% in Germany. The UK had the highest percentage of any of the countries surveyed.

Transatlantic Trends: Immigration 2010
http://trends.gmfus.org/immigration/doc/TTI2010_English_Key.pdf

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.'

*Trades Union Congress 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*

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

'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/lead/19153/migrant-workers-racism-and-the-recession

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. They have had to counter the misinformation that people on very basic allowances (see page 29) 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. Some say that 'asylum seekers are taking our jobs' when most are not allowed to work.

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 feel unwanted. To read about the campaign to restore faith in our ability to respond positively to ideas of sanctuary, see margin.

Attitudes in Churches

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 and minority-ethnic people felt patronised and excluded by churches. In 2005 Canon Rajkumar Sathiyaraj 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 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/

'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

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

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

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 from time to time attempts are made 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 www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/north-down/news/lsquomindless-idiotrsquo-behind-new-racial-slur-flyers-in-comber-14299561.html

There were complaints that loyalists distributed British National Party (BNP) leaflets in north Antrim around the time that foreign people were attacked. The BNP say that they distributed several thousand pieces of literature in Mid Ulster in February, 2009. Misunderstanding the role of the proposed Larne **Short-Term Holding Facility** (see page 44), the BNP made statements about Larne being 'earmarked as a dumping ground for illegal immigrants and bogus asylum seekers'. In November 2010 they registered formally to contest elections in Northern Ireland for the first time. Searchlight magazine puts their local membership at around 50 people. www.searchlightmagazine.com/index.php?link=template&story=330 In 2011, the BNP registered a small number of candidates for both the Assembly and local government elections.

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 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 lead to racist actions

Dictionaries tend to define racism in terms of beliefs that some 'races' are superior to others. Many people today do not hold conscious views of racial superiority but retain ideas about people from different countries or ethnic backgrounds that lead to discriminatory attitudes and actions. Negative stereotyping in the wider community is a breeding ground for more overt racism and racist crime. Physical and verbal racial attacks are publicised but more subtle forms of racial discrimination and indifference also affect many aspects of people's lives in a detrimental way.

In November 2009 the ARK research survey on prejudice and tolerance in N Ireland revealed disturbing levels of prejudice.

- 93% of respondents in 2008 thought there was a lot or a little prejudice against minority-ethnic communities in N Ireland.
- One in ten people described themselves as 'at all prejudiced'. (Ten years ago it was one in four.)
- 32% reported themselves to be 'very' or 'a little' prejudiced against minority-ethnic people.
- Worryingly, 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.

www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update63.pdf

These attitudes are experienced in many aspects of people's lives.

In the Workplace:

Research in the health service in 2006 reveals the disturbing level of racist behaviour experienced by healthcare workers. For example

- 47% reported having been harassed by patients, 27% by friends or relatives of patients and 19% said that they had suffered racist harassment from a manager or supervisor.
- 50% stated that work colleagues were most likely to be the source of racist harassment in the workplace.
- 59% experienced racist harassment outside of work.
- On occasions where staff had suffered harassment from colleagues, incidents that involved humiliation were found to be the most upsetting.

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

BNP leader,

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

'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.'

<http://ekkleisia.co.uk/node/10485>

Workers in restaurants and fast food outlets have often experienced verbal abuse.

'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 (Conference Report). Belfast: Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 1999

Young people seeking asylum and young refugees report negative experiences.

'Well, I was doing my papers [paper round] and a group of people they just attacked me and my sister was with me and they started calling me Paki, Paki, Paki and then they tried to bully me and my sister but then a man came out of a house and said get to your houses and leave people alone so then we were safe (Young refugee).'

New to Northern Ireland: A study of the issues faced by Migrant, Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children in Northern Ireland by Teresa Geraghty, Celine McStravick and Dr Stephanie Mitchell, 2010 www.ncb.org.uk/pdf/INTNI_final.pdf

A report in 2009 on migrant worker experiences (many working in the health service) confirmed these findings

- 54% of respondent have been personally exposed to racism at work and 83% have encountered racism in their workplace.
- 80% of respondents working in the private care sector have experienced racist bullying and discrimination and have felt humiliated at work.

Migrant Workers, Racism and the Recession www.unison.org.uk/file/MW_Racism_and_the_Recession_-_final_report[1].pdf

At School:

Interviews undertaken by the National Children's Bureau show a high level of racist bullying.

- 51% of respondents said that they had witnessed racist bullying or harassment in their school.
- 31% said that they had been a victim of racist bullying or harassment in their school.
- 'Once I went to the swimming pool and one Irish girl called me all sorts of things because I am Polish ... and told me to go back to my country.'
- 'I have witnessed a racist attack. It was in P6. Two boys were being picked on by about six people and they said "go back home" ...'
- 16-year-olds from a minority-ethnic group were 8 times more likely to say they had been bullied or harassed than their counterparts.

Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland, 2010 www.nidirect.gov.uk/attitudes_to_difference_report.pdf

Officials:

'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, 2006

'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 www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/dd/files/108/No_Home_from_Home_(September_2009).pdf

'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

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'

Recent research only reinforces the widespread existence of attitudes that have been experienced by people for a long time. Local minority-ethnic people, and people who arrived in the early 2000s had to 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

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

When migrants arrived in numbers in Mid-Ulster in the early years of the 21st century many people 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

'"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

does not mean that they form 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 incidence of racially motivated crime, recorded by the police, tended to rise during the last decade. Between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2009 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. 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](https://www.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'

'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, 27 February 2008
[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7266249.stm](https://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7266249.stm)*

'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:80/news/local/second_racist_attack_condemned_1_2091777 | 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

Some incidents have affected numbers of people. 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

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) defines

A Hate Incident as: any incident, which may or may not constitute a criminal offence, which is perceived by the victim or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

A Hate Crime as: any hate incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, perceived by the victim or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

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.

In June 2009, attacks on foreign nationals attracted international press coverage (see also attacks on Roma people below). 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

This is not unique and such attacks continue. In June 2010, for example, cars were set alight outside the homes of an Indian family and a Filipino family in Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim. *www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/community-telegraph/north-belfast/crimebeat/boroughsquot-racist-attacks-condemned-14862634.html?r=RSS*

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. The others were asked to explain why they did not.

'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 in 'Za Chlebem'

Attacks on Roma people in 2009

If you mention racism in N Ireland one series of attacks is always mentioned. 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 news attracted world media interest and people still talk about it.

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 36–9.)

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 felt able to return to Belfast later and some have secured work and accommodation, that would have been impossible in their own country.

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/publications_view/index/minority-rights-now

Denise Wright of EMBRACE says of the Roma people assisted by EMBRACE

'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.'

