

"IM NOT A RACIST BUT..."

Exposing the common
myths which can fuel
racist attitudes
towards migrant workers

INTRODUCTION

This leaflet has been produced as part of the Belfast Peace Plan funded under Priority 1.1 of the Peace III Programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Region. It is intended to be a resource to help challenge some of the myths around issues relating to migration and to help create shared cultural space.

GLOSSARY OF USEFUL TERMS

A **migrant worker** is someone from outside the UK and Ireland who is here to seek or take up work.

An **immigrant** is someone who comes to another country hoping to live permanently in it.

An **emigrant** is someone who leaves this country to live in another.

A8 countries - Eight of the ten countries that joined the European Union in 2004. They are Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

A2 countries - In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania also became members of the European Union. Their ability to work here is subject to conditions laid out in the Workers Authorisation Scheme.

European Union national - That's us by the way! The media often call European workers, migrants and even asylum seekers! Like us, workers across Europe have the freedom to travel and work within the European Union.

Workers Registration Scheme - Under transitional arrangements the UK Government placed restrictions on nationals from A8 countries who on commencement of employment had to pay £90 to register under the Workers Registration Scheme with the Home Office and needed one year's uninterrupted work before they could be considered for entitlement to full welfare benefits here. This ended in May 2011 when all EU countries opened up their job markets.

Work permit - Gives permission to UK employers to recruit named people from a country outside of the EU. The permit ties the worker to that employer. They are issued for a maximum of five years.

Accession Worker Card – A2 nationals have to apply to the Home Office for an Accession Worker Card for certain types of employment in the UK without the need for an employer to apply for a work permit.

European Economic Area - EEA countries:- Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, UK.

Habitual Residence Test – test applied to people who have recently come here when they try to access some benefits. There is no statutory definition and individuals are assessed on a case-by-case basis. Generally, in order to demonstrate that one is habitually resident in Northern Ireland, they have to show that their intention when coming to live here was to establish a permanent and settled residence.

Right to Reside – applies to certain rights under the EU Rights of Residence Directive and people usually retain this status only when they are working or studying.

An **'asylum seeker'** is someone who is seeking asylum. This means they are applying to be given the status of a refugee in another country on the basis that they face persecution in the country they have left under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees.

A **refugee** – If an asylum seeker's application for asylum is granted by immigration officials they become a 'refugee' in that country and are given either temporary or permanent leave to remain.

A SHARED WORKPLACE, A SHARED FUTURE

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions project 'A Shared Workplace, A Shared Future' is a new and unique service funded by the EU Peace III programme through the Good Relations Partnership of Belfast City Council to provide protection for migrant workers from exploitation in the workplace and to challenge racist attitudes that may exist in the workforce.

Over the generations migration for a better life has been a very familiar concept for the people of this country. Most families will have, or have had members living and working abroad. Their well-being has often been dependent on the friendship and support they received in the host country.

Migrant workers' impression of Northern Ireland will be largely shaped by their experiences within the workplace. Given the difficulties with language, unfamiliarity with their rights and having no family support here to fall back on should they lose their jobs, migrant workers are amongst the most vulnerable in our society.

The protection offered by trade unions is open to all citizens, however, many migrant workers new to this

country are not aware of their employment rights or where to get assistance when they experience problems at work.

This project offers migrant workers advice on employment rights, and uniquely, representation by trade union officials should they have problems in work.

Another aspect of the project is to challenge racism. Normally such attitudes simply arise from an ignorance of the facts rather than a deep seated racism. We provide training for trade union activists on the dangers of racism to our society and how to challenge racist attitudes when they come across them.

