



EMBRACE NI
*Building a Welcoming
Community*

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INFORMATION SHEET

Poverty and Destitution Experienced by People from Other Countries

Briefing Spring 2015

Most newcomers come here and live successful lives, earn enough to live comfortably, contribute to and integrate well in local communities. A few are less fortunate. People in some categories are particularly vulnerable:

European People

Citizens from most EU member states used have much the same entitlements as local people, once they proved that they lived here. But recent changes make it harder for EU nationals to claim means tested benefits. For example if a person's only right to reside here is as an EU jobseeker s/he will not be entitled to Housing Benefit. It is likely that some people who may have entitlement will be turned down because of the complex nature of the rules so it is important that they get expert advice (see overleaf). If they have not sufficient funds on arrival, or nobody to stay with, it is difficult for them to supply officials with evidence that they have made this their home. Without evidence of job applications or a job offer they can also find it hard to get a National Insurance number so that they can work legally.

Croatian Nationals

Croatia joined the EU in 2013 and transitional arrangements apply to Croatian nationals. They can get permits as skilled workers or work here on a self-employed basis but they cannot apply for jobs in the normal job market. They have limited access to out-of-work benefits. These arrangements will be in place for at least 5 years.

People from Outside the European Economic Area

People recruited here for skilled work enter on visas issued on the basis of one particular job. Their passports are usually stamped 'No recourse to public funds'. They have no safety net if they lose their jobs. Most have to be here for 5 years before they can apply for permanent residence/ citizenship and acquire the same rights as the rest of us.

Relationship Breakdown and Domestic Violence

Some people's rights and immigration status depend on the fact that their partner/spouse is a European citizen or has a working visa. If they leave the household because of relationship breakdown or abuse, or are abandoned, they may lose financial support without the hope that the state will assist them and others may no longer even be allowed to stay here.

Health

Everyone has access to emergency health care but some people do not have access to the ongoing care provided by General Practitioners and have to pay the full price of prescriptions.

The Reality of Job Loss for Foreign Nationals

People whose short-term contracts have ended, or who have lost their jobs can become homeless quite quickly. They may lose tied accommodation or flat mates find it impossible to support them for long. Savings are used up quickly, especially if they have been sending money home to their families previously. If they have no right to welfare benefits, some hostels supported public money may also deny them a bed. Having no welfare support also makes it difficult to access other rights.

People in the Asylum System

Most people who seek asylum here are offered accommodation and some financial support while their case is being heard. They are usually penniless when they arrive and may experience destitution until their support begins. During their claim there can be glitches in support. Some also experience difficulty in accessing a job or getting normal benefits started when their claim is successful, and they lose their asylum cash support and accommodation. Delays can cause distress. Others use precious money to bring their families here to join them as they are entitled to do. They often find it hard to manage rent and fuel bills. Failed asylum applicants lose their support and, if they cannot safely be returned home they have to make a case for emergency assistance. Many end up completely destitute at this stage, and rely on charity. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-26189348

Irregular Migrants and Trafficked People

Some people have no legal right to be here and are often labelled 'illegal immigrants'. Many have come here legally and a change in circumstances means that they have lost their right to stay. In 2004, for example, a woman from the Ukraine, who was here with a work permit, lost her job, her tied accommodation and therefore her right to remain here. She had no entitlement to housing or welfare support or a GP and when her money ran out she slept rough, got frostbite and had to have her lower legs amputated. Information about rights is better now and some emergency support has been available for vulnerable people from time to time, but the overall situation is largely unchanged.

Some people may have been tricked out of large amounts of money and come here to find there is no job and no prospect of employment. Others may be in the control of people who trap them into forced labour such as prostitution, the growing of cannabis, or domestic servitude. They may stay with their captors partly because they fear that they will not be believed and will be treated as criminals. They may also have language difficulties and little knowledge of their rights.

Life on the Streets

Anyone who ends up sleeping rough is vulnerable to the temptations of crime and substance abuse and they are also in danger due to hunger, depression, disease, hypothermia and physical attack. Foreign nationals on the streets are also especially vulnerable to racist abuse.

Action

- The **EMBRACE Emergency Fund** supports the urgent needs of destitute people from other countries through recognised homelessness and refugee support groups.
- Matt Orme at **Storehouse**, Belfast runs a rota of churches and groups that donate material goods to assist destitute people from other countries. He can be contacted at matt@storehousebelfast.com
- Learn how to signpost people for expert advice.
See www.embraceni.org/category/christian-response/advice-for-churches/