Reporting Race Hate Crimes or Discrimination

Unless someone is in danger, it is important to have the permission of the victim before you take action. Many people fear making the situation worse by making a complaint. Where people are willing, there are a number of ways of reporting the incident.

The **Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)** has published Hate Crime, Racial Incidents: Protecting your Rights. This is available in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese. www.psnipolice.uk/hate_crime_leaflet_-_racist1.pdf

The PSNI has trained **Hate Incident and Minority Liaison Officers** in each area.

You can report a hate crime online at www.urzone.com/hatecrime/hatecrime.asp

In an emergency you should dial **999**, and for non-emergency calls phone **0845 600 8000**.

The **Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)** also 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 of neighbourhood harassment 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

The **Belfast Migrant Centre** offers support for victims of racist harassment **028 9043 8962** www.belfastmigrantcentre.org/

The **Equality Commission for Northern Ireland** is the body responsible for preventing discrimination and promoting equality. It covers various areas of discrimination including gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, marital status and religious or political belief. If you want advice from the Equality Commission about unlawful discrimination contact them by E-mail: discriminationadvice@equalityni.org or by telephone on **028 9089 0890** (Enquiry Line).

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 many have been educated through English. 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 (see also pages 58–9), or their English is not good enough. 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 (especially in the older generations) 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. Today things have improved and Northern Ireland now has a regional translation service for the health service.

The equality obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act have encouraged all the public services to be more conscious of the need for improvement.

‘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

Translation services are more widely available for migrants in recent years, with most service providers using thebigwordGroup, the approved supplier of translation and interpreting services to Government departments, but the service is not always used. 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 and their content. Some far sighted employers run free classes for their employees. 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,

‘A treasure in your mouth’

... many new people have come to Northern Ireland. ... One of the biggest problems for them is the language barrier – many can’t understand and speak English. ... It is very difficult to get necessary information about benefits, legal issues, housing etc. Simple things, such as going to a doctor are not simple because they have to have interpreters. (In emergency cases it is especially difficult.) Helping children with their schoolwork is impossible. Finding a job in a new economic situation is a big achievement. Language problems have also impacted on their mental health and lots of newcomers are experiencing depression. It is not easy to make friends, so many feel very lonely. English-speaking people have treasures in their mouths that are so precious for people who came here recently. Every, even very small, conversation is like an English lesson and an encouragement to learn more.

Aneta Dabek,
EMBRACE Development
Worker, 2010

Read more at
[www.embracenl.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/8543_Embrace_NL\[3\].pdf](http://www.embracenl.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/8543_Embrace_NL[3].pdf)

'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

'For some of us we don't speak the same language as our parents – they speak better Cantonese than English and we speak better English than Cantonese.'

Young Black & Minority Ethnic Communities in Lisburn, SE Education and Library Board, 2010 www.yesjp.org/docs/2010/YoungBlackMinorityEthnicComm.pdf

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/

Asylum applicants 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 29–32.)

Bryson House and the NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers supported the Law Centre NI in preparing a briefing paper on 'Access to Free 'ESOL' Classes for Asylum Seekers and Refugees'. As well as outlining the importance of English language skills in everyday life, social cohesion, and in communicating with the UK Border Agency, they also stressed the mental health benefits in countering isolation and in helping children with their education. People seeking asylum here receive inferior treatment regarding support for English language learning compared to those in GB and there is increasing difficulty in mitigating this through charitable funding. Support organisations spend an inordinate time trying to access grants. This paper recommends that ESOL classes should be free for all refugees and people seeking asylum in N Ireland. The cost would be reasonable as the numbers are so small. (See pages 27–8) www.lawcentreni.org/component/content/article/63-policy-briefings/694-esol-briefing.html?q=esol

Poverty and Homelessness

Welfare entitlement in the UK can be based upon your immigration status and whether you are officially regarded as habitually resident. (You can read about this in greater detail, pages 37–40.) Some people's rights and immigration status depend on the fact that their partner/spouse is working. If they leave the household because of relationship breakdown or abuse, or are abandoned, some may lose financial support without the hope that the state will assist them and others may lose their right even to stay here. 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 pages 37–40). 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 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.

Foreign nationals are especially prone to sudden homelessness as they often lack a circle of family and friends to help them for long enough to get themselves back on track. They may have used all their savings to get here but then find that promised work does not materialise. If a job falls through they may totally underestimate the cost of living here and run out of money quickly. 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. Those 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 may 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

'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

'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*

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. You can read the paper at: www.lawcentreni.org/policy/policy-briefings/201.html

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. The researchers were also 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 100–1).

'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.'

Interviewee quoted in No Home From Home

Women whose immigration status, right to work and access to funds depends on their husbands or 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 from other charities 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)

As the recession has deepened, homelessness organisations have noticed increasing need among foreign nationals. For example, during 2010, the **Welcome Organisation** assisted 186 people from 25 different countries at their drop-in centre in the Lower Falls, Belfast. The organisation 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.

'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

There has been much agonizing about this welfare gap and a revised Law Centre paper Proposal on 'Plugging Gaps in Welfare Support for Migrant Workers' for the Racial Equality Forum suggested funding a crisis fund through the UK Migration Impacts Fund which operated between April 2009 and March 2011. The paper also highlighted how having no welfare support also makes it difficult to access other rights. For example, Eriks Prenclavs, an A8 national lost his sight in an accident at work. Because he was not in registered employment he is without welfare support while he tries to get financial compensation and continue his rehabilitation. The issue was discussed within the Immigration Sub Group of the Race Relations Panel at Stormont during 2010 but there has been no positive response from local departments so, in 2011, charities still have to help out as best they can.

The Simon Community NI (SCNI) assists migrant workers and local people without distinction and in May 2011 launched a free centralised helpline **0800 1712222**. Patrick McGettigan, direction of Accommodation and Community Support Services says

'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/nostrangers/upload/DBAS-Booklet-pdf.pdf

'Anyone who is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless can contact the SCNI helpline and we will try to provide an appropriate solution to meet their needs, either directly or through other organisations.'

The alternative assistance might include bed and breakfast, private rented accommodation or transport to the nearest hostel with a bed available.

The Council for the Homeless NI (CHINI) has produced an advice leaflet, Information for Members of European Economic Area Living and Working in Northern Ireland www.chni.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Info_EEA.pdf

Food for disadvantaged people

The **Council for the Homeless NI (CHNI)** has worked with the UK group **FareShare** to set up **FareShare Island of Ireland** community food network for voluntary, community and faith groups to work with the food industry in redistributing good quality food to organisations working with disadvantaged people. Their first depot is in Weavers Court Industrial Estate, Linfield Road Belfast. For more information see www.chni.org.uk/services.php?sid=14 Individual churches also provide food for people in need and support projects like the **Storehouse** initiative of Belfast City Vineyard Church. www.eauk.org/medial/feeding-the-poor-in-belfast.cfm

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 29).