If you are a migrant worker having problems at work contact the ICTU, Migrant Workers Support Unit, on:

028 90319644,

or at,

ICTU

Carlin House

4-6 Donegall Street Place

Belfast

BT1 2FN



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WE WERE ALL MIGRANTS ONCE

Migration has been a constant feature in the history of these islands. However, from the 18th century onwards the history of migration in the Island of Ireland has been primarily about **emigration – people leaving the Island.**

Throughout history many migrants who left Northern Ireland faced suspicion, exploitation,

racism, and discrimination in their adopted homes. What about the people who come to live and work in our country? Do we welcome migrant workers with open arms and hospitality? Or, do we repeat the same myths and hold the same attitudes towards them that plagued the lives of emigrants from this island?

"YOU DON'T REALLY BELIEVE THAT, OR, DO YOU?"

A survey of public attitudes towards migrant workers in Northern Ireland in 2010 highlighted that:

16% of respondents consider migrant workers more law abiding than locals - although 38% took a contrary view.

28% of respondents think that Northern Irish people are very prejudiced towards migrant workers.

48% of respondents feel that migrant workers take jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland.

30% of respondents agree or strongly agree that migrant workers come to Northern Ireland just to get social security benefits.

70% of respondents feel that the number of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland puts a strain on services.¹

Some of the attitudes revealed in the results here and the spurious scare stories in the media about immigration and immigrants can and do lead to hate crime and violence against migrant workers and minority ethnic communities. This is especially the case in difficult economic times where migrants can become the scapegoats for existing problems.

This leaflet sets out to **explore some of the misconceptions** about immigration and to **challenge myths with facts.**

¹ Source: Omnibus Survey 2010; DEL, Labour Market Bulletin, March 2011.

MYTH 1

"THERE ARE
TOO MANY
OF THEM
HERE."

MYTH 2

"THEY'RE
TAKING
ALL OUR
JOBS."

FACT

There are no accurate figures on the number of migrant workers in Northern Ireland. The situation is complicated by the fact that EU citizens have the right to move freely into Northern Ireland without their details being recorded.

Based on all available evidence, there were around **56,000** people living here who were born outside the UK or Republic of Ireland in 2008, which is around **3% of the population**. At the same time, **5% of the Northern Ireland workforce** was comprised of migrant workers ².

²Source: The Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, DEL, December 2009.

³Source: NISRA <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=260>

FACT

Approximately **5% of the Northern Ireland workforce is comprised of migrant workers**. This is a very small proportion. Migrant workers are attracted to Northern Ireland by job vacancies. Research revealed that while local employers would choose to employ a native worker in preference to a migrant given candidates of equal ability, **37% of Northern Ireland employers reported difficulties** in recruiting native-born workers to fill vacant positions.⁴

In many cases locally based employers have recruited people from other countries **to fill skills gaps and labour shortages**. A 2009 survey of over 600 of Northern Ireland employers found out that 31% of employers said migrants had been "important" for their organisation's survival, including more than 50% in health and social care and in agriculture.⁵ There is evidence that certain sectors, most notably

The evidence from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) points to a reduction in the number of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland recently. According to NISRA the increase in the population of Northern Ireland due to migration was approximately 9,000 in the two years from 2005 to 2007 (the peak period of inward migration). In 2007-8 this number declined to 5,700. The number of residents added through migration declined further to **2,100 in 2008-9** ³.

elements of food processing, could have disappeared entirely from Northern Ireland in the absence of available migrant workers.⁶

Far from "taking" jobs **migrant workers are saving, maintaining and creating a wide variety of employment**. A greater number of economically active workers in Northern Ireland means there are more producers and consumers; both of which are essential components of a functioning economy. Migrant workers support key areas of the economy and that in turn stimulates further employment, for example by buying goods in the shops and supporting other services.

^{4,5,6} Source: The Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, DEL, December 2009.

MYTH 3

"THEY'RE FORCING DOWN PAY RATES AND UNDERCUTTING LOCAL WORKERS"

FACT

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.**⁷ 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.** Migrant workers do not take jobs at lower rates of pay than others doing the same job, although they do tend to be concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid occupations. In most cases, they have helped facilitate rapid rates of economic expansion by filling lower-skilled jobs, including those local workers 'no longer want.'⁸

There has been strong evidence of so-called 'occupational segregation' between local people and migrants, which means that during the recent years of economic growth, the involuntary displacement of native employment has been minimal.⁹

Migrant workers should not be blamed for employers who do not pay minimum wage and who violate employment legislation.

