

# **New Migrant Communities and Belfast**

**An Overview of the Demographic Context,  
Social Issues and Trends**

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## 1. Introduction

There has been a significant increase in the numbers, backgrounds and diversity of migrant workers moving to Northern Ireland over recent years. This trend came to prominence with the arrival of substantial numbers of migrants to work in particular in the food processing industries and the health sector, and the subsequent arrival of substantial number of migrants from the eastern European countries that joined the European Union in 2004. The new dynamism in migration has been generated by growing economies and a demand for workers in countries such as Britain and Ireland and which cannot be met by the local population and also by the desire by people in many countries of the world to seek a better standard of living, to develop their skills and to be able to send money back to their families at home.

To date most of the research on the new migration to Northern Ireland has either focused on developments on a regional level (Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre 2004; Devine 2006; Holder, McAliskey and Lenaghan 2006; McVeigh 2006; Rogers 2006a) or on developments in and around the Dungannon / south Tyrone / County Armagh area (Soares 2002; Holder and Lanao 2005; McVeigh and Fisher 2006; Sobieraj 2005). This focus of interest on the Dungannon region was in large part due to the presence of two NGOs, STEP and Animate, which have focused on the impact of the new patterns of migration on the local communities and on meeting the needs and rights of the new migrant populations.

There has been no consideration given to how the new patterns of migration have impacted on Belfast, and no published data on the new minority communities in the city. Equally there are no NGO or other support project initiatives in the Belfast area, similar to those in Dungannon that aim to meet the needs and support the rights of new migrants in the city.

This research was commissioned by the Good Relations Unit of Belfast City Council to provide some specific information on the number and make up of the new migrants communities in Belfast and some information on the wider social and economic context of patterns of migration to the city. The research was undertaken between December 2006 and February 2007.

The overall aim of the research is to help inform the council in meeting its statutory responsibilities in challenging racism, discrimination and inequalities and in developing appropriate policy and practice responses to the changing and developing social environment of the city. The key points of reference for council initiatives are:

- *A Shared Future* and the *Racial Equality Strategy*;
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998<sup>1</sup>; and
- The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 as amended by the Race Relations Order 2003.

And of course the Council's own Good Relation Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> See Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (nd) *Guide to the Statutory Duties*. Belfast.

It is also worth noting in this regard that the recently published interim report by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion<sup>2</sup> emphasised the key role that is to be played by local authorities in developing ‘pragmatic approaches in their local areas’ to helping to promote cohesion and integration. The growing diversity of the city thus places fresh challenges on the Council.

The first section of the report provides a review of statistical data on recent patterns of migration to Belfast and some further information on the demographic breakdown of recent migrants<sup>3</sup>. This is based upon extrapolating the Belfast data from a variety of more general sources, these included the 2001 NI Census, information on people registered under the Workers Registration Scheme, on applications for Work Permits and for National Insurance Numbers, on GP registration and on the school census of children with English as a second language.

The second section of the report includes the findings of the qualitative research, which aims to complement and extend the findings of the statistical data. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the overall subject of inward migration to Belfast, a series of interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the statutory sector, with the business community and among the community and voluntary sector to assess factors such as the scale of migration in different areas of the city, the issues facing migrants and any responses and initiatives that had been made by employers or statutory bodies.

The final section of the report reviews the main findings, offers some speculation as to future trends in relation to patterns of migration to Belfast and makes a small number of recommendations for actions that Belfast City Council should take in responding to the recent developments and planning for future changes.

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<sup>2</sup> Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007) *Our Interim Statement*. Wetherby.  
[www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk](http://www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> The Northern Ireland Housing Executive have also undertaken a mapping exercise across NI at District Council level, see <http://www.nihe.gov.uk/publications/reports/migrantworkers2006.asp>

## 2. Diversity Background

Belfast has long had a diverse range of minority ethnic and religious communities resident in the city, with the most widely recognised of these being the Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Traveller, Jewish and Sikh communities. However it was only with the publication of the results of the 2001 Census that it was possible to get more details on the scale and make up of the established minority populations.

The Census provides three main sets of data that offer some insight into the diversity of the Belfast population, through questions on ethnicity, religious belief and place of birth. However, the three sets of information are not distinct and separate, but rather include numerous points of overlap and duplication. For example, some people captured by the ethnicity question may also be included in the data on religious belief, but some will not, and similarly some will also be included in the figures for those people born outside of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, but some will not. The three sets of data thus provide three views from three different perspectives of the diversity within the city in 2001.

The data for the minority ethnic population within each of the four parliamentary constituencies is set out in Table 1. The data indicates that there were 4,310 people from a minority ethnic background resident in Belfast<sup>4</sup>, with the largest number being members of the Chinese community, followed by people of ‘mixed’<sup>5</sup> ethnic background and people from Indian, Pakistan and Bangladesh (presented in the table as ‘South Asian’). The Census data indicates that 30% of the total minority ethnic population lived in Belfast, with 57% of the minority ethnic population of Belfast living in South Belfast.

**Table 1: Minority Ethnic population by Belfast Parliamentary Constituency**

	Chinese	Mixed	South Asia	Other	Black	Traveller	Other Asian	Total
Belfast E	322	192	83	74	81	21	14	707
Belfast N	147	162	135	93	58	43	5	511
Belfast S	1108	399	456	293	139	61	57	2453
Belfast W	83	133	89	62	72	184	16	639
Tot B'fast	1660	886	763	522	350	309	92	4310
Total NI	4145	3319	2485	1290	1136	1710	194	14279

*Source: Census 2001*

The Census also reveals that Belfast had a total of 1,409 residents from six non-Christian faith backgrounds. This included 727 Muslims (out of a total of 1,943 Muslims in Northern Ireland), 224 Hindus (of 825 in NI), 202 Buddhists (of 533), 156 Jews (of 365), 58 Sikhs (of 219), and 42 people of the Ba’hai faith (out of 254 across

<sup>4</sup> The Census figures have been challenged from within the BME constituency as under-representing the size of the Chinese community in NI.

<sup>5</sup> This classification did not figure in previous attempts to identify ethnic diversity in NI and there is little understanding of the make up of those people who self-identified as ‘mixed’.

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NI). Belfast thus had 34% of the NI population of the six faiths. This data has not been broken down by parliamentary constituency by the Census unit.

However, alongside these distinctive and established communities there has been a significant population of people who can broadly be categorised as migrants, that is people who are resident in Belfast but were born outside of the UK and Ireland. The presence of a wider migrant population within Northern Ireland has only recently come to be recognised and acknowledged, primarily due to the publicity given to the issue as a result of the relatively high levels of immigration associated with the recent enlargement of the European Union. But the 2001 Census figures indicate that even at that time there were a significant number of people living in Belfast who were born outside of the UK and Ireland.

Table 2 reveals that in 2001 7,650 people who completed the Census were born outside the UK and Ireland. The table also shows that while the largest number of these migrants was from Asia, the next highest numbers were from Western Europe and North America. The data also shows that only a few people living in Belfast in 2001 were born in Eastern Europe.

**Table 2: Persons born outside of UK and Republic of Ireland by Belfast Parliamentary Constituency**

	West Europe	East Europe	Africa	Asia	North Am'ca	South Am'ca	Oceania	Other	Total
Belfast E	365	46	246	440	336	27	130	9	1599
Belfast N	311	34	109	294	278	13	105	13	1157
Belfast S	907	153	454	1551	685	64	211	34	4059
Belfast W	152	25	115	196	234	9	93	11	835
Tot B'fast	1735	258	924	2481	1533	113	539	67	7650
Total NI	6970	707	3116	7004	6093	374	2166	229	26659

*Source: Census 2001*

The table indicates that while the four Belfast parliamentary constituencies accounted for 20.6% of the total Northern Ireland population, some 29% of the total population of the non-UK and Ireland born population of Northern Ireland were living in Belfast, and they accounted for 2.2% of the population of the area.

It is also worth noting that over half of the Belfast migrants (53%) were living in South Belfast, while 21% were living in East Belfast, 15% in North Belfast and 11% in West Belfast. Finally, South Belfast had far and away the largest number of foreign born residents of any parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland, with nearly twice as many as the next highest constituency (North Down with 2,120 people). But while East Belfast had the sixth highest foreign born population, West Belfast had the third fewest number of foreign born residents and only Mid-Ulster and West Tyrone had less (Bell et al 2004: 123). The migrant population was thus disproportionately dispersed across the city.

**Thus the Census data indicates that in 2001 the four Belfast parliamentary constituencies contained:**

- **21% of the Northern Ireland population;**
- **30% of the minority ethnic population;**
- **34% of the minority faith population; and**
- **29% of the total migrant population of Northern Ireland.**

However, the Census was held five years ago and the patterns of migration to Northern Ireland have changed significantly since 2001 (Jarman 2006). The recent trends in migration have included a numbers of Portuguese speakers, initially recruited mainly to work in food processing factories in the Dungannon and Portadown area, nursing staff from the Philippines and India recruited to work in the public and private health sectors and most recently people from eastern European countries who moved to the UK following the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004.