'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.'

Destitution Inquiry chairperson Kate Adie, 28 March 2007

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. 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 asylum support. They may be forced to live on handouts 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.

The **Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust** undertook a **Destitution Inquiry** which 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 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. 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 quality of assessment. www.asaproject.org/web/images/PDFs/not_destitute_enough.pdf

People whose claims have failed can access some support if they are cooperative and can prove they are destitute (see page 31). They may receive Section 4 Support which can include emergency accommodation and a contribution towards their food and other purchases, through pre-paid cards. Rule changes in October 2009 seem to have created huge delays in the system. 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.

Even those who have agreed to return home voluntarily find it difficult to access support. People who cannot 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.

The Bryson Service was aware of around 8 individuals and 8 families on Section 4 support (see pages 28 and 31) in March 2011. For people with 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 receive no payments and 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 in the UK 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

Writing about the difficulty of accessing support, Edith Shillue of the Bryson One Stop Service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers said

'In Northern Ireland, recent evidence requests include: bank statements, National Insurance numbers, names and addresses of employers, tenancy addresses and landlord contact details and letters from friends or charitable organizations refusing to provide support. Most applicants are unable to access any of the above, but applications will be delayed or refused without them.'

Frontline Social Welfare Law Quarterly, Summer 2010 www.lawcentreni.org/Publications/Frontline/Frontline%2076%20web%20version.pdf

'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

Some of the problems for people seeking sanctuary would be alleviated if they could work. **Amnesty** has asked local MPs to sign a petition to allow people who have not had their asylum claim resolved within 6 months, and those whose application has failed, but are unable to return home, to undertake paid employment. Some have done so.

From April 2011 **Refugee Action** will be overseeing the assisted voluntary return of people who feel that they have no alternative but to go home, rather than IOM who used to undertake this task. 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 for voluntary return 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 see www.refugee-action.org.uk/ourwork/assistedvoluntaryreturn.aspx

'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)

Mental Health and Suicide

Support groups for foreign nationals report mental health problems among the people they work with. Migrant Voice is a migrant-led organisation and its newsletter (*Migrant Voice*) allows migrants and others to air issues of concern. In their 2010 election special, Aleksandra Lojek-Magdziarz reported on the growing number Polish people in Northern Ireland who are suffering from depression because of factors such as homesickness, financial problems and the language barriers that prevent proper integration. She says that there is only one Polish-speaking psychologist (who has been working voluntarily for the Polish Association) for the whole Polish community of 25–30,000 people. Aleksandra, who is a community safety advocate, links the problem with the difficulty that migrants have in getting recognition for qualifications obtained in other countries (see page 58–9.)

It is widely accepted that having confidence in your place in society and a sense of self-esteem are plus factors in preventing mental health problems and 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 pages 53–4).

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 harassment 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.

The situation can be even worse for people seeking asylum who are not allowed to work and are concerned about their future. 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. www.lshtm.ac.uk/news/2009/violencetoasylumseekers.html 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 national prisoners can also suffer from depression and be vulnerable to thoughts of suicide. As the numbers of foreign nationals living here has increased, it is inevitable that some would be convicted of criminal offences. 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. In April 2009

'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 businesswoman, on being 'dispersed' to Middlesbrough, Guardian 8 July 2004

'... detainees, particularly those held for long periods, suffer from profound hopelessness, despair, and suicidal urges ... In many of these patients, both medical and psychiatric needs were frequently not adequately addressed.'

Médecins Sans Frontières and the BMJ quoted by Medical Justice Network www.medicaljustice.org.uk/images/documents/medical-justice-booklet-july-2007.pdf

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 can be difficulties in the following areas:

- Lack of information about the legal system and their rights within the immigration system, knowledge about resettlement etc.
- Delays in deportation that lead to indefinite detention after the end of their sentence
- Language barriers that can have consequences for self-harm as well as order and discipline
- Isolation from distant families and culture
- Lack of appropriate toiletries, dietary needs etc.
- Racism
- Religious observance

These difficulties are identified in the NI Prison Service Draft Foreign Prisoner Strategy, 2008 www.niprisonservice.gov.uk/uploads/docs/Foreign%20National%20Prisoner%20Strategy%20-%20Draft%20consultation%20document%20pdf.pdf which also acknowledged the need to build links between the prison service and community support organisations, churches and faith groups. In its response to the draft strategy the NI Human Rights Commission expressed concerns, especially about the reliance on the UK Border Agency, rather than an independent organisation, to provide specialist immigration advice. (See [www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/ddlfiles/100/Response_to_NIPS_draft_Foreign_National_Prisoner_Strategy_\(July_2008\).pdf](http://www.nihrc.org/dms/data/NIHRC/attachments/ddlfiles/100/Response_to_NIPS_draft_Foreign_National_Prisoner_Strategy_(July_2008).pdf)) The Law Centre NI contribution to the Prison Review also mentioned poor access to independent immigration advice. www.lawcentreni.org/policy/consultation-responses/715.htm

The affects of incarceration can be severe. In November 2010 Justice Minister David Ford expressed his regret at the death by suicide of an unnamed man (Prisoner B) in March 2009. He acknowledged that he was 'a vulnerable prisoner who had the added difficulties of having little or no English and being so far from home.' www.dojni.gov.uk/index/media-centre/minister_regrets_death_of_foreign_national_prisoner.htm Prisoner B was one of 48 Chinese prisoners taken into custody at the same time. He had been 9 months on remand, was distressed about the delay in coming to trial, the possible length of his sentence and about what would happen to his family if the £18,000 he had paid in order to be brought to the UK was not repaid. www.niprisonerombudsman.gov.uk/downloads/PrisonerBSummary.PDF

Public Policy

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 60–8) **Institutional Racism** is where there is collective failure to deal with people properly, 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 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** has been 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.

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 concerns 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 69–71), 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

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

groups received no public funding. See www.newsletter.co.uk/news/local/campaigners_talk_up_racism_wilson_1_1887624

The UK Government published **A Shared Future Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland** in 2005 www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality/community-relations/a-shared-future-strategy.htm 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 was recognised as no longer a bipolar society but one that is enriched by being more culturally diverse. It was also recognised however, that racism had emerged as a problem. The Shared Future strategy recognised 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'. The draft **Cohesion Sharing and Integration (CSI)** programme was published in 2010 and consultation closed in October. www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/reformatted_final_print_version_csi_-_26.07.10.pdf There have been concerns that the document does not live up to the aspirations of the Shared Future strategy. There is no longer encouragement for the role of faith-based organisations.

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 and the funding of additional hours for its Administrator (see page 100). See also the OFMDFM role in racial equality (page 85).