It is illegal in Northern Ireland for an employer to pay a migrant worker less than a local worker for doing the same job.

Migrant workers are involved in Trade Unions and in campaigning for fair pay and better standards of employment for all workers.

⁷Source: Labour Market Bulletin, DEL, June 2009.

^{8,9}Source: The Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, DEL, December 2009.

MYTH 4

"THEY GET HOUSED
QUICKER, GETTING
BUMPED UP THE
HOUSING LIST
THROUGH THE
POINTS SYSTEM"

FACT

Allocation policies do not discriminate on grounds of race or ethnicity. Social housing providers will establish migrant workers eligibility for housing in Northern Ireland and their housing needs will be assessed in the same way as any other applicant.

Research shows that 76% of migrant workers resided in privately rented accommodation; **only 3% lived in Housing**

¹⁰Source: A Report on the Experiences of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, Institute for Conflict Research, DEL, December 2009.

¹¹ Source: Black and Minority Ethnic and Migrant Worker Mapping Update, NI Housing Executive, February 2011.

Executive accommodation and 5% in Housing Association accommodation .¹⁰

A total of 653 migrant worker households were Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants on 31st July 2010 out of 90,000 homes managed. 81% of these households were families .¹¹

MYTH 5

"THEY'RE
BLEEDING
THE
WELFARE
STATE"

FACT

All the evidence on economic migration is that people migrate in the direction of available jobs, **not in pursuit of unemployment benefit.**

In fact, there are severe restrictions on the rights of migrants to claim social security.

Migrant workers from the A8 nations until May 2011 could only claim some benefits if they were in registered employment, such as Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.

From May 2011, A8 nationals no longer have to register their employment, however, as other EU nationals, they have to pass the "Right to Reside" and "Habitual Residence Test" in order to claim benefits. The restrictions on A2 nationals will still be in place. There are concerns that some A8 migrant workers who had failed to register their employment will be disadvantaged by the previous transitional arrangements.

It is important to note that all EU states had to open their job markets to A8 nationals in May 2011 and some could prove more attractive to migrant workers than the UK.

Non-EU migrant workers are required to pay tax and national insurance like everyone else, but they cannot claim most benefits until they have been granted "indefinite leave to remain" (permanent residency), in the UK by the Home Office, after they have been here at least six years.

In fact, statistics show that immigrants have a 23% lower probability of receiving benefits than the local population.

A report published by DEL identified that **61% of migrant worker respondents to the survey did not receive any state benefits at all, with only 3% receiving housing benefit and 3% receiving unemployment benefit.**

The largest uptake amongst respondents was for Child Benefit (16%), Tax Credit (15%) and Working Tax Credit (13%).

Only 50% of respondents with children were currently claiming Child Tax Credit, while only 55% were receiving Child Benefit .¹²

¹² Source: A Report on the Experiences of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, Institute for Conflict Research, DEL, December 2009.

MYTH 6

"THEY CONTRIBUTE NOTHING"

MYTH 7

"PUBLIC SERVICES CAN'T COPE WITH THE INFLUX"

FACT

The evidence shows that migrant workers contribute more in taxes than they use in public services.

According to the Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration (CReAM) in the latest fiscal year, 2008/09, **A8 immigrants paid 37% more in direct or indirect taxes than was spent on public goods and services which they received.** ¹³

The UK has an ageing population as a result of declining birth rates and the fact that people are living longer. Migrant workers are needed to ensure that there is a sufficient workforce to fill available jobs and pay the taxes that will fund pensions in the future.