The next section of this report attempts to assess the scale of the recent migration on the city Belfast and to analyse the key demographic elements of the new migrant population.

### 3. Estimating the New Migrant Population of Belfast

Although the growth in migration to Northern Ireland has been acknowledged for a number of years now, it has proved difficult to gauge with any degree of accuracy the number of people involved. In part this is because the free movement of people for nationals of the majority of European Union countries means there is no accurate way of documenting mobility, but in part it is also because there has been no systematic process whereby data is collected and analysed within Northern Ireland. Some categories of migrants are required to register or seek permission to enter to work, but this only captures a (unknown) proportion of those moving to Northern Ireland, it does not for example normally include spouses and children accompanying individuals who move here to seek work.

In an attempt to provide more accurate information on recent trends Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) published an overview of long-term international migration estimates for Northern Ireland (Beatty, Fegan and Marshall 2006). This report provides data on migration from five principal sources:

1. Registrations, under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS), of nationals from the eight Eastern European countries (A8) that joined the EU in May 2004, for the period May 2004 - March 2006;
2. Work permits issued for the period April 2004 – March 2006;
3. New registrations with a family doctor, for the year 2005;
4. Registrations for National Insurance Numbers (NINo) over the period April 2004 – March 2005; and
5. School census figures taken in October 2005.

Table 3 outlines the total figures for Belfast that appear in the NISRA report for the four categories of migrants that have been broken down by geography (the school census figures are not broken down by geography). The table also includes the number of migrants in Belfast in each category as a percentage of the Northern Ireland total; and the number in each category per 1000 residents of Belfast.

**Table 3: Recorded Migrants in Belfast**

Category	Period	Number	Percentage of NI Total	Per 1000 residents
WRS	05/04 – 03/06	2,675	19	10
Work Permits	04/04 – 03/06	1,549	23	6
NINo	04/04 – 03/05	1,842	33	7
GP Registrations	2005	2,937	22	11

*Source: Beatty, Fegan and Marshall 2006*

Unfortunately, the four categories cannot simply be added together to create a gross figure for the total number of working migrants because some migrants will be included within two or more sets of data.

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- The requirement to register under the WRS registrations or have a Work Permit apply to completely different nationalities and are therefore mutually exclusive. Thus the figures for these two categories can be added together to create a gross figure for legally registered working migrants.
- All working migrants are required to have a National Insurance Number but this data will also include people who are already captured under the WRS and Work Permit data, although not all those seeking a NINo will necessarily be included in the WRS and WP data sets.
- Similarly health service registrations will include some people who are included in the WRS and WP data sets but will include others who are not.

**It is possible to conclude that the combined data for WRS migrants and migrants with Work Permits indicates that the *minimum* number of working migrants who have arrived in Belfast between April 2004 and March 2006 is 4,224 people.**

### Proportionate Migration to Belfast

As was noted above Belfast has a higher than average proportion of the minority ethnic and faith population and of migrants to Northern Ireland as recorded in the 2001 Census. However, it is worth briefly comparing the official figures for recent migration to Belfast with the figures for migration to other towns in Northern Ireland.

The NISRA figures indicate that 4,224 people out of a Northern Ireland total of 21,129 new migrants lived in Belfast. The city thus houses 20% of all new migrants and Belfast therefore has a similar proportion of new migrants to its proportion of the total population of Northern Ireland.

**Table 4: Numbers of New Migrants per 000 population across NI.**

WRS + WP		NINos		Health Card	
Cookstown	37	Dungannon	11	Dungannon	28
Dungannon	29	Belfast	7	Craigavon	15
Ballymena	26	Craigavon	4	Belfast	11
Antrim	20	Antrim	3	Coleraine	11
Armagh	18	Armagh	3	Newry	11
Newry	18	Ballymena	3	Cookstown	10
Belfast	16	Cookstown	3	Omagh	10
Craigavon	15	Newry	3	Armagh	9
Fermanagh	13	Omagh	3	Fermanagh	9
Magherafelt	13			Antrim	8
Coleraine	12			Ballymena	8
NI Average	12	NI	3	NI	8

However, while Belfast accounts for both the greatest number and largest percentage of new migrants, a number of other towns have a higher proportion of new migrants

in relation to their current population (Table 4). In fact the NISRA data indicates that Belfast has 16 new WRS and WP migrants per 1000 population, and although this is above the NI average of 12 per 000 population, it is much lower than the 37 per 000 in Cookstown, 29 in Dungannon and 26 in Ballymena.

### **Beyond the Official Data**

The NISRA report provides a broad range of official data on migration for the first time. Nevertheless there are limitations with this data in trying to assess the total number of migrants:

1. The figures focus on long-term migrants - ie those staying for more than one year, therefore they ignore short-term migrants, who may account for a substantial proportion of the migrant population at any point in time.
2. The report does not attempt to analyse the apparent differences between the different data sets.
3. There is no assessment of the number of A8 nationals who do not register under the WRS, or of self-employed A8 nationals, while UK figures suggest that self-employment alone may add 33% to the total.
4. There is no allowance for dependents who accompany or subsequently join people moving for work.
5. There is no consideration of undocumented migrants or cross border migration factors.

The NISRA figures thus represent a somewhat conservative approach to assessing recent migrant and the figures are probably at the minimum end of the scale. There are two other approaches that might offer an insight into the numbers of migrants in Belfast, one is through a review of applications for National Insurance numbers and the other is by drawing on analysis of UK wide data.

### **Applications for NINOs**

The NISRA report does provide figures for National Insurance Numbers that have been allocated to individuals. However, as the authors note, there are considerably more applications for National Insurance Numbers than are eventually allocated. This discrepancy is due to failure to attend interview or follow through with the application, and as the NISRA study suggests in some cases this may be because the person has left the country before the process has been completed (Beatty, Fegan and Marshall 2006 para 39).

But there is probably a much wider range of reasons why people apply for NINOs but fail to complete the process. Some may well be short-term migrants, but who nevertheless work for while before leaving the country; others may choose to work informally and not pay National Insurance; others may stay for a short while and then move to another part of NI or Ireland. Thus the figures for NINo applications may indeed reflect the greater diversity of patterns within current the migration than is reflected in the search for the longer term trends.

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Table 5 is based on data provided by DSD to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for applications for NINOs at the seven Social Security Agency offices that cover the Belfast area. It gives a more detailed breakdown by nationality of applications for NINOs for the 31 months from April 2003 to October 2005 (note that the time period is different to that for the WRS and WP data periods). This data indicates that 6,669 people made an initial application for a NINo over the period.

**Table 5: NINo Applications in Belfast April 2003 – October 2005**

Nationality	A'town	Corp'tion Street	Falls Road	Ho'wood Road	Knock-breda	Shaf'bury Square	Shankill	Total
Polish	6	136	67	105	487	714	11	1,526
Indian	17	91	21	86	61	261	13	550
Slovak	7	32	13	58	112	264		486
Chinese		15		28		321		364
Filipino		35	61	75	57	113		341
Australian	8		11	36	41	166		262
Spanish	5	10	15			193		223
Czech		15		39	35	131		210
French				19	36	137		192
Malaysian			11			112		123
Lithuanian	10	47	10	17	35			119
S African		12		31	32		18	93
Latvian					41			41
USA	6	10						16
Italian			15					15
Canadian		11						11
German		10						10
								4,582
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>1,264</b>	<b>3,681</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>6,669</b>

*Note: Data was only available for the main nationalities in each SSA office, these total 4,582 people out of the total number of 6,669 applications.*

It is not possible to directly compare the numbers for people making an application for NINOs with the number who were allocated NINOs as the time period for the data sets are different. However, it is possible to make a broad assessment of the two sets of figures by comparing the number of applications and allocation per month. This process indicates that there was an average of 215 people applying for NINOs each month and an average of 154 people allocated a NINo per month.

**Averaging this out over a two year period would project to a figure of 5,160 people applying for a NINo in Belfast between April 2004 and March 2006.**

The table also provides some insight into the main nationalities of those migrants who applied for NINOs. The largest numbers of recorded nationalities were similar to that evidenced by other more general or anecdotal data: Poles, Indians, Slovaks, Chinese and Filipinos; but the data also highlights that other nationalities such as Australians,

Czech and Spanish are also well represented in Belfast. It is worth noting that there are comparatively few Lithuanians, compared with the numbers elsewhere in NI, and little evidence of Portuguese speakers in Belfast.