The **Northern Ireland Office Community Safety Unit** is the central co-ordinating body for Community Safety in N Ireland and it is now within the Department of Justice see www.communitysafetyni.gov.uk/ They have some funding for local projects.

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 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 Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) now has an **Employment Agency Inspectorate** with two inspectors responsible for ensuring that recruitment agencies and

businesses comply with the law. (See page 56)

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** with 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

This strategy ended in 2010 and it is hoped that OFMDFM will publish a new strategy in 2011. In the meantime **The Racial Equality Unit** within OFMDFM manages a fund that is targeted at helping minority-ethnic groups and other groups in the wider community to work together to foster integration (See page 84.) 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** coordinates a **Migrant Worker Thematic Sub-Group** of the Racial Equality Forum. In this sub-group, people from civil service departments, voluntary and statutory bodies, business and trade unions 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 three 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/department_publishes_reports_on_migrant_workers_in_northern_ireland_.htm

The Racial Equality Forum was in abeyance for some time 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

The UK Department of Communities and Local Government has published *Guidance on Building a Local Sense of Belonging* www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1112832.pdf and *Guidance on Meaningful Interaction*, which is intended to increase community cohesion. This guidance is at: www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1112887.pdf

In November 2009 the forum began to meet again with themed sub groups that should make it more effective. EMBRACE is represented on the **Immigration Sub-Group** that considers policy issues such as destitution for people with no recourse to public funds, access to English language classes, and the possibility of people seeking asylum here being allowed to work. The Law Centre NI provides secretarial back up for this group.

There is 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. It is comprised of representatives of black and minority-ethnic support groups and political representatives. This group is administered by the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and you can read the minutes of meetings at www.nicem.org.uk/APAG

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, 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. Many groups have pledged support for the campaign. To find out more or sign a petition of support, go to www.uniteagainsthate.org.uk/

During 2010 OFMDFM had discussions with the **Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)** to encourage the formation of a **Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership (NISMP)**. It is hoped that the NISMP board will be made up of elected members from councils, officers from the UK Border Agency; Government departments and statutory bodies; the PSNI; the CBI; the Housing Executive; NGOs such as the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre, Human Rights Commission, Community Relations Council; and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions NI. The draft vision is 'to work across the spheres of government in Northern Ireland and with other key stakeholders to ensure that Northern Ireland is a welcoming place for new migrants, and to support the retention and integration of people in a way that helps meet our needs for skills and labour required for our future economic growth needs.' Perhaps the most important innovation about this proposed new policy group is the additional aspiration 'to ensure that Northern Ireland's needs and concerns in respect of immigration are recognised within the constraints of UK wide strategy.' Scotland and Wales already have similar strategic migration partnerships.

Positive Developments

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 the **Belfast Migrant Forum** that allows council staff and representatives of statutory and voluntary bodies to network and share best practice. They have consulted migrant groups and honorary consuls about issues of concern for migrant workers, 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 works 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 also 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.

Belfast City Council also led the **Open Cities** project, along with nine other European cities and the British Council. This project explored how cities can become more open in attracting and retaining migrant workers in order to become more successful cities. See more at www.belfastcity.gov.uk/lopecities/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. Free advice sessions for people from other countries now occur widely at local level, assisting people with issues relating to immigration, benefit and housing entitlements, and employment rights.

Research shows that, in spite of some difficulties migrants who have been surveyed find this a pleasant welcoming place.

'Northern Ireland was seen by many of the respondents as a friendly place, providing a good quality of life and welcoming atmosphere.

Generally, local people were described in very positive terms, and were seen as polite, helpful and welcoming. Unfortunately, the research also recorded instances of discrimination in daily life in Northern Ireland, with verbal attacks being the most prevalent form.'

"... Easy Life, Great People, Bad Weather" www.delni.gov.uk/a_report_on_the_experiences_of_migrant_workers_in_northern_ireland.pdf

These are just a few of the recent positive developments

Anti-racism

- The **Unite Against Hate** campaign has prepared an **Educational Toolkit** for children and young people www.uniteagainsthate.org.uk/lunite/toolkit/

Advice

- A partnership between the **Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)**, the public service union **UNISON**, the **Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU NI)**, and the **Polish Association** has set up a **Belfast Migrant Centre** where the three bi-lingual staff provide general welfare advice and advocacy, immigration advice, and racial harassment advice and advocacy. Contact 028 9043 8962 Email: jolena@nicem.org.uk Web <http://belfastmigrantcentre.org/>
- Belfast City Council has commissioned the **Law Centre NI** to undertake training on immigration issues for advice workers in Belfast.

Good employment practice

- **Business in the Community (BIC)** launched a new **Employers Charter for Employing Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland** in January 2011. Download their revised *Best Practice Guidelines for Employing Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland* www.bitc.org.uk/northern_ireland/what_we_do/people/wellbeing_and_inclusion/inclusion/employing_migrant.html

Information

- In January 2010 the **Department of Employment and Learning (DEL)** published a brief guide to *Living and Working in Northern Ireland* www.delni.gov.uk/living_and_working_in_northern_ireland_09_10.pdf
- The **NI Housing Executive** has launched a **Community Welcome Pack** for East Belfast and hope that the template will be used in other local areas. It is currently available in English and Polish but other languages may be available on request. www.nihe.gov.uk/least_belfast_ethnic_support_network_local_services_directory.pdf

Language

- The NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) who are responsible for the census, engaged with groups, including migrants, people seeking asylum and refugees to ensure that they knew what support was available. This included translation booklets in 15 languages and doorstep interpretation, where it was needed, in 60 languages.

Networks

- On 25 March 2010 a large gathering of people working throughout N Ireland in the field of race and ethnicity met in Lisburn on the initiative of the Black Minority-Ethnic and Faith Forum supported by OFMDFM, Unite against Hate, the PSNI and Lisburn District Council. The **Stronger Together** gathering allowed high quality networking and some practical ideas to emerge. comhlamh.org/assets/files/pdfs/Stronger%20Together%20Report.pdf

Research

- Each year the NI Housing Executive produces a valuable *Black & Minority Ethnic and Migrant Worker Mapping Update*. The fifth volume was published in February 2011. The research showed an increase of 12% in applications for social housing from migrant worker households. Just 256 migrant worker households were allocated housing in the year to 31st July 2010, a 25% increase on the previous year. Main nationalities include Polish (123), Lithuanian (25), Portuguese (22) and Latvian (21) households. Read the report at www.nihe.gov.uk/black_and_minority_ethnic_and_migrant_worker_mapping_update_-_february_2011.pdf
- The **Migrant Workers Action Research Network** published *The New Workers: Migration, Labour and Citizenship in Northern Ireland in the 21st Century* in February 2011. This document is particularly effective because it is almost entirely made up of quotations by migrant workers interviewed by the large research team, many of whom are from other countries. [www.strath.ac.uk/media/departments/hrm/pdfs/hrm-pdf-other/Main_template_Layout_1_\(2\).pdf](http://www.strath.ac.uk/media/departments/hrm/pdfs/hrm-pdf-other/Main_template_Layout_1_(2).pdf)
- The **Belfast Health Development Unit's** research document *Barriers to Migrant Health and Wellbeing in Belfast* carries useful findings and recommendations that should be helpful to all health policy makers and practitioners. www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pdf/Migrant-Health-Strategy.pdf