We should also remember that migrants do not only contribute to the UK's economy, they are contributing in a far broader sense as key stake holders and consumers. Their contribution can also be measured in terms of provision of skills, education, qualifications, linguistic diversity, previous work experience, entrepreneurship and their contacts and global networks.

¹³ Source: <http://www.econ.ucl.ac.uk/cream/publicationsdiscussionpapers.htm>

FACT

There is no evidence for this sort of strain due to migration in Northern Ireland.

Far from being a burden on the welfare state, migration and the contribution of healthcare professionals born outside the UK keep our health service operating.

In total, around **13% of all workers in the UK, working within the field of health, education and public administration are migrants.**

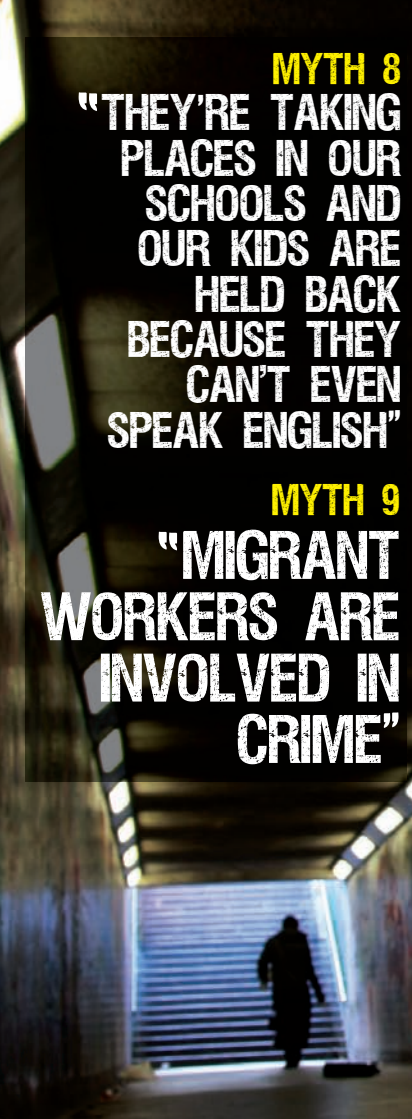
According to Migration Parliamentary Group in 2007:

- 38% of all doctors working in hospitals in England qualified outside Britain.
- 40% of the UK's new dentists were born abroad.
- 20% of those caring for older people were born abroad.
- 16% of nurses come from a minority ethnic background. ¹⁴

And while they staff public services, **immigrants** are more likely to be healthy, single, young and of working age than the population in general – and consequently **depend less on public services** such as healthcare. ¹⁵

¹⁴ Source: Migration Parliamentary Group, Myth Busting Facts about Migration in UK <http://www.wlga.gov.uk/english/new-communities-publications/myth-busting-facts-about-migration-in-the-uk-health/>

¹⁵ Source: The Economic, Labour Market and Skills Impacts of Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland, DEL, December 2009.



MYTH 8
"THEY'RE TAKING
PLACES IN OUR
SCHOOLS AND
OUR KIDS ARE
HELD BACK
BECAUSE THEY
CAN'T EVEN
SPEAK ENGLISH"

MYTH 9
"MIGRANT
WORKERS ARE
INVOLVED IN
CRIME"

FACT

School Census figures for 2009 show that 4,800 primary school children have a language other than English as their 'first' language. This is **3% of the primary school pupils in Northern Ireland**. For post-primary school children, 2,400 pupils have a language other than English as their 'first' language in 2009. This is **1.6% of the post-primary school population in Northern Ireland**.¹⁶ There is no problem of overcrowding; in fact, there is actually a serious problem of falling enrolment in many rural schools. Inward migration and increased

FACT

Criminality exists in all communities. When media stories deliberately use a person's nationality or residency status it can give the impression that members of a particular group are more likely to commit crimes than others. A police study in 2008 found that the arrival of immigrants from Eastern Europe into the United Kingdom **had not fuelled a rise in crime**.¹⁸ According to the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), Peter Fahy, Chief Constable of the Cheshire constabulary, and co-author of the study, "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."

