

What Can You Do?

Learn more:

There is additional information on the EMBRACE web site and in the leaflet EMBRACE Information Sheet 11: **Poverty & Destitution in the Asylum System** www.embraceni.org/about-us/embrace-resources/information-sheets-and-briefings/

Refer people for advice:

The **Law Centre NI** is funded to advise on eligibility for welfare benefits. Advice line 9.30am–1pm (028) 9024 4401.

The **Simon Community** has a 24/7 freephone Central Access Point, Tel: 0800 171 2222 for people who are homeless or about to be homeless.

Report possible fears about human trafficking. **If you feel that someone is in immediate danger dial 999.** Report other suspicions to the **PSNI** on the non emergency number, **101**. You can also report suspicious activity through the Home Office Modern Slavery 24-hour help-line 0800 121 700 which is free from most landlines and mobiles

Some support groups for foreign nationals are listed on the NISMP web site www.migrationni.org/support-organisations

Donate to Organisations that support destitute foreign nationals

Just some are listed below:

The Red Cross Belfast provides some financial and practical support to people in the asylum system. Neil McKittrick Tel: (028) 9073 5350

The **NI Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS)** advises and supports asylum applicants. 143a University Street, Belfast BT7 1HP. Tel: (028) 9024 6699 info@nicras.org.uk www.nicras.btck.co.uk

Homeplus Drop in Centre provides a range of support services for foreign nationals. 113 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HP, Tel: (028) 9031 1836

St Vincent De Paul conferences provide practical support for people from many different backgrounds

Storehouse Belfast assists people in the asylum system with food and material goods. Tel: (028) 9023 6333 www.storehousebelfast.com Other foodbanks assist foreign nationals living in destitution or poverty.

Refugees Welcome aims to link people with a room to spare with people in the asylum system who need somewhere to stay. [http://refugees-welcomeni.co.uk/](http://refugees-welcomeni.co.uk) Email: bethwatbrad@gmail.com

EMBRACE Emergency Fund and their **Refugee Fund** give small grants to foreign nationals in crisis situations. Approach should be made through other groups. (Contact details for donations below.)

EMBRACE NI
Building a Welcoming Community



Web: www.embraceni.org

48 Elmwood Avenue,
Belfast, BT9 6AZ
Tel: 028 9066 3145
Email: info@embraceni.org

EMBRACE Information Sheet 12

Poverty & Destitution Experienced by People from Other Countries

Winter 2016–17



Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.
Proverbs 31:8–9

People who move to another country usually do so in order to improve their lives. Most newcomers to N Ireland come here and live successful lives, earn enough to live comfortably and contribute to and integrate well in local communities. A few are less fortunate.

These include

- European nationals who come here without a job
- European nationals who become ill or lose a job before they have access to out-of-work benefits
- Non-European nationals (here on work visas) who become ill or lose their job. They can usually not look for other work or access out-of-work benefits until they become permanent residents after at least five years.
- People whose immigration status depends on a partner or spouse but whose relationship has broken down
- People who are exploited in the workplace and part-time workers, including those agency workers on zero hours contracts
- Irregular migrants with no permission to work here legally and people who are trafficked
- People in the asylum system

Falls in the value of sterling can lead to a dramatic drop in income for people who are committed to sending money to family abroad. This leaflet gives a very brief introduction to these issues.

Migrants may not fully appreciate their rights and entitlements and so may be rendered more vulnerable if their employer operates with impunity ... Migrants face additional barriers owing to fewer family and other support structures and connected to childcare costs and in-work poverty.

Dr Ruth McAreevey, Poverty and Ethnicity and International Migrants in NI; New Opportunities or New Vulnerabilities www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series3/mcareavey090114.pdf

People from the European Economic Area (EEA)

The EEA encourages freedom to trade and move from one country to another for the purpose of work. Most Europeans who arrive here have either been recruited in their home country by employment agencies or have some other firm offer of work. If they come here without a job offer, however, they will need to live on their savings unless they have imported benefits with them from their country of origin. After three months it may be possible for them to get Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for a short time, but only if they can prove that they have genuine prospect of work. If they cannot do this they may be unable even to get a National Insurance Number (NINO) and without this most employers will not consider them.

The situation is similar for people who become ill or lose their job before they have access to out of work benefits.

People from outside Europe who require visas to work here

Non-EEA nationals on work visas come here with their passports stamped 'No Recourse to Public Funds'. They have no safety net if they become ill or lose their job. Their visa is tied to the employer who sponsored them and so they cannot look for another job. They usually have no alternative but to return home.

'The ICR [Institute for Conflict Research] highlights the debt bondage in the Filipino and Polish communities where workers have to pay fees to agencies in their home country quoting the case of Filipino nurses who owed several thousand pounds making them vulnerable to long antisocial hours.'

Quoted in Bronagh Hinds, *The N Ireland Economy: Women on the Edge*, 2011.

www.wrda.net/Documents/The%20NI%20Economy%20-%20Women%20on%20the%20Edge%20Report.pdf

People whose immigration status depends on a partner or spouse are in an especially difficult position if their relationship breaks down or there is domestic abuse. If they leave the relationship, they cannot seek work. People may well continue in a violent relationship rather than face destitution.

Many local people have a poor understanding of how our immigration and asylum rules can lead to people being faced with poverty and destitution.

People exploited in the workplace and part-time workers

Trade unions and other support groups report the exploitation of foreign nationals who may be unaware of their workplace rights. Part-time workers, especially those on zero hours contracts, may have difficulty paying for transport, rent and living expenses when there is little work. It is especially difficult to find affordable childcare in rural areas.

'... one issue is the language barrier because they are working at the lowest of the low [jobs] ... where they are dependent on that particular employer and in that particular sector, and for many ... it would be the cleaning sector. So we would see a lot of people like that – they are completely dependent and helpless'

Support worker interviewed for Joseph Rowntree research. www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/presentations/series3/mcareavey090114ppt.pdf

Irregular migrants and people who are trafficked

People working here without permission are especially likely to be exploited, financially and in other ways. Trafficked people – victims of movement, deception and exploitation – may be entirely in the power of others, with little or no reward for their labour, and live in constant fear that they may be removed by the authorities.

Poverty and destitution in the asylum system

Most asylum applicants are destitute when they arrive and until support begins. While their case is being heard they usually receive accommodation and £36.95 per week, which is difficult to live on. Some refugees also experience difficulty in accessing a job or getting normal benefits started when their application is successful, and they lose their asylum support. They often find it hard to manage rent and fuel bills.

Refused asylum applicants lose their support and, if they cannot safely be returned home, they have to make a case for emergency assistance. This is usually denied so there are always a number of people here who are completely destitute at this stage, reliant on charity. See EMBRACE Information Sheet 11, *Poverty & Destitution in the Asylum System* www.embraceni.org/about-us/embrace-resources/information-sheets-and-briefings/

'We strongly argue that destitution should never be an outcome of the asylum system, however for a number of reasons, some people do find themselves completely destitute.'

Neil McKittrick Red Cross NI, *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 September 2015
www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/refugees-in-northern-ireland-facing-destitution-warns-british-red-cross-31505913.html