Support groups and consuls

- New national support groups continue to emerge and there are now honorary consuls here for Belgium, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, India, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta Mauritius, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States of America. www.ca-ni.org/consular_launch.html

Training

- From 2009 onwards **GEMS NI** developed the **Talk-IT** programme to assist employees of AllState (a major IT Company) who were not native speakers of English, to improve their ability to use English language as both the language spoken in the workplace and the main language used in the IT business. This was such a success that the programme is now being used in a number of European countries. www.talk-it.eu/index.php?page=news&newsID=667

Young people

- **Diversity in Action NI (DIANI)** is a joint project between the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Barnardo's NI. They have run seminars and training for people working with minority-ethnic children and young people and hope to provide leadership and a networking focus in the sector. www.ncb.org.uk/diani/about_us.aspx
- Local research has taken place. For example, the SE Education and Library Board studied the makeup of the black and minority-ethnic community in Lisburn, the level of racism and discrimination and the need for youth worker training. www.yesip.org/docs/2010/YoungBlackMinorityEthnicComm.pdf

'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

Good neighbours

'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 person 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

Signs of growing integration:

Social change

'Anti-Polish prejudice in Derry is on the decline, according to welfare group Polish Abroad.

Ewelina O'Donnell, an interpreter and English teacher with the Foyle Language School based welfare group, says Derry has become a city where Poles feel "very welcome".

"Attitudes and the way of thinking has definitely changed", she says. "People in Derry want Polish people to feel welcome. They know Poles choose to come here to work hard, to do 12 hour days, to the benefit of this country."

"People in Derry understand Polish people are not here to take jobs. Poles do different kinds of jobs, hold different qualifications. Attitudes have changed, people here are so open. Derry is much more welcoming than Belfast,"...'

This story from the *Derry Journal*, 27 March 2009, also stressed the importance of the help **Polish Abroad** had received in setting up language classes from the **SEEDS** support group in the city. www.derryjournal.com/news/local/anti_polish_prejudice_on_wane_in_derry_1_2136168

Good employment 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
- 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

Interest in politics

People from 25 countries registered to vote before the May 2011 elections, nearly 2000 from Poland, 900 from Portugal and 800 from Lithuania. Some have been chosen to stand for election http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6341471.stm For example The SDLP has selected several Polish candidates including Anna Ochal-Molanda who will stand for election in Craigavon in the 2011 local government elections. She said

‘There is a great appetite among the Polish community to get involved in local politics in Craigavon and I will try my best to represent and give a voice to migrant people and indeed everyone in our community on the issues that matter most to them.

As a wife and a young mother I am very aware of how hard things are for families at the moment and the difficulties that people are facing trying to retain and get work to simply make ends meet.’

www.sdlp.ie/index.php/newsroom_media/newsarticle/sdlp_selects_polish_craigavon_council_candidate/

Daniel Konieczny is also from Poland and is a DUP supporter who addressed the party conference in 2008. He said

‘We are not coming here just to save the money and go back home ... We are buying houses now and people know this – that we are part of the community and we are living here and are contributing to the economy and want to be involved as well with the politics.’

*Story by Martina Purdy, BBC
www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-12780447*

Feeling at Home

Some people begin, quite quickly, to regard this as their home.

‘I feel here at home, I like this country’s people. It’s different the people here and in England, people here are more like Lithuanian people. In England, people are more closed. People and neighbours are very friendly here, people say hello, hello, it’s so nice.’

*Voices from the Global South; A Research Report on Migration, Belfast, 2010
www.centreforglobaleducation.com/sites/default/files/Voices%20from%20Global%20South%20Res.pdf*

Second generation or long-term migrants comment on helpful new developments such as the celebration of festivals and specialist shops. Abby whose father came from Cape Verde was asked about changes she had seen and commented about the increased cultural diversity:

‘I’m glad to see it because there are things like the multicultural shops and music and I feel that it just makes the place so much richer culturally.’

In spite of what she says was ‘a year and a half of absolute hell’ because of bullying and racism when she came here as a child, Abby wants to live here for good.

‘People have been so friendly here. And the landscape I just absolutely love all of the landscapes ... love it. I’ve met a lot of brilliant people and the talent of people is exciting and for me many people are creative and that really feeds myself.’

Voices from the Global South

A more recent migrant, Justyna from Poland, says

‘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.'

Justyna Pers from the British Council Ordinary Lives Project, 2008 www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland-society-ordinarylives.htm

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/

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

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.

'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

'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 Albolari, originally from Nigeria, interviewed in Once We Were Strangers.

His hospitality was about reconciliation and the transformation from stranger to guest and from guest to friend.'

Part of an article by the then 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. The price is £5.00, or less, if buying multiple copies. Download the booklet 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 seven 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.

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

The Bible Society (27 Howard Street Belfast, Tel 028 9032 6577, E-mail Admin@bsni.co.uk) stocks Bibles in 50 languages, including some children's editions, and can order 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

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 appear to 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. During the debate many tributes were paid by MLAs from all parties to volunteers and charities, including the following from Anna Lo:

‘We are well known for our generosity in helping people in developing countries ... At home, the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS) has told me that faith-based organisations have been the main source of support for the destitute in our community and that, without the generosity of

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 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

those organisations, it would be facing a much more serious crisis ... Those organisations have also been proactive in opening their doors to refugees and other migrant groups and in providing them with opportunities to meet others and seek advice. They have also made their premises available for groups to use. Indeed, the City Church in south Belfast and the interfaith organisation Embrace Northern Ireland were very active in helping the Roma families when they were targeted by racists in June 2009.' [see pages 70–1] www.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2009/100202.htm#6

'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

The authors of *Unity in Diversity* in our Churches also identify the potential but 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 increase 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 page 99). 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.

While some newcomers have had negative experiences in local churches (see pages 63–4), 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

The main Churches in Ireland have responded in different ways.

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/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-

migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html. In November 2007 the Catholic 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/ieece.html. At the initiative of the Bishops' Conference, each diocese now has priests 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.

