

How can I find out more?

EMBRACE runs **Workshops** for groups of church people, to support and advise them on local initiatives they can undertake at congregational and local community level to welcome incomers. Topics include how to cope with language barriers; the setting up of English classes; how drop in centres and clubs can promote integration and friendship; and general information about the challenges faced by migrant people.

The group can also facilitate **Migration Awareness Training**. Knowledge makes it easier dispel negative attitudes that may be based on myths or ignorance. EMBRACE produces an annual information update about immigration and associated issues, *Embracing Diversity*, see www.embraceni.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/2014-Information-Update-FINAL.pdf See also www.embraceni.org/category/information/

Other resources are helpful in building welcome at parish/ congregational level. www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/

The website also includes Advice for Churches on signposting people from other countries who are in crisis situations www.embraceni.org/category/christianresponse/advice-for-churches/

The United Bible Societies has produced the resource, *On the road... A journey through the Bible for migrants* a combination of Bible stories, prayers and personal experiences and suggested questions for discussion. www.la-bible.net/doc/dons08072.pdf

'EMBRACE respects government's responsibility to manage immigration but we cannot ignore our own responsibility. In resourcing the Christian Community in Northern Ireland to welcome in Christ's name we are highlighting the worth of every human being; whoever they are and wherever they're from. EMBRACE is about enabling people to express the message that people are precious to God.'

Rev. Richard Kerr EMBRACE Chairperson, September 2013

I was a stranger and you made me welcome Matthew 25: 35

EMBRACE NI
Building a Welcoming Community

Web: www.embraceni.org

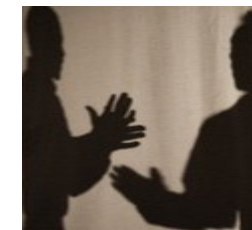


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EMBRACE Information Sheet 8

Opinions on Immigration in Northern Ireland

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The stranger living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself...

Leviticus 19:33

In the last decade immigration has seldom been out of the news in the UK and negative attitudes towards immigrants have grown. What are the obligations on Christians in this highly charged debate?

It is always important to have facts to inform your opinions. (See back page.) We should also be careful not to make judgements about what is happening locally, based on newspaper articles relating to the situation in England and Wales.

One journalist relays a story where an editor sends a young reporter to 'go and monster an asylum seeker'. Another comments: 'There's nothing better than a Muslim asylum seeker, in particular, that's a sort of jackpot I suppose. You know, it's very much the cartoon baddy, the caricature, you know, all social ills can be traced back to immigrants and asylum seekers flooding this country.'

Evidence of pressure put on journalists.
Book review of Bad News for Refugees by the Glasgow Media Group.
www.jcwi.org.uk/blog/2013/11/14/bad-news-refugees-book-review#sthash.mzyOTlpS.dpuf

It is equally important to be prepared to challenge the 'facts' you hear about the local situation. Question the truth about what you are told and ask for the source of information. Check out rumours with people who should have first-hand expert knowledge. Weigh up your own anxieties about newcomers and our changing society against our Lord's command to love all our neighbours as we love ourselves. Many of us can also think about how we want our own relatives to be treated in other parts of the world.

This doesn't mean that we should never discuss the level of immigration and some of the difficult issues involved. It does mean that we should do so responsibly with reference to facts, not stereotyping or rumour, and out of love not fear.

Some Facts about Immigration and Northern Ireland

Numbers

In spite of an increase in immigration recently, the 2011 census indicates that there are still only 4.51% of the population living in N Ireland who were born in countries other than the UK or the Irish Republic, 45,407 from the rest of the European Union, and 36,046 born in other countries. This contrasts with England and Wales where residents born outside the UK made up 13% of the population in 2011.

Jobs and Wages

Most migrant workers are attracted here by offers of work from companies or agencies unable to fill vacancies locally. They fill skills gaps and labour shortages and often do jobs that local people are not trained to do or prepared to do. Some local employers would have had to move their factories abroad if they had not been able to attract foreign workers. There is anxiety even now that, as European economies come out of recession it may be difficult to continue to fill job vacancies. Research has shown that if wages drop it is usually temporary.

There is a need, however, for local young people to obtain the education and skills to enable them to step into available jobs.

Benefits

There is a presumption that people from the European Union who arrive without a job offer, get benefits as soon as they arrive here, but even before the Government moved to delay payments of Job Seekers Allowance until people have been here for three months, advice workers had been reporting lengthy delays in some foreign nationals accessing benefits. Arrangements are reciprocal, with at least 40,000 expat Britons claiming unemployment benefit in other EU countries.

(*Sunday Times* 10 November 2013)

People from outside Europe are usually unable to get out-of-work benefits until they have been here for at least 5 years when they can apply for permanent residence or citizenship.

Look at both sides of the argument

Poland has responded to David Cameron's call to change the EU treaty so that the UK can withdraw child benefit from Polish migrants working in the UK.

'If Britain gets our taxpayers, shouldn't it also pay their benefits? Why should Polish taxpayers subsidize British taxpayers' children?'

Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski
The *Telegraph*, 6 January 2014

Housing

The NI Housing Executive (NIHE) allocates social housing from a common waiting list and a standard points-based system, based mostly on need. The majority of recent migrants live in privately rented accommodation. There were just 914 migrant worker households who were Housing Executive tenants in 31 July 2012. When new houses are built, however, people from other countries may have worked their way to the top of the list, perhaps because they have children, and this may seem unfair to local people.

Healthcare

The Government has announced some changes to free access to the health service by foreign nationals in England but it has always been a little different in Northern Ireland. While everyone is entitled to emergency healthcare some foreign nationals are not allowed to register with a GP in NI, or have ongoing treatment without payment, and this leads to suffering. The people affected include those who have applied for asylum and not been granted refugee status but who cannot be sent home.

Contribution to Society

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. By increasing the numbers of young people in the workplace, they help to reduce the worrying pensions gap. Local figures are not available but 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

Migrant workers do send money home to their families and the World Bank estimates that in 2011 £2,031 million left the country in this way but £5,040 million came in from expatriates. Local people also lodge money in banks whose headquarters are in other countries, spend money on foreign holidays and purchase goods that are produced abroad.

What can we do?

- Become more familiar with the facts (see overleaf)
- Challenge rumours and negative stereotypes
- Build relationships between local people and newcomers
- Find out how you could respond to a racist incident (see the EMBRACE leaflet *Responding to Racism*: www.embraceni.org/category/about-us/embrace-resources/)