The differences in figures for the different offices is also of interest as the largest numbers of application have been made to the offices in the central area, south and east Belfast, with few applications being made in the north or west areas of the city.

**It is interesting to note that these figures for NINo applications reflects the earlier patterns of residence that were identified in the 2001 Census data, that the largest proportions of migrants are focused on the south and east of the city, with relatively smaller numbers associated with the north and west parts of Belfast.**

### Guesstimating Migration

It was noted that the figure of 4,224 recorded working migrants should be regarded as a minimum figure of migrants moving to Belfast, as there are a number of categories of migrants who may not be included in these figures for one reason or another. In this section we will try to suggest an informed guesstimate of a less conservative figure.

1. The official figures do not include any migrants from those states that were members of the European Union prior to May 2004, nor to nationals of Cyprus and Malta who were excluded from the requirements of the WRS.
2. Not all A8 migrants may register under the WRS registration scheme. A comparison between applications for National Insurance Numbers from A8 nationals and registrations under the WRS suggest that perhaps one in three migrants do not register (Jarman 2006).
3. Self-employed A8 migrants are not required to register under the WRS. Estimates for the UK suggest that self-employed A8 migrants may increase the WRS figures by one third<sup>6</sup>.
4. The figures do not include dependents. Data from the Health Card registration scheme suggest that 16% of new migrants registering are children under the age of 18 (see below), while UK data suggests that one in twelve A8 migrant workers had an accompanying dependent, either spouses or children<sup>7</sup>.
5. An unknown number of migrants will be legal undocumented, including:
  - people who initially had a work permit but no longer have one;
  - people who have entered NI in an irregular manner;
  - people who have legal status in RoI but are now based in NI;
  - trafficked persons (Dudley 2006; Skrivankova 2006).

It is necessarily difficult, if not impossible to accurately assess the number of undocumented migrants, but translating recent UK estimates to NI would suggest that there may be somewhere between 3,000 and 12,000 undocumented migrants in Northern Ireland (Woodbridge 2005; Jarman 2006) in contrast the UK

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<sup>6</sup> See [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/5273356.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5273356.stm)

<sup>7</sup> See [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/5273356.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5273356.stm)

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Immigration Service made a guesstimate of 2,000 undocumented migrants in NI in 2003 (Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre 2004:46).

Each of these additional categories of workers and their dependents will increase the total number of migrants living and or working in Belfast. By following the formulae for each category based on the above criteria it is possible to assess the number of recent migrants to Belfast. These are set out in the table below.

**Table 6: Estimate of Number of Migrants coming to Belfast between April 2004 and March 2006**

Category	Number of Persons
Workers Registration Scheme	2,675
Unregistered A8 Workers (30% of total)	802
Self Employed A8 workers (30% of total)	802
Work Permits	1,549
Dependents (16% of total)	728
Undocumented (20% of NI total estimate)	600
Other EU Member states <sup>8</sup>	350
Total	7,506

**By including a ‘guesstimate’ figure for range of specified categories of unregistered or unrecorded migrant workers it is suggested that a figure of 7,506 new migrants coming to Belfast between Aril 2004 and March 2006 is not unreasonable.**

### Summary

The available data does not give a comprehensive inclusive figure for recent migration to Belfast. The combined data for migrants registering under the Worker Registration Scheme and those with Work Permits indicates that the *minimum* number of working migrants who have arrived in Belfast between April 2004 and March 2006 is 4,224 people.

However, by projecting from the available figures for the number of applications made for National Insurance Number a possible figure of 5,160 migrants is reached.

Alternatively by building in projections for dependents and those outside of the formal recording system, it is possible to argue for an upper limit of 7,500 migrants coming to Belfast in the two years from April 2004.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on number of nationals registering for NINOs in Belfast, Table 4. This is likely to be a low estimate.

#### 4. Demographic Profiles

This section of the report reviews the available data outline the recent patterns of migration according to the migrants nationality, gender and age.

##### Migrant Data by Nationality

The data on the 4,224 people recorded through the WRS and WP systems can be analysed by their nationality. There are eighteen nationalities with twenty-five or more individuals recorded as registered with an employer based in Belfast in the two year period between April 2004 – March 2006. Table 7 gives the figures for the main nationalities that are working in Belfast and the percentage of each nationality recorded in Belfast compared with the total number recorded in Northern Ireland.

**Table 7: Migrants to Belfast by Nationality**

Nationality	Number in Belfast	Belfast as % of NI total
Poland	1,680	24
Slovakia	500	23
Philippines	395	34
India	375	26
Czech Republic	240	31
Lithuania	160	5
China	150	36
USA	120	54
South Africa	75	39
Latvia	55	6
Malaysia	50	51
Canada	40	83
Japan	40	83
Nigeria	40	77
Bangladesh	30	50
Hungary	25	14
Kenya	25	76
Zimbabwe	25	74
Estonia	10	17
Countries with less than 20 WP registrations	180	66
Total	4,224	20
Total Population	277,170	16

The WRS and WP data indicates that 20% of recorded migrants are working for employers based in Belfast but it also indicates that there are large differences in the percentages of different national groups working in Belfast.

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- Three quarters or more of all Canadians, Japanese, Kenyans, Nigerians and Zimbabweans are working in Belfast.
- More than half of Americans, Bangladeshis and Malaysians are employed in Belfast.
- Around one third of Chinese, Czechs, Filipinos and South Africans work in Belfast.
- Belfast also has a slightly higher percentage of Indians, Poles and Slovaks than average.
- The city also has a somewhat smaller percentage of Latvians, Lithuanians and Hungarians.

It is also worth noting that the WRS and WP data does not capture any figures for nationals from EU15 Countries living or working in Belfast, because they have the right to move here and take up employment without any form of registration. The NISRA data on NINo allocations can be broken down by nationality however, and this indicates that forty-five Spaniards, forty-five French, thirty German and twenty-five Portuguese people based in Belfast were allocated NINos between April 2004 and March 2005<sup>9</sup>. These figures also record that sixty-five Australians received NINos in the same period.

Data from an ICR study on experiences of racism in the health sector (2005) included responses from 275 migrant workers and this indicated that 50% of migrant staff were from the Philippines, with 17% from India and 8% from Malaysia. A previous smaller sample of forty-eight migrants (2003) found 54% of Belfast migrants were Filipino and 38% were Indian. Both studies included only very small numbers of east Europeans, but this is probably reflective of the fact that the dynamics of migration have changed rapidly over recent years and also can be employment sector specific.

Finally, the Electoral Office has released data of the number of European Union nationals who were on the electoral register prior for the March 2007 elections. This revealed that there were 1,162 EU nationals registered to vote in the four Belfast constituencies. This included 587 people in the South Belfast constituency, 249 in East Belfast, 233 in North Belfast and just ninety-three in West Belfast. The following table (Table 8 over) shows the breakdown of each constituency by nationality of electoral registrations.

The table indicates that the largest number of EU nationals registered to vote were Polish people (33% of the total) followed by French (12%), Germans (10%), Spaniards (7%) and Italians (7%). There were no people from Bulgaria (a recent member of the EU), Luxembourg or Slovenia registered to vote in Belfast.

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting the differences in this data, with the data for applications for NINos set out in Table 5. We will not try to analyse or explain these differences but merely highlight the variations to indicate that limitations of the current available data.

**Table 8: EU nationals on the Electoral Register in Belfast Constituencies, 2007**

	East Belfast	North Belfast	South Belfast	West Belfast	Total
Austria	2	2	2		6
Belgium	3	4	4	3	14
Bulgaria					
Cyprus		1	2		3
Czech Rep.	2	3	21	2	28
Denmark	3	3	12		18
Estonia	3		4		7
Finland	4	3	5	1	13
France	35	30	68	8	141
Germany	22	17	71	9	119
Greece	2	2	4	2	10
Hungary	1	3	4		8
Italy	9	8	45	13	75
Latvia		4	9	3	16
Lithuania	7	13	12	6	38
Luxembourg					
Malta			2		2
Netherlands	12	10	36	3	61
Poland	87	76	192	27	382
Portugal	9	13	15	4	41
Romania				1	1
Slovakia	19	22	22	4	67
Slovenia					
Spain	19	13	41	6	79
Sweden	10	6	14	1	31
	249	233	587	93	1162

### Gender of Migrants

The available data can also indicate the gender of those people taking up work in Belfast (Table 9). The WRS data indicates that there are more than twice as many male migrants as female migrants from the A8 countries. However, the Work Permit data, the figures for NINo allocations and the data on Health Card registrations suggest that there is a much more even balance between the genders.

The combined figures for WRS registrations and Work Permits suggest that just over 60% of recorded recent migrants working in Belfast are male and fewer than 40% are female. However it should be noted that in some cases the nature of the employment will also have an impact on gender balance, the ICR research for the Department of Health, for example, indicated that 66% of migrants and BME staff working in the health sector were female and 34% were male.