The **Catholic Church** had a major commitment through the Irish Bishops' **Refugee and Migrant Project** in Maynooth where Sr Joan Roddy did valuable advocacy work and co-ordinated the **Churches' Asylum Network (CAN)** a network of individuals and groups from various Christian communities/churches in Ireland who work with and on behalf of migrants and refugees. Joan, who has been a supportive friend to EMBRACE, retired in spring 2011 and will not be replaced. It is unclear at this stage if this work will be undertaken elsewhere in the Maynooth structure. Meanwhile Dr Helen Young is working as 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. She has been running sessions with priests on the pastoral challenges posed by migration. **St Vincent de Paul** continues to provide a valuable role in helping people throughout local communities who find themselves affected by poverty, including destitute foreign nationals.

The **Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI)** adopted a document, *Policy on Asylum Seekers and Refugees; a Report by the Race Relations Committee to the 2003 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*. It is more comprehensive than the title suggests, as it also explores issues of immigration, racism and welcome. The responsibility in this area lies with the **Race Relations Panel**. The Panel has been actively concerned with how immigration enforcement has impacted on people at congregational level (see for example Mountpottinger, page 45), and there are 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.'

Keith Preston, an Irish Mission worker for the PCI Board of Mission in Ireland working in South and East Belfast, opened a drop-in centre for migrant people on the Lisburn Road, Belfast, in 2010.

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

'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 World Day of Migrants and Refugees offers the whole Church an opportunity to reflect on a theme linked to the growing phenomenon of migration, to pray that hearts may open to Christian welcome and to the effort to increase in the world justice and charity, pillars on which to build an authentic and lasting peace.'

The opening words of the message of Pope Benedict for the 97th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2011) www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20100927_world-migrants-day_en.html

St Anthony's Community Fund

Many local charities have been concerned about hardship experienced by people from other countries during the recession and especially during the recent severe winter. Some migrants have decided to do something about it themselves. For example, the Polish Community associated with St Anthony's Catholic Church in East Belfast set up a fund 'to help migrant workers who are not doing well, have been exploited, taken ill or simply have to go back home and have not got money for their fare.' www.saintanthony.co.uk/page7.html

College also continues to contribute to the work with the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (see below pages 99 and 102) and is in partnership with EMBRACE. For a theological reflection on migration community and the churches by the Reconciliation Officer of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Scott Boldt, see www.edgehillcollege.org/Finding%20Sanctuary

The **Church of Ireland** undertook a 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.

The Presbyterian, Methodist and Church of Ireland Churches and Belfast City Vineyard Church have committed to contribute money over a 3-year period towards an EMBRACE development worker and this plus a grant from the OFMDFM Minority Ethnic Development Fund has enabled the employment of Aneta Dabek. You can read more about Aneta and her work in the EMBRACE newsletters from Summer 2010 www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/

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 Service hope to start a volunteer programme, **Quaker Connections**, to provide visits to isolated individuals in Maghaberry Prison, including visits to foreign nationals who often have no friends or family within reach.

Christian groups such as **Evangelical Alliance** have worked to raise consciousness around the issues and in January 2009 facilitated The 'World on our Doorstep' (WOOD) event, 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. To read more see www.eauk.org/articles/world-on-our-doorstep.cfm MAP have held further WOOD events, 'Who is my Neighbour?' in February 2010 and 'Stranger to Friend' in February 2011 when keynote speaker, Dick Dowsett warned of the danger of mono-cultural churches 'where everyone thinks like me and I can understand them all', an attitude that runs counter to the

internationalism of the early Church.

Evangelical Alliance has 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. www.eauk.org/public-affairs/socialjustice/upload/alltogether-for-asylum-justice.pdf Their **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/nostrangers/. They make it clear that their concern is not whether immigration policies are right or wrong, but with how people are treated when they are here.

In January 2011 **North Down YMCA** hosted a Good Relations conference, Challenges for Integration. Minority Ethnic Development Worker, Elaine Rowan said 'It's about opening up our community to all ... We have a unique opportunity here, to really experience the richness of our increasingly diverse social fabric and today's conference is a chance for us to talk about how we can make the most of this in the future. www.northdownymca.org/component/content/article/24-new-fp/78-challenges-for-integration-in-harbour-ward.html

Migrant-led Churches

Some local churches are led by migrant people. In December 2008 the All-Ireland Churches Consultative Meeting on Racism (AICCMR) (see page 102) produced a **Directory of Migrant-led Churches and Chaplaincies**. Dr Scott Boldt (then EMBRACE chairperson), Yvonne Naylor, Rob Fairmichael and Naomi Brown carried out the research in the north. The booklet provides a snapshot in time, but has been updated from time to time on the Irish Council of Churches web site. At the time of publication the group identified 361 new local Christian communities, congregations or chaplaincies run by migrants and for migrants in Ireland, of which 33 were in Northern Ireland. For the original booklet and the most up-to-date information go to www.irishchurches.org/imigrant_directory.

Fr Irenaeus du Plessis, of the Antiochian Church of St Ignatius Belfast, formally launched the booklet with a moving address emphasising the positive potential in the situation. Christians are all strangers on this earth with a theology that instructs them 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. 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.

'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/nostrangers/upload/DBAS-Booklet-pdf.pdf

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 pages 33–4) Across the denominations, congregations, church forums, parish and community projects, individuals and specialist groups 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 a mapping exercise could identify all these activities so that people could be inspired by examples of good practice.

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

Michael Earle, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches and Executive Secretary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting on why new churches are formed, at the launch of the Directory of Migrant-led Churches

EMBRACE Activities

Information

EMBRACE produces regular newsletters, circulated electronically and through our mailing list, an annual information update, fact sheets on particular issues, and information on the web site, including advice to churches on signposting people from other countries who are in crisis situations. There is also a small resource library that you can use if you contact **Jill Marrs**, our administrator, in advance. Our committee members are also involved in speaking engagements, workshops and training events. Volunteer **Jenna Liechty Martin** produces a monthly prayer newsletter.

Translation Service for Church Notices

EMBRACE development worker **Aneta Dabek** has set up a service to help churches to communicate information about events and activities (up to 60 words). So far, this is available for the Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Dutch, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Latvian, Nepali, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish and Urdu languages. Maybe you would be able to offer your services in translating church notices into additional languages, especially Czech, Lithuanian, Romanian or Slovak etc.? You can contact Aneta at 0756 4969 976 or aneta@embraceni.org.

Workshop Events

In the last year (late 2010 and early 2011) EMBRACE has run workshops events in Templepatrick and Newry to help build confidence for people in churches who want to make a start in their own setting by say, starting a language class, organising a friendship club, learning more about hospitality etc. and learning a little about some of the problems that may face vulnerable migrants. Where people are eager to learn, EMBRACE should be able to organise a local event.

