

## Myths and Stereotypes about Immigrants

While many people are welcoming and understand the reasons for increased migration 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’

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 locally without migrant labour.

### ‘They drive down wages’

Research has shown that when wages drop it is usually temporary.

Although on average private sector pay in Northern Ireland is lower than anywhere else in the UK, in most years since 2004 median private sector wages in Northern Ireland rose more strongly than the UK as a whole. (Source: *Labour Market Bulletin*, DEL, June 2009.) These figures do not suggest any serious negative impact of migrant workers on the Northern Ireland labour market: in contrast they suggest that migration helped the labour market and the economy to grow. ... It is illegal in Northern Ireland for an employer to pay a migrant worker less than a local worker for doing the same job.’

“I’m Not a Racist But...”: Exposing the Common Myths which can Fuel Racist Attitudes Towards Migrant Workers, *Irish Congress of Trade Unions Northern Ireland Committee*, 2011. [www.ictuni.org/uploads/67b098da-831b-4ef7-ba01-f5111705d2bc/IMNOTRACISTBOOKLETWEB.pdf](http://www.ictuni.org/uploads/67b098da-831b-4ef7-ba01-f5111705d2bc/IMNOTRACISTBOOKLETWEB.pdf)

### ‘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. In the financial year 2008–09 it was estimated that immigrants to the UK from Central and Eastern Europe paid 37% more in taxes than was spent on them by the state. [www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0907/09072302](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/0907/09072302) 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 can usually only access benefits when they are given permission to settle here which can now take at least 5 years. Advice workers are reporting that foreign nationals are experiencing lengthy delays in accessing benefits when they do become entitled to receive them.

Research by the Department of Work and Pensions in GB found that by February 2011, of the 5.5million people receiving working age benefits in England, Scotland and Wales, only 6.4% were born outside the UK. While 17% of all British born people in GB were in receipt of these benefits, only 7% of people, who were classed as non-UK nationals when they arrived, were represented among the claimants.

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16643677](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-16643677) There is no reason to believe that the situation in N Ireland is different.

**‘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. While some migrant workers are now eligible to apply for social housing many still live in privately rented accommodation. There were just 779 migrant worker households who were Housing Executive tenants at 31 July 2011.

**‘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 e.g. for 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.’**

It is wrong to ignore the fact that poor relationships with local people are sometimes caused by the behaviour of individual incomers. The negative stereotypes about national groups, that they have loud parties, are dangerous drivers, aggressive and violent, heavy drinkers, disrespectful towards women, or rude may all be based on actual behaviours and incidents. When someone from another country misbehaves or commits a crime it stands out and we forget how many local people are convicted of criminal acts. The anxiety caused is magnified in areas where very large numbers of newcomers have arrived suddenly. All the stereotypes listed could apply equally to elements within local communities and especially to young adults living away from their families. People from other countries are actually more likely to be victims of crime 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.