**Table 9: Gender of Migrants to Belfast**

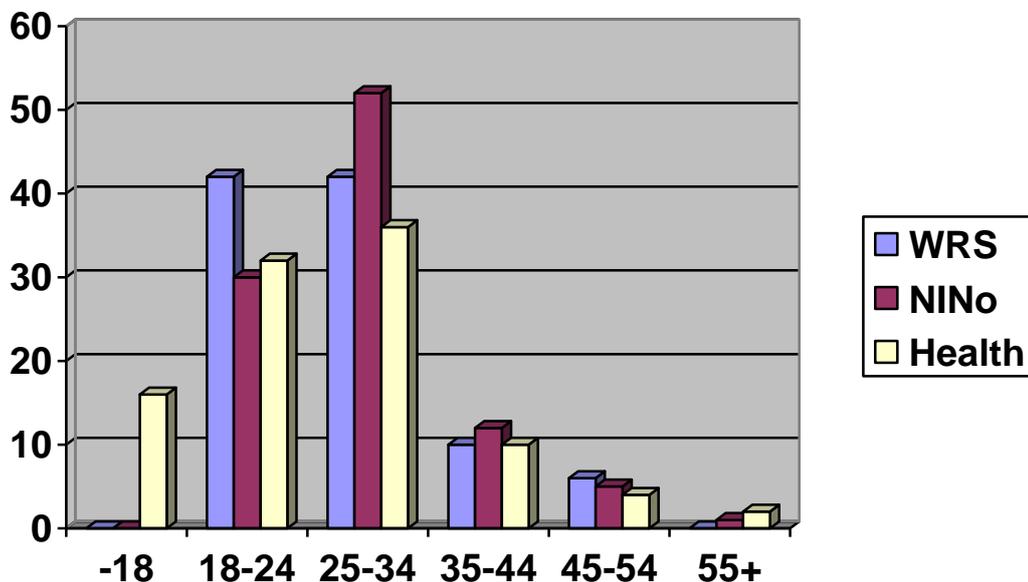
Category	Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%
WRS	1,845	69	830	31
Work Permit	740	48	810	52
NINo	1,000	54	840	46
Health Registrations	1,465	50	1,475	50
WRS + WP	2,585	61	1,640	39

**Age Profile of Migrants**

The data on the WRS registrations, NINo allocations and Health Card registrations can all be broken down by age groups. None of the three data sets indicate any great differences between the age ranges of males or females among recent migrants.

The data indicate that the vast majority of recent migrants to Belfast fall within the 18-34 age range, with a somewhat younger profile for migrants from the A8 countries than the wider a range of countries represented in the National Insurance figures (Figure 1). Each of the three data sets indicates that only around 10% of recent migrants are aged between 35 and 44 and that relatively few recent migrants are over the age of 45.

**Figure 1: Percentage of table recorded recent migrants by age group**



The Health Card registration statistics are the only data that provides any information on young people. This data indicates that 16% of recent migrants who have registered

with the health system are under the age of 16%, this accounts for 470 individuals, 230 males and 240 females.

A somewhat different and slightly older age profile was evident in the two ICR studies of migrants. The 2003 study for OFMDFM include 19% of people aged 36-50 and 6% aged over 50, while the study for the Department of Health included 34% of people in the 36-50 age range and 6% over 50 years of age.

The data from the Department of Health suggests that recruiting a more skilled workforce may also mean recruiting a slightly older workforce, whereas the more recent data from the WRS and NINo samples is more in line with the presumed younger profile of the recent migration from eastern Europe.

### **Migrants and Children**

An older migrant population may also be more likely to have family members and / or dependents. The ICR survey for OFMDFM found that two thirds of those migrants who were married were living with their spouse in Northern Ireland and a similar percentage also had children living with them.

There are two other sets of figures that can provide further information on children and young people in this context: births to mothers born outside the UK or Republic of Ireland and school census figures.

Data supplied by NISRA indicates that there was a total of 3,290 registered births in Belfast in 2005. This figure includes twenty children whose mother was born in an A8 country, 260 whose mother was born in another country and five where the birth country of the mother was unknown. This means that 8.6% of births in Belfast in 2005 were to mothers born outside of the UK or Ireland.

The school census, taken each October, provides information on the number of children with English as an Additional Language at each level of the system and by their first language. Table 10 sets out the available figures for each of the five ELBs.

**Table 10: Children with English as an Additional Language, 2005-2006<sup>10</sup>**

	Nursery	Reception	P1-P7	Post- Prim.	Total
BELB	61	0	400	277	738
WELB	#	#	172	51	242
NEELB	#	#	318	93	443
SEELB	#	#	307	92	443
SELB	45	6	574	188	813
Total	194	13	1,771	701	2679

<sup>10</sup> No figures were available for children in pre-school facilities or for children with special needs.

The table indicates that 31% of nursery children with English as an additional language were at school in Belfast, as were 23% of primary school pupils and 40% of post primary pupils. Overall 28% of pupils with English as an additional language were at school in Belfast. The figures for children at school in Belfast who have a first language other than English are set out in Table 11.

**Table 11: First Language Other than English for Belfast School Children, 2005-2006**

	Cantonese	Mandarin	Hindi	Urdu	Bengali	Punjabi	Others	Total
Nursery	10		9				42	61
Primary	50		13	10	14	6	299	400
P- Primary	124	18	10		9		109	277
Total	184	18	32	10	33	6	450	738

The school census data also suggests something of how the patterns of first languages are changing. The data collection appears to focus on first languages associated with the established minority ethnic communities, which are primarily Chinese and South Asian languages, while high proportion of children with English as an additional language are included in the ‘Other’ category. This broad category is not yet being broken down into specific languages although it includes 75% of primary school pupils, 69% of nursery school pupils and 40% of secondary school pupils. This suggests that language categories used for the census data need to be revised to reflect the growing diversity of languages in schools.

**There is a clear need for the publication of school census data on first language other than English to be refined and revise to reflect the increasing diversity of languages. The majority of such children do not speak the Chinese and South Asian languages that are currently highlighted.**

### Skills and Education

It is not possible to obtain any information about the education, skill or language abilities of the new migrant population from the NISRA data. Nevertheless some small indications can be gathered from the two ICR surveys that included samples of migrants living in Belfast and a large majority of whom were working in the health sector.

The 2003 OFMDFM survey indicated that all forty-eight respondents had a university education. However, while 85% said their educational qualifications were recognised in Northern Ireland, 15% said their qualifications were not recognised here.

The 2005 survey of health workers did not ask about educational background, but 66% of respondents whose qualifications were gained outside the UK said that their qualifications were recognised here, while 16% said that they were not. Furthermore, 27% of the sample said that they had to retrain in the UK before they could work here.

In both cases the respondents had or claimed a high standard of both written and spoken English, which is as one might have expected of people predominately working in the health sector and who had been working here for some time.

Finally it is worth noting that OFMDFM survey sample indicated that 83% of respondents were living in privately rented accommodation, while 11% were owner-occupiers, while two people had their houses provided by their employer and one person was living in a Housing Executive property.

### **Summary**

The available data indicates that the largest numbers of new migrants to Belfast come from Poland, followed Slovaks, Filipinos, Indians and Czechs. However, there is also a substantial number of people from other western European countries living in the city. There are also some considerable variations by employment sector, with health sector migrants predominantly employing Filipinos, Indians and Malays, but relatively few east Europeans.

The current evidence suggests that around 61% of migrants working in Belfast are males and 39% are females, although there is a higher percentage of male migrants among people coming from eastern Europe.

Overall the majority of migrants fall within the 18-34 age range, with relatively few migrants over the age of forty-five. Again the health sector data suggests as somewhat older age profile with around one in three migrants being over the age of 35.

The data also suggests that some 16% of new migrants are children under the age of sixteen, and the school census also indicates that 61% of children who require English as an additional language support do not speak one of the established minority languages.

Some limited information from other studies of migrants in Belfast indicated that those migrants working in the health sector were well educated and qualified, they had a good command of English and lived in the rented sector.

## 5. Emerging Patterns

The statistical findings indicate that there has been a steady increase in the number of migrant workers moving to Northern Ireland, and in particular Belfast. According to McVeigh (2006):

*Migrant workers are no longer a 'new' or temporary phenomenon. They are an embedded part of the social fabric of Northern Ireland. This has significant implications for the local, non-migrant worker population.*

But if 'migrant workers' are becoming a more acknowledged feature of the local social fabric, so too must we recognise that the category, or term 'migrant worker' has begun to obscure as much as it reveals.

While there is a general acceptance that there is great deal of ethnic and national diversity among the new migrant population, so too is there considerable diversity of reasons for migration, and expectations of the process of moving home. For some moving is an opportunity to work for a short time to earn money, for others the focus might be on learning a language, others might regard it as a career move, while some see the move as long term or permanent.