enrolment may actually save schools threatened with closure. Locally the schools that are oversubscribed are those where there are the least number of migrant workers.¹⁷

¹⁶ Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/Statistics%20press%20Notice%20-%20Migration%20NI%202009.pdf>

¹⁷ Migrant Workers: Frequently Asked Questions, Animate (2006)

Similarly, the Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration's research discovered that there was no significant increase in crime rates in areas of Britain which had a large number of A8 nationals coming from 2004 onwards.¹⁹ A report by the Local Government Association (LGA), *Estimating the scale and impacts of immigration*, concluded that migrants are more likely to be the victims of crime than the perpetrators, particularly hate crime and exploitation by gang-masters.²⁰

PSNI statistics for Hate Crimes between April 2009 and March 2010 record that there were 1,038 racist incidents out of which 712 were racist crimes.

¹⁸ Source: "Migrant crime wave a myth - police study" The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/apr/16/immigrationpolicy.immigration>

¹⁹ Source: Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration, Department of Economics at University College London Discussion Paper "Crime and Immigration: Evidence from Large Immigrant Waves" (2010) <http://ideas.repec.org/p/crm/wpaper/201012.html>

²⁰ Local Government Association Press Release, 17 October 2007, 'Estimating the scale and impacts of immigration at the local level'.

MYTH 10

"MOST OF THEM ARE ILLEGAL WORKERS"

FACT

"Illegal immigrant worker" is a **highly problematic term** as the use of the term "illegal" stigmatises and criminalises a person, who is not a criminal but is doing nothing more than wanting to work. A more accurate term is 'undocumented workers' which refers to individuals working in the UK without a legal right to do so.

Naturally, there are no information sources which provide any kind of reliable data. According to the Home Office, the numbers of undocumented workers that have been arrested for working in Northern Ireland in the last five financial years are:-

- 14 in 2005-06
- 8 in 2006-07
- 44 in 2007-08
- 8 in 2008-09
- 41 in 2009-10 ²¹

Undocumented workers may be the victims of human trafficking and exploitation, including prostitution, forced labour and slavery.

WHAT ABOUT ASYLUM SEEKERS?

Asylum seekers are people who leave their country due to fear of torture or persecution and apply for protection.

- According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, **the UK is home to less than 2% of the world's refugees** – out of 16 million worldwide.²²
- According to Refugee Action Group, it is estimated that **2,000 refugees currently reside in Northern Ireland**.
- Almost all asylum seekers are **not allowed to work** and are forced to rely on state support.
- Asylum seekers are **not allowed to claim mainstream welfare benefits**. Those who are destitute can apply to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for basic food and shelter. A single adult is eligible for **£35.52** a week. A married couple are entitled to **£70.34** ²³

²¹ Source: Parliament records, 17th June 2010 <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2010-06-17d.2769.h>

²² UNHCR 2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons, 2009

²³ Tell it Like it Is: The Truth about Asylum, Refugee Council

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Resources/Refugee%20Council/downloads/aboutus/Tell_it_like_it_is_23_March.pdf

A photograph of a city park with trees and a building in the background. The trees have yellow and orange leaves, suggesting autumn. A large, ornate building with a green dome is visible in the background. In the foreground, there are benches and a paved path. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark grey box.

MYTH 11

**"THEY KEEP THEMSELVES TO THEMSELVES;
THEY'VE NO INTEREST IN INTEGRATING"**

FACT

Sports clubs, churches and community associations are experiencing a new lease of life as migrant workers and their families participate in local activities.

Whilst migrant workers are often bi- and tri-lingual, English may not be one of their languages and accessing classes can be difficult due to long and unsocial working hours and the expense. Experiences of racism and exclusion can make migrant workers nervous about approaching local groups and networks.

Why don't you take the first step and make them feel welcome? After all we are meant to be renowned for our openness, hospitality and warm welcome.