Emergency Fund

There are gaps in provision for foreign nationals who find themselves in crisis situations. This fund receives donations from groups and individuals. EMBRACE distributed money to meet a range of needs, following requests from 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 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 repatriation and 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.

Due to the harsh winter the fund was in particular demand and a special appeal to supporters in December raised over £1000, this along

with a contribution of £1000 from The Black Santa Fund has allowed us to offer support to some very vulnerable people.

EMBRACE On the Street

This EMBRACE project raises awareness of migrant destitution and provides practical assistance through the donation of clothing, bedding, sleeping bags, towels, toiletries and non-perishable foodstuffs. Collections are undertaken by a variety of churches throughout NI on a rota basis. These include (in Belfast unless otherwise stated) the Antiochian Orthodox Church, Cooke Presbyterian, Crescent Church, Fitzroy Presbyterian, a group of people in St Philip and St James Church of Ireland Church, Holywood, (Finaghy), the Good Shepherd Catholic Church, St Jude's Church of Ireland, Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian, Lowe Memorial Presbyterian, Portaferry and Glastry Methodist Church, Templepatrick Presbyterian, Waringstown Presbyterian, and Whiteabbey Presbyterian. Special thanks are due to Edgell 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. In early 2011, for example, there was a need for toiletries for people seeking sanctuary here.

If you would like your church to be involved in the EMBRACE On the Street project contact **Ashleigh Hunter** at Edgell College by phone 028 90686933 or E-mail rec@edgellcollege.org.

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/253.

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.

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.

'What was the most valuable aspect of the workshops for you and why?'

'To find like-minded people who are willing to reach out and have a vision of inclusion.'

Feedback from an EMBRACE workshop event

City of Sanctuary

Leading Methodist, Inderjit Boghal encouraged support for City of Sanctuary in a visit to Belfast in 2008. He told a meeting, hosted by the Refugee Action Group, that the movement 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 many groups who support them. It remains to be seen if Belfast has the critical mass of people to join the movement. For more see www.cityofsanctuary.org.

'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

The Irish Council of Churches organised a gathering of Christians on 1 October 2010, who heard keynote speaker Dr Afe Adogame give two wide-ranging presentations which included analysis of the relationship of religion to migration, the similarity in the processes of migration and mission, and the positive nature of reverse mission, as evangelists from Africa, for example, bring their gifts to what they see as the new 'dark continent' of Europe. A number of EMBRACE members and people from local churches with migrant membership contributed, including Pastor Chris Ifonlaja of the Redeemed Christian Church of God whose congregation meets in the Europa Hotel.

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.

On 22 of March 2011 the AICCMR brought together 45 church leaders from across Ireland at Wood Quay, Dublin for a day of 'Listening and Learning.' The gathering intentionally brought together people from newer, migrant-led churches and the longer established churches in Ireland. Throughout the day participants explored the changing landscape of the church as well as inter-church connections that already exist. The gathering provided a good opportunity for people to meet and to begin building relationships with others across the denominations. Joan Roddy (see also page 97), chair-person of AICCMR, summed up the day saying, 'I think the day delivered on its promise. It was a good "listening and learning" experience. We are, I believe, in the early stages of that experience, but we now have a solid foundation on which to build.' AICCMR hopes to host a similar event in N Ireland.

Adrian Cristea of the **Parish-Based Integration Project** is available to assist Churches with the practical integration of immigrants in parishes and congregations 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 94. 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/ Adrian also had a major role in the development of the Affirmations on Migration Diversity and Interculturalism.

The Irish Churches' Affirmations on Migration, Diversity and Interculturalism

The *Irish Churches' Affirmations on Migration, Diversity and Interculturalism* document was launched at Belfast City Hall on 8 September 2010 by The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Pat Convery, who gave the document a warm welcome. For full details of his speech and others at the launch see www.edgehillcollege.org/Churches%20Affirmations%20on%20Migration

The Churches have been invited to report on their progress in taking action on the issues raised by the affirmations.

The Churches' Affirmations

The Irish Inter-Church Committee and its constituent churches, in issuing these Affirmations, recognise the significant changes over the past decade in the fabric of our Church communities and of society as a whole. We are seeking to ensure that the following Affirmations, founded on Gospel values, will inform and drive the plans, processes and programmes of our Churches as they, individually and together, strive to live out the mission of Christ in an increasingly diverse and intercultural society. We affirm our commitment as Christian Churches:

1. *To recognise and appreciate cultural and ethnic diversity as gifts of God, and to ensure that these gifts are reflected in the life of the Church.*
2. *To foster faith communities where the rights of each person are respected and where scope is provided for each person's potential to be realised.*
3. *To work towards inclusive communities, paying particular attention to addressing racism and xenophobia in attitudes, actions, practices and policies.*
4. *To explore and adopt ways of worship, systems of administration and other structures so that they fully respond to and reflect the Church membership.*
5. *To defend the rights of migrants in accordance with international and national laws and standards on migration.*
6. *To advocate for the rights of all migrants, and in particular their right to family life.*
7. *To support and assist migrants in appropriate, practical ways in their efforts to integrate in Church and society.*
8. *To establish networks with migrant-led Churches and chaplaincies by fostering co-operation and collaboration with them in providing pastoral care and support to migrants.*
9. *To seek the development of appropriate services for migrants and to draw attention to the need for public services generally to be responsive to the circumstances of migrants.*
10. *To work together as Churches and to network with people of other faiths and none to promote a greater understanding between denominations and other faiths and none, ensuring the growth of a society based on respect, dignity and equal rights for all its members.*

'I am both amazed and impressed at the innovative role that Churches and faith-based communities have played in providing a positive response to migration and supporting the integration of new communities. ... Within this city, Churches and faith communities have had a long tradition of hospitality and inclusiveness. Following the recent increase in migration to Belfast they were one of the first to quickly apply this tradition of welcome to new communities. Within a short space of time, many Churches were providing advocacy and support initiatives. English language classes were organised. Opportunities to encourage dialogue and understanding between communities were developed. Much of this work was going on below the radar, without funding and dependent on the good will of volunteers.'

Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Pat Convery, at the launch of the Churches' Affirmations

Research on Church Responses to Migration

Many churches have already 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 said that they had preached or taught on immigration, diversity or welcoming strangers in the previous 12 months.
- 44% of clergy, pastors, ministers, and faith leaders said they had 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 faith 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.’