### Plans and Expectations

Anecdotal evidence from a variety of respondents suggests that there are three broad categories of migrant workers residing in Belfast, and although this is not a fixed or bounded categorization, it does help in trying to identify the broad needs and interests of the new migrant population. The main categories are

1. **Short-term migrants:** People who have travelled on their own, leaving families behind, and with the intention of working in Belfast for a maximum of two years. They appear to have little interest in integrating within the wider society and see their presence as transitory.
2. **Medium-term migrants:** People who have travelled on their own, leaving their families behind, with the aim of working in Belfast for an undetermined period of years. They intend to return home to work in their own country, but are likely to embrace the local culture and learn the English language. This will assist their ability to integrate into Northern Irish society, but will also benefit them when they return home.
3. **Long-term migrants:** These are migrants who move to Belfast with their family. They enrol their children in school, have long term goals of owning their own home and wish to integrate into society. This group's needs and interests are very different from the previous two as they have long term ambitions to settle in Northern Ireland. The long-term migrants might well form the core of more formalised new minority communities and may therefore be more interested in working in partnership with organisations that aim to assist in integration.

It is important to note that these categories are not fixed. Some people may come to Northern Ireland with the intention of staying for only a short period, but a change in circumstances can often mean that they stay longer than they initially planned. In other cases people may intend to stay for a longer time but then return home sooner than they had initially intended.

It has been suggested that the key period for making a decision about returning home or building a life in the new country or location is two years. In the first two years an individual's relationship with the new home is still relatively temporary, but after two years they become more established and it becomes more difficult to uproot and return home.

### **New Communities**

In the last five years one of the most prominent new communities groups to be established in Northern Ireland, and specifically Belfast, is the Polish community. The exact number of Poles in Northern Ireland is uncertain, but one Polish resident claimed that there are approximately 9,000 members of the Polish community in Belfast. It is notable that in 2006 the first magazine aimed specifically at the Polish community, *Glosik*<sup>11</sup>, was launched. It has a print run of 5,000 copies and deals with a range of issues such as work, employment law, the education system, housing and healthcare. Further indications of the growing prominence of the Polish population is the number of shops selling Polish products, bars selling Polish beers and social events aimed at the local Polish population.

One indication of developments within the Polish community is that there is a regular meeting each Saturday to discuss issues and concerns facing the community and to provide an opportunity for Poles to meet each other. The meetings, organised by Poles who are now established in Belfast, regularly attracts a hundred people each week, with the figure increasing. This in turn has raised issues of resources and a suitable venue, meetings have been held in community facilities in south Belfast, which in turn has helped integrate the Polish population into the wider community. Byrne et al (2006) noted that the Clergy Fellowship, a collection of different churches in the Ballynafeigh area, organises welcome nights for different minority ethnic communities, and one church holds a regular mass in Polish.

The Polish community is dispersed throughout the city, although there are a significant number of Poles based in south Belfast. But recently, the patterns of migration within this population have begun to change, and more families with young children are establishing themselves in Belfast. This has in turn begun to raise issues in relation to housing provision and education for children. One respondent from the Polish community noted that difficulties had been experienced in enrolling young people in both pre and post-primary education, with children often starting the school year late as a result of the complex administrative system.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.glosik.eu](http://www.glosik.eu)

Attempts were made to engage with nationals from some of the other eastern European countries who are residing in Belfast, but this proved difficult. The statistics indicate that there are growing numbers of Czech, Latvian, Lithuanian and Slovakian people residing in the city, but it appears that they have not yet established community associations and networks in the same way that the Polish community have done. Some agencies, including trade unions, have tried to organise meeting with these smaller communities, but with little interest as yet.

The Lithuanian population is probably second to the Polish in terms of the new eastern European communities. One Lithuanian woman suggested that there might be as many as 15,000 Lithuanians living in Northern Ireland, with substantial numbers in the Belfast area. However, this is not reflected in the currently available data and it is thus difficult to determine the scale of the Lithuanian population in the Belfast area. There have been attempts by members of the Lithuanian community to develop a forum or an action group, but a lack of interest from the wider community meant that this was not pursued. In contrast, there is evidence of a more organised and established Lithuanian community in the Republic and a Lithuanian language paper, *Saloje*, based in Dublin is sold throughout the country.

There are no specific services targeting the Lithuanian population in the north, although one respondent noted that STEP in Dungannon offered translation services for Lithuanians and facilities for weekend schooling for Lithuanian children, while NICEM in Belfast offers information and advice on migration issues. More recently the Lithuanian embassy in London has also begun to develop initiatives around counselling its people on consular issues.

It is likely that over the next few years that the Lithuanian population and some of the other eastern European nationalities will follow the example of the Polish population and begin to establish themselves as more structured and identified communities.

### **Levels of Education**

Employers and respondents from the education sector believe that in recent years there has been an increase in the number of migrants with a high level of education and with experience of working in professional occupations arriving in Belfast. According to several respondents the main motivation for some migrants was not primarily economic, but rather was educational. There was a suggestion that many people had left good jobs in their home countries and moved to Belfast to acquire or improve their English, but that they would return to further their careers in the home country.

It is believed that having fluent English as a second language there was a greater opportunity for them to pursue a successful career in their own country, or in other English speaking countries. As a result, such migrants were not concerned about the types of jobs that they acquired in Belfast, as their main aspiration was learning the language rather than earning more money. Consequently in some cases well-educated,

professional individuals were employed in low paid manual work, although they regarded this as a short term measure while their language skills developed.

Employers and migrants were also both keen to stress the importance of knowledge and ability in the English language, even if the intention was to work here for a short period of time. Discussions with those involved in delivering English language programmes highlighted the importance migrant workers place on this subject. Staff at Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education noted a dramatic increase in the numbers of individuals attending courses in 'English as a Second Language', from 350 people in 2002-2003, to 2,500 by 2005-2006. Although this figure also included international students, the BIFHE respondent estimated that nearly 90% of students would be classified as migrant workers.

However, even though there has been a marked increase in the number of people enrolling in ESOL classes, the college has seen its financial budget for these programmes significantly reduced. As a result students are now required to fund the classes themselves. Such factors will in turn have implications for the wider process of integration of new migrants.

### **Providing Support**

The issue of English language provision highlights a key point about the new migration: it has been largely driven by the needs of private sector employers (the NHS being the major exception), but it places demands on the services provided by various parts of the statutory sector, and on the community and voluntary sector.

In the Belfast area, organisations such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the PSNI and the various Health Trusts have begun to adapt their services to meet the needs of the growing migrant worker population, while bodies such as the Housing Rights Service and the Labour Relations Agency have increasingly to deal with clients of varying ethnic backgrounds and very different language needs. Issues and problems associated with housing and employment have been associated with more frequent enquiries, and these, and other such organisations, have had to adapt and respond to the changing context.

A further indicator of the growing scale of migrants in the Belfast area comes from discussion with the Citizens Advice Bureau which revealed that their branches on the Antrim Road and Falls Road have seen a small but significant increase in the number of inquires from migrant workers about benefits, employment and housing. Such organisations are having to adapt their services to meet the needs of a diverse client group, which in turn has implications on their resources. It also illustrates how the new migrant population will engage with a wider range of services and resources as it grows and becomes more established in the city.

**It is important to note however that there is a need to balance the provision of translation and interpreting services with the provision of an appropriate level of resources to enable and encourage non-English speakers to learn that language.**

## 6. Employment Perspectives

Employment patterns for new migrants were seen to be somewhat different in Belfast compared with other parts of Northern Ireland. Much of our current understanding of the recent patterns of immigration has been focused on the recruitment of workers from the European Union into the food processing industry and in areas of agricultural work (Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre 2004). And although the use of foreign labour in the meat processing factories, in places such as Ballymena, Derry Londonderry, Dungannon, Portadown, and in the mushroom industry around the border has been important, the British government data on the integration of eastern European migrants into the Northern Irish economy has indicated that employment patterns are much more diverse (Home Office 2007).

In many ways it was the relative scale of new migrants in taking up work in the food processing sector and moving to provincial towns such as Cookstown and Dungannon that raised the issue to prominence. In contrast the movement of new migrants to Belfast has been largely ignored.

The Belfast economy is not dominated by a small number of large employers; it is not dominated by a small number of industries. Rather the diversity of the Belfast economy has tended to dilute our understanding of the scale and nature of the inward migration into the city. In contrast to the prominent food processing industries of mid-Ulster, employment opportunities in Belfast have been more varied, and the main opportunities have been found in the hospitality sector, in the construction industry, in the public and private health sector and in IT. There are also substantial opportunities for casual employment through the many local recruitment agencies. Furthermore, each of these sectors is in itself diverse and varied and includes many small employers scattered throughout the city, thus making it difficult to discern the emerging patterns.

There was a strong perception among the interviewees from the business community that the majority of migrant workers within Belfast and Northern Ireland were working legally and were in possession of the appropriate documentation. The employers also noted that recent legislation (Gangmasters Licensing Act 2004) made it illegal for employers to source labour from recruitment agencies within or outside the UK who operated without a gangmasters licence. However, it is unclear how effective this legislation has been so far.

There are undoubtedly some migrants working in Belfast who are here with an irregular or undocumented status, but there has been little research on this issue to date, apart from preliminary work on various forms of trafficking (Dudley 2006; Skrivankova 2006). The greatest concern for such people however, is their vulnerability to exploitation, the denial of their basic human rights and the potential for them to fall through any safety net (Bicocchi and LeVoy 2007; Holder, McAliskey and Lenaghan 2006). These areas remain the dark underbelly of the new migration. This research did not attempt to explore this aspect of the migrant economy as it was outside the scope and capacity of the project. Nevertheless it remains an issue requiring further research, investigation and understanding.

This section briefly reviews some of the key findings in relation to the four major employment sectors in Belfast that draw on migrant labour: construction, health, hospitality and IT. It then reviews the findings of our conversations with a number of recruitment agencies and ends by identifying some examples of recognised good practice among employers and finally offers some perspectives from the trade unions.

### **Construction**

The construction industry is one of the fastest growing sectors for the employment of migrant workers in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately much of the evidence for this has been anecdotal, as there has been limited statistics available. However, research published in February 2007 by the Construction Industries Training Board indicated that 16% of employers in the industry across Northern Ireland employed non-British and Irish staff and it was estimated that some 5% of people involved within the construction workforce of 70,000 in Northern Ireland are migrants (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2007). The largest number appear to be Polish workers, followed by Lithuanians and Latvians, with smaller numbers from Slovakia, Czech republic, Portugal, Switzerland, Brazil and Palestine. The various employers of migrant labour indicated that the main issues for them were related to limited language skills and demands for general health and safety training.

According to those in the industry, the recent economic boom within Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland has resulted in a massive expansion in construction projects. Consequently, there has been an increase in the demand for labour in this sector, which in some cases has been filled by migrant workers. The largest number of workers appears to come from Poland and Lithuania. An example of this occurred when a Polish company was sub-contracted to undertake work in the new Victoria Square development and immediately brought over approximately one hundred Polish workers to assist on the project. This was one of the first occasions that a foreign company had been sub-contracted work on a construction development in Belfast, although there are other examples where companies have had to source abroad for workers due to a shortage of skilled workers in Northern Ireland.

The current situation in Belfast is different to that in the Republic of Ireland, where it is not uncommon to find construction sites dominated by foreign firms and migrant workers, here the majority of building sites are run by locally based construction firms and local workers are aided by a small number of migrants.

The industry has begun to respond to the growing diversity in the workforce. There has been an increase in requests from employers about information on health and safety training in different languages, on the translation of signs, and on the provision of information on workers rights. The Construction Industry Training Board and the Construction Employees Federation are developing an information pack for migrant workers and employers in the construction industry. Due for publication in late 2007, it will provide employers with information on legislation, health and safety and workers rights. Furthermore, the CEF has begun to use their 'State of Trade Surveys' to monitor the patterns of employment of migrant workers, which will allow them to

determine the numbers of migrants in the industry and to assess if they are responding adequately to their needs.

There was a perception that the employment of migrant workers in the construction industry in Belfast was dependent on a number of factors: in particular these include the continuation of government and private investment in regeneration and the maintenance of low levels of unemployment. There is some considerable uncertainty about the impact that the redevelopment and regeneration of the Titanic Quarter might have on both the construction industry and the employment of migrant workers and there has been similar speculation of what might happen if contracts were won by foreign companies, as has been the case with some of the larger sites in Dublin.

However, any attempt to map out the future trends of the industry is problematic. It was interesting to note that some employers raised concerns about the long-term impact of the recruitment of foreign workers to compensate for the lack of skilled workers as this could have a negative impact on the numbers of young people having the opportunity to serve apprenticeships in the construction sector. It was also suggested that if construction firms could recruit skilled employees on minimal or low wages they would not have to spend time, resources and money in training young people to do similar jobs, which could have a long term impact on the local employment sector and economy.

### **Health**

It is generally recognised that there is a substantial number of migrants and minority ethnic people working in both the public and private health sectors in Northern Ireland. There are a number of large hospitals in the Belfast area, including the Royal Hospitals Group, Belfast City, the Mater, Ulster, and Musgrave Park Hospital, and all of these have recruited nursing staff internationally. However, research on racism within the health sector has indicated it is not possible to obtain precise information on the number of ethnic minority staff in either sector (Betts and Hamilton 2006).

However, it is possible to provide an indication of the level of migrant workers employed within the health sector. The 2001 Census indicated that there were 2,186 people employed in health and social work who were born outside the United Kingdom or Republic of Ireland (Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre 2004) and a parliamentary question from Iris Robinson in February 2005 revealed that in January 2005 there were 812 overseas nurses employed by the various health trusts across Northern Ireland, these numbers do not appear to have increased significantly since this time. The majority of the nursing staff has been recruited from the Philippines and India (Betts and Hamilton 2006).

It is important to note that these figures apply to nursing staff and excludes auxiliary staff and support services associated with the running of the health service, for which there is no accurate data. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that a growing number of new migrants, from a wider range of countries, are working in the health sector, either directly for a local health trust, for a private company servicing the NHS

or for a private health company. Many of the overseas health care staff have been recruited via recruitment agencies in their home countries and there has been a notable growth in the number of recruitment agencies in Northern Ireland offering this service (RCN 2003).

The importance of migrant labour within the health sector across the UK and Ireland has been widely acknowledged, not least by the hospitals themselves, and this sector appears to be one that will be reliant on international labour for the foreseeable future. It is disappointing that there is so little information available, although the DHSSPS are encouraging better monitoring practices. It is also significant that the nursing staff in particular come from very different countries (Philippines, India) to those people being recruited in other employment sectors and we might therefore also expect that they experience a somewhat different range of problems and issues, than migrants from eastern European countries working in other sectors.

### **Hospitality**

Research by Devine et al (2006) estimated that there are 2,000 migrant workers in the Northern Ireland hospitality industry. A significant section of this population is based within the Belfast area and are employed in a diverse range of bars, cafes, restaurants and hotels. Our discussions with employers in the hotel sector revealed a growing reliance on migrant labour in their respective businesses. There has been a steady increase in the employment of migrants over the last five years, with a significant number coming from eastern European countries, mainly Poland and Lithuania.

A number of organisations stated that they have changed their recruitment practices in recent years. In the past the employers went to various countries to recruit staff directly, but now there is a pool of foreign born workers available in Northern Ireland. Increasingly the networks of existing eastern European workers provide the information and contacts that draw others to Northern Ireland with the expectation that work is easily available. There was an expectation that as Belfast expanded and as regeneration increased there would be an expansion in service sector and in the number of bars, cafes, restaurants and hotels, and thus there would be an increase in demand for good, professional staff.

The majority of the migrant workers recruited by the hotel side of the industry enter at the service level, and take up positions in house-keeping, kitchens, restaurant and bar work. However, it was apparent that an increasing number were also taking up opportunities to progress in-house and were increasingly taking up supervisory or managerial positions. The employers noted that many of the recent migrants were better educated and had higher levels of educational attainment and English language abilities than migrants who had been recruited in the past, even from three years ago.

A number of organisations have adapted their practices as a result of their increased migrant workforce. Many organisations feel that by providing good training for migrants, integrating them into the wider workforce and meeting their needs (one employer, for example, stated that they now subsidised ESOL classes for employees

with poor English) will help create a more productive environment, which will ultimately be beneficial to the organisation and the employer. One respondent indicated that a substantial element of their current staff training was delivered through computer programmes, which in turn have a number of language options, this creating greater flexibility for migrant staff.

One possible impact in this greater level of investment in new staff is that several employers believed that their non-national staff were now remaining for longer in their positions and regarding work in the hospitality sector as long term and perhaps the basis for a career rather than simply casual labour. This has meant that in some organisations there is now less of a demand for staff, in what was notoriously seen as an industry with a high ratio of staff turnover.

In considering the future demand for migrant labour in the hospitality sector there are two somewhat contradictory possibilities emerging, there could be either an undersupply of staff or an oversupply of staff.