Aneta’s Story

I am a migrant and I was a stranger. ... When you are a stranger you don’t feel secure and safe – you don’t know what to expect from the people around you and the place where you are. ... I am from Poland. My husband and I came to Northern Ireland six years ago ... we found a local church and started to go there regularly. I don’t know for whom our presence at the church was more difficult, for the church or for us. Having someone in your congregation who doesn’t speak and understand almost any English is hard, very hard. Understanding hardly any word from the sermon is hard too. Later on someone told me that at that time I was a ‘funny’ girl, because whatever I was told or asked I always just smiled. I couldn’t even say a word – people at church didn’t stop to talk to me. They invited us for meals and they tried to have contact with us – even though we didn’t speak English very well. It was a struggle for both sides. But it was very good for us and allowed us to learn the language. And it gave us something more – this feeling that we were not alone, that someone cares about us, and the knowledge that if you are in trouble you can count on someone. It gave a kind of security to our lives. I felt, and feel, very welcome in this country and I found that local people are very nice.

Aneta Dabek, EMBRACE development worker

European Churches and Migrants

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

- The essential unity of the 'one human race' (or humanity)
- The reality of nationhood
- The fact that national borders are permeable to people but not necessarily to values
- The loving care and welfare of the alien
- The rights of immigrants
- Reminding immigrants of their responsibilities within the host society
- Urging a willingness to integrate the migrant
- Urging a similar willingness on the part of the migrant to accept integration
- Compassion for the vulnerable
- The Church as a model of cross-cultural community.

To read the whole study see www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/30_Migration_2010/2009-07-04_CCME_Publ_-_Mapping_migration_-_Mapping_Churches_responses.pdf See also the multi-lingual *Theological Reflections on Migration; a CCME Reader*, Brussels 2008. http://migration.ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/mig/10_migration_2010/2008_CCME_Reader_Theological_Reflections_on_Migration.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

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/document/final/FinalmessageEN.pdf

to examine how best to become united in diversity. www.ceceurope.org/news-and-media/news/?tx_ttnews%5Bps%5D=1237545471&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=141&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=229&cHash=51ae331922

In a press release after the **Thirteenth 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 <http://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 migrant
- 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

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.

‘There are three major themes in this conversation on Diaspora. Around the globe, 200 million people now live and work outside their homeland. God is moving people around demographically and moving them spiritually to be receptive to the gospel (Acts 17:26-27). The Church is uniquely called, empowered and mandated for this task of discipling the diaspora people. Second, to reach people on the move by identifying opportunities and challenges we are facing in this borderless world – geographically, digitally, organizationally. People on the move are highly receptive to change and to explore new alternatives, including reexamining traditional religious worldviews. Third, to explain the important mission strategy of mobilizing Christians in the diasporas to be kingdom influences. There are four approaches: reaching countrymen in their homelands, reaching local and people in the region, reaching transients and compassionate ministries.’

The Lausanne Movement Global Conversation in connection with the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town 2010 <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/home/diaspora>

In research with migrant groups in Mid Ulster Dr Ruth McAreavey found that local organisations in civil society were providing an important support role for newcomers and that English language classes in particular ‘typically form a gateway to other types of social participation’. Social links and word of mouth are important in settling in and accessing services, and ‘at a local level church groups were cited as being extremely positive in acknowledging newcomers’.

Life as a Stranger; the Personal Stories of Migrants to Northern Ireland

Building Welcoming Congregations

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 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.iccsi.ie/resources/welcoming-angels-copy.pdf

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 others such as community leaders and employers 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 the Bible 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.
- Encourage 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 on information to let new residents know about local churches, 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. (see also below under 'pastoral considerations').

'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

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

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

Pastoral considerations

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

'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, p 24, advising on the use of language in church

- 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 congregation permanently because he felt shamed at being introduced as 'an asylum seeker' by a person 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.
- 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.
- 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 human trafficking.
- You may find yourself *acting at or beyond the edge of the law* and uncertain where the moral and legal boundaries lie, especially when you are relating to people who are here without proper documents.
- Above all you would 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, 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.

For advice on how best to signpost people from other countries in crisis situations go to the EMBRACE website www.embraceni.org/category/christian-response/advice-for-churches/

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

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

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 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

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 www.ofmfmni.gov.uk/can_contact_promote_better_relations_evidence_from_mixed_and_segregated_areas_of_belfast_-_summary_report.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)

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,
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

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 **Foyle Multicultural Forum** also runs a weekly friendship club in SEEDS Café del Mundo, Guildhall Square, Derry.

'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

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 newcomers

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.

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

Volunteering opportunities

A number of organisations work with minority-ethnic people and refugees, and some welcome volunteers. Just a few are mentioned here and you will find other opportunities locally if you live outside Belfast.

Refugees in Time of Need (RITON) is a project initiated by two NI refugee charities, the **Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)** and the **Refugee Action Group (RAG)**. The first batch of volunteers received training at the Law Centre. RITON volunteers can do a number of tasks such as giving lifts when asylum applicants have to sign on with the UK Border Agency at Drumkeen House in South Belfast, providing moral support at appeal or bail hearings, undertaking research on asylum cases or being there to help when someone is opening a bank account, for example. You do not need any legal skills to be a volunteer. Language skills and access to transport could be useful but not essential. You do need to be compassionate and calm and prepared to face traumatic situations. If you want to find out more see www.refugeeactiongroup.com or phone NICRAS on (028) 90246699 E-mail: nicras@hotmail.co.uk. NICRAS has many other volunteering opportunities. (See pages 32–3.)

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. For office hours see www.nicras.btck.co.uk/RedCrossBelfast

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.

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 Mullen, 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

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

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

www.nisra.gov.uk

Police Service of Northern Ireland

www.psnipolice.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**

Migration

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Your Rights in Northern Ireland, A Guide for Migrant Workers from: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia. (Available in English, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Slovak) www.lawcentreni.org/Publications/Migrant%20Workers/A8%20English%202008.pdf

Living and Working in the UK: Rights and Responsibilities of Nationals from the New Member States from 1 May 2004.

www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/workingintheuk/wrsleaflet

Your Rights in Northern Ireland, A Guide for Migrant Workers from: Romania and Bulgaria.

www.lawcentreni.org/Publications/Migrant%20Workers/A2%20English.pdf

Your Rights in Northern Ireland, A Guide for Migrant Workers from: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland (Second Edition 2008).

www.lawcentreni.org/Publications/Migrant%20Workers/EEA%20English%2008.pdf

Your Rights in Northern Ireland, A Guide for Work Permit Employees.

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EMBRACE is a group of Christians from different denominations working together to promote a positive response to people who are seeking asylum, refugees, migrant workers and people from minority-ethnic backgrounds living in Northern Ireland. Our primary role is to resource Churches through information and training so that they can help make this a more hospitable place for migrant and minority-ethnic people.

This seventh annual information update, *Embracing Diversity*, provides an introduction to some of the complex issues of immigration, asylum and racism and their implications for the life experiences of the people involved. In a year when there has been much change, it challenges Christians to make a practical and informed response, by living out the gospel values of welcome and love of neighbour. Together we can build a more welcoming community that has moved beyond suspicion, racism and exclusion.

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