To date there has been an adequate supply of workers to meet the growing needs of the hospitality sector, but there were concerns among some employers whether this would continue, particularly as employment options become available in other parts of the European Union. One employer spoke of the difficulties they had in recruiting people from the local population as there was a perception among Northern Irish people that work in the hospitality sector involved low pay and long and often unsociable hours and combined with low unemployment rates has meant that it is difficult to recruit staff locally. There was thus a view that the hospitality industry could struggle if there was a fall in the numbers of migrant workers.

The contrasting view noted that if migrant workers are to continue to be attracted to moving to Belfast at their current rate there will need to be a steady avenue of employment opportunities available for them. However, if the current workforce within the hospitality industry stabilises and remains in post and there is less staff turnover then there will be less demand and opportunities for new migrant workers and this may reduce the number of people moving here in search of work.

### **IT**

There has been a steady increase in the number of overseas workers that have been employed within the growing IT industry in Belfast and wider parts of Northern Ireland. One leading technology organisation in Belfast indicated that about one in ten of its current work force originated from countries outside of the UK and Republic of Ireland. They stated that a shortage of skilled workers locally was the primary reason for employing people from outside of Northern Ireland. They also stated that they have had to adapt their recruitment procedures in recent years and their human resources department now conducts interviews in a number of different countries. A significant number of their newer employees come from India and Poland, which are viewed as having a comprehensive education system and provide well qualified staff.

Employers in the IT sector appear to provide some considerable support to new staff recruited from overseas, compared with other sectors, and this probably reflects the resources that are committed to the recruitment process. There was a perception among employers that it was important that new employees from other countries be assisted in relocating to Belfast, this might include paying for their initial flight, helping to cover the first month's accommodation costs and helping staff to open accounts with local banks. Furthermore, in at least one major organisation all staff were expected to participate in some diversity training, with the focus on issues associated with racism and ethnicity, rather than on religion and sectarianism.

Employers were asked for their perceptions of the benefits that migrant workers would receive by coming to Northern Ireland. The general consensus was that these were primarily economic, although there was also an opportunity for them to gain a better command of the English language. There was a view that migrant workers' long-term goals were to re-establish themselves in their own countries and develop their careers at home, but it was felt that working abroad could be a means to enhance their opportunities to achieve their goals.

It was also interesting to note that one employer felt that migrant workers were more inclined to stay longer with their company compared to local employees, even though the nature of the IT industry meant that there was a very high turnover of staff. One employer, for example, had begun to notice a change in the pattern of the individual migration process, with more people bringing their immediate families with them at the outset of the employment and enrolling their children in the local education system. These changes may indicate a greater sense of the commitment to the move and also of the changing perception of Belfast as a safe place to live.

### **Recruitment Agencies**

We contacted forty-four recruitment agencies to assess their knowledge and experience of migrant workers, thirty-three of the agencies responded with varying degrees of information. A number of themes emerged from these discussions that provided a comprehensive view of the current employment status of migrant workers in Belfast, although it should be noted that these factors only apply to that section of the migrant population who had sought employment through a recruitment agency.

### **Pattern Changes**

It was apparent that in the last two to three years there had been a significant increase in the number of migrant workers enquiring about employment. One agency stated that they had seventy two different nationalities registered for work, while another agency indicating that they had up to 1,100 migrant workers on their books. Most agencies indicated that they dealt mainly with individuals from eastern European countries, with the most significant group coming from Poland. A number of the agencies noted that five years ago they had no migrant workers registered to work thus emphasising the speed and recentness of these changes.

There was also a notable change in the practices of migrant workers with more people coming directly into their offices to enquire about work, and fewer agencies having to recruit labour from abroad. This suggested that people were either coming here with the expectation that they would find work reasonably easily or that they were happy to change jobs or look around once they were here.

It is also worth noting that a number of the agencies noted a greater willingness from their employer clients to take on migrant workers, whereas in the past some employers were reluctant to do so. There is therefore a sense in which the migration process has become increasingly normalised and accepted for both employers and employees.

### **Types of Employment**

According to the majority of recruitment agencies most of the migrant workers on their books are employed within the healthcare system, the construction industry, the hospitality industry, or as manual or casual labour. One recruitment agency noted that 80% of staff that they supplied to the health sector would be classified as migrant workers, while another agency that specialised in supplying the construction industry reported that nearly a quarter of its registered workers were migrant workers. In general a significant number of migrant workers were placed on short term or temporary contracts with only a minority being offered long term contracts in skilled employment.

It became apparent that the type of recruitment agency affected whether or not they had any registered migrant workers. Consultancy and executive recruitment agencies had little or no engagement with migrant workers, whereas those agencies that offered a range of different forms of employment had more migrant workers registered. The consultancy and executive agencies felt that migrant workers themselves perceived that they did not have the skills or knowledge to gain employment in these particular sectors and did not approach them for work.

This suggests that the recruitment agencies are supplying a specific employment niche and are drawing on a pool of migrants who are prepared to take up a variety of forms of work on a casual or short term basis. In contrast, migrants with specific skills, or who seek employment commensurate with their skills, appear to find employment through other means.

### **Educational Background**

A significant number of agencies stated that many of the new migrants registered with them had high standards of education. Several had undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications but many also found it difficult to gain employment within their particular field. One respondent cited an example of a migrant worker with a degree in microbiology currently working as a labourer. Agencies stated that although they accepted qualifications from different countries, obtaining confirmation of these could be time consuming and problematic, especially in terms of getting them translated into

English. In many cases the employers wanted someone with the appropriate experience for a specific job and in many cases migrants found it difficult to provide any evidence for their previous working experience. It was interesting to note that several agencies reported that migrant workers were increasingly using the internet to apply for jobs and send in their CVs. This was considered to be a relatively new phenomenon, but in some cases it helped in speeding up the process of placing the individual in a job.

### **Barriers to Employment**

The most common factor that limited agencies in placing migrants in employment was the lack of language skills. In general migrants who had poor levels of English were unsuccessful in being employed within the customer service industry. Several agencies noted that many employers often specified that an excellence in both spoken and written English was a requirement, and this immediately ruled out many of those seeking work.

One agency indicated that some of their clients who employed migrant workers had begun to enquire about the availability of ESOL classes and of finding ways that they could help their employees improve their level of English. This again appears to suggest that some employers have recognised that they will increasingly have to take on people with less than adequate English language skills, and that they can do something to improve this situation.

One concern that was highlighted by several agencies was that in the past their clients had been apprehensive about employing migrant workers for fear that they would leave their position and return home. There was a perception that migrants would be unreliable and less committed to their job compared with local people. However, more recently this negative perception has changed and there was a realisation that migrant workers were reliable and contributed positively to the work force.

### **Internal Working Practices**

Several recruitment agencies reported that they had become more selective in who they took on their books, and they had moved away from simply conducting telephone interviews at the initial stage and now hold face-to-face interviews to assess the individuals competency and level of English. Another agency said they had developed a pre-registration form after they had been inundated with applications from new migrants, this was a means of providing an initial assessment of their ability in English, academic standards and job suitability.

In some cases the agencies have interpreters to help deal with issues relating to language difficulties among people seeking work, while other agencies had opened up branches in European countries and had representatives in other countries dealing with recruitment issues. However, for the most part recruitment agencies in the Belfast area had not introduced any radical policies or altered internal working practices in response to the increase in migrant workers.

### Unemployment

There has been no research to our knowledge on the scale of unemployment among new migrants to Northern Ireland, although DEL did carry out a brief snapshot survey in June 2006 of migrants using the Jobs and Benefits Offices and JobCentres across Northern Ireland (Rogers 2006b). This research identified 512 migrants from nearly thirty countries who accessed the centres over a two week period. The largest numbers were from Poland (46%), Portugal (16%), Lithuania (9%) and Slovakia (8%).

In Belfast 114 people contacted the various offices in the two week period, seventy eight people accessed the Connor Building centre on Great Victoria Street, twenty nine were in north Belfast, five in west Belfast and one in east Belfast. No migrants used the Knockbreda or Shankill offices during this time.

The data from this research and the evidence of the large numbers of migrants using recruitment agencies indicates that substantial numbers of migrants are in a relatively transient state in relation to their employment. Given the limitations that have been imposed on their access to welfare benefits, this places them in a potentially vulnerable and insecure position.

### Summary

In summary it appears that most recruitment agencies are open to having migrants on their books, while employers who use recruitment agencies have become increasingly used to having migrant employees. There does appear to be some contrasts in education and abilities of new migrants registering to seek work: some people are over qualified for the work available, while others do not have the level of English required to be employed. While some recruitment agencies appear to be trying to filter and sift the quality of people that they have on their books, some employers are seeking ways to help migrants improve their language skills.

All of these factors appear to indicate that there are growing numbers of migrants seeking work through the recruitment agency networks in Belfast and there are growing numbers of employers who recognise that employing foreign nationals is neither unusual nor a risk, but rather has become a routine feature of working life.

### Models of Good Practice

As a result of the increased levels of migrant workers in Northern Ireland and the growing number of examples of poor practices or concerns associated with the employment of this client group, Business in the Community developed a Code of Practice<sup>12</sup> to clearly identify a range of workers' rights and employers' responsibilities. According to the director of the organisation:

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<sup>12</sup> Business in the Community (nd) *Voluntary Code of Practice on Employing Migrant Workers / Overseas Staff in Northern Ireland*. Belfast. See also Equality Commission (2005) *Promoting Equality in Intercultural Workplaces*. Belfast.

*migrant workers are an ever growing category of employees in Northern Ireland and they are a necessary resource for many employment sectors due to a shortage if available local labour...we want to encourage employers and recruitment agencies to take responsibility to support the integration and safety of migrant workers into the workplace and into the community<sup>13</sup>*

A number of organisations within the Belfast area have since signed up to the Code of Practice and some have in turn been recognised for the innovative practice that they have developed to address the needs of the migrant staff.

- Tim Lewis Recruitment was one of the first organisations in the recruitment industry in Northern Ireland to sign up to the Code of Practice. They recognised the need to adapt to the changing demographics in the workplace and have used the code as a model for delivering a comprehensive and fair service for clients, registered workers and employees.
- In 2006 Northbrook Technology was recognised as one of the top British companies for its work in meeting the needs of a diverse workforce at the national Business in the Community Awards for Excellence. The company won the Morgan Stanley Diversity Award for its Diversity and Equality Programme, which aimed to ensure a positive work-life balance for its employees and the successful integration of an increasingly migrant workforce.
- FPM Accountants of Belfast won the Corporate Award at the Small Voice Business Awards in 2006. These awards were developed by CBI Northern Ireland and Glosik, the NI Polish magazine, Members of the Polish community had been invited to nominate businesses and service providers who they believed promoted good practice and encouraged integration in the employment of migrant workers.

While it is important to acknowledge innovative and effective good practice in the workplace, it is interesting to note that these examples focus on the professional, white collar end of the employment sector. These organisations seem to be keen to highlight their good working practices involving migrant workers and the importance of migrants to their business development. In contrast it was more difficult to source information on models of good practice that focused on the lower tier of the employment sector within the Belfast area.

### **Trade Unions**

The Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NICICTU) represents the combined interests of thirty-three trade unions and over 215,000 workers. NICICTU policy and practice on migrant workers has been developed in the context of overall ICTU policy and has three strands; developing an immigration policy, protecting migrant workers rights, and tackling racism.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk) 05/07/06.

Trade unions in Belfast have been keen to register migrant workers within their respective organisations, some have had information translated into different languages and provided translators for members with low levels of English. A representative from the ICTU also addressed a large group of Poles in the Ulster Hall to highlight the role of trade unions in Northern Ireland.

In 2006 NCCICTU commissioned research to inform the strategies of various regional and local organisations in addressing the needs and rights of migrant workers and their families (McVeigh 2006). The report did not specifically focus on the Belfast area and it appears that many of the interviewees were based on experiences in the food processing and agricultural sectors. The research noted the routine nature of inequality and exploitation experienced by many migrant workers and argued that unions have a key role in supporting, representing and helping to organise these workers in Northern Ireland.

The report also drew attention to the difficulties that union representatives have had in encouraging migrant workers to join trade unions. They acknowledged that this process would take time and that unions would need to think creatively in terms of how they should engage with and support migrant workers. A number of recommendations were developed from the research with one of the most significant relating to the need for a new unit specific to migrant workers:

**ICTU should give consideration to the establishment of a Unit for Migrant Workers Rights with a particular focus on policy development and intervention** (McVeigh 2006: 68)

Since the publication of the research, NCCICTU have established a working group to explore the potential for creating such a unit. They have been in discussions with statutory organisations in relation to the practical implications of such a unit and its location and there appears to be a general feeling that it should be located in Belfast.

### Summary

Currently there are a significant number of migrant workers employed in the main industrial sectors in Belfast: construction, health, hospitality and IT. Of the four construction and IT have been the last to embrace the potential for employing migrant workers, but each of the sectors appears to contain a growing number of new migrants within its workforce.

According to several respondents there had been a significant trend in recent years of migrants locating in Belfast with higher standards of education and experience in professional occupations, and this also coincided with the arrival of younger migrants. A growing number of migrants also appear to be arriving in Belfast with no pre-arranged employment or residence. In some cases they rely on family, friends and pre-existing social networks, but often they are self-dependent and rely on recruitment agencies and advertisements for employment.

It is increasingly difficult and less useful to try to generalise about employment practices and issues of concern given the diverse range of skills, education levels and employment sectors that draw upon migrant staff and labour. The experiences, needs and concerns of a highly skilled worker on a permanent within the IT sector are increasingly different from those of someone with limited English and registered for casual work with a recruitment agency. The situation is fluid and varied, patterns are changing rapidly and will probably change again rapidly again once the redevelopment of the Titanic Quarter begins.

There is still some considerable exploitation of migrant workers in some sectors. Many of the support agencies (see below) recount regular complaints of low pay, and problems over overtime, holidays and sick pay being recounted. But at the same time, there is evidence that migrant workers are gaining in confidence in the work place and are establishing themselves in the local economy. Organisations as diverse as Business in the Community, the Trade Unions and the Equality Commission have become increasingly proactive in fighting for the rights of migrant workers and educating employers on the needs of this specific client group.

## 7. Residential Patterns

Several of the people from the different minority ethnic communities indicated that there are distinctive differences emerging within the housing patterns of the new migrant population. The Chinese and Indian communities are the two long-established migrant communities in Belfast, but there is now a growing Polish community. Large sections of the established communities were owner-occupiers, living mainly in south and north Belfast, but, many more recent migrants were living in forms of private rented accommodation, often in houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). A significant number were identified as also being on a waiting list for social housing.

Various parts of south Belfast have attracted significant numbers of Poles and other east Europeans to rental accommodation. This has been recognised by community groups, such as Ballynafeigh Community Development Association, and some clergy, who have offered services and resources to assist the integration of this community. Several shops in the Ballynafeigh / Ormeau Road area also stock produce from east European countries, a further indication of the presence of a growing local population.

There has also been growing recognition of the increasing ethnic and national diversity of some parts of the inner city areas of east Belfast. A recent community survey by the Carew II Centre and ICR identified Chinese, black, South Asian and eastern European as the main local populations (Carew II 2006). In contrast there is little evidence of any impact of the recent changes in patterns of immigration on areas within north or west Belfast.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive recently completed its initial mapping report of baseline information on the impact of the changing demographic patterns in Belfast, although is largely drawn from diverse sets of existing data. According to the Executive's Community Cohesion Unit there has been a marked increase in minority ethnic people residing in the city, in particular people from Polish, Slovak and Indian communities. These changing dynamics have had an impact on the NIHE and the organisation's Good Relations Strategy now includes a Race Relations Policy, an approach that reflects the government's approach in integrating A Shared Future and Race Equality Strategy. According to the NIHE the provision of housing services and policy development is no longer based on a bi-polar society, and has to be developed to reflect the changing needs within social housing areas around the promotion of equality, tolerance and diversity.

There was concern from some respondents that the increase in the number of new migrants seeking housing in the Belfast area was being perceived as one of the catalysts for an increase in the costs in the private rental sector, particularly in the east and south of the city. There was a perception among some people that 'migrant workers had already taken local jobs, now they were taking local homes'. This type of myth about the negative impact of new migrants has similarly been noted in the Dungannon and South Tyrone region<sup>14</sup>, although interestingly the Carew II survey

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<sup>14</sup> See the various materials on the Animate website <http://www.animate-ccd.net/>

found that 84% of residents in east Belfast were happy to accept members of a minority community as a neighbour and only 20% believed that they had had a negative impact on the local economy (Carew II 2006: 8-10)

In some parts of the city and there has been an increase in HMOs (Murtagh and Carmichael, 2005) and several respondents were fearful of the impact of the increasing numbers of HMOs might have on their community, but while it is largely students and young professionals that are driving the demand for such housing, it seems that in some areas 'migrant workers' are being identified as the scapegoat.

An increase in the number of homeless people was also identified as a possible emerging problem. A recent newspaper article (*Irish News* 5/12/06) highlighted the growing homeless population in the Belfast area, with specific attention focused on the increase in eastern European nationals who had originally come to Northern Ireland to seek employment but who have ended up with no job and no place to live.

Staff at one homeless centre in west Belfast indicated that in recent months they had been dealing with a number of foreign nationals with nowhere to live. At any one time there could be forty individuals attending the centre and on occasions a quarter of these could be from the new migrant population. This client group consisted of individuals from three distinctive groups of people. It included individuals who had:

1. Moved from another country to make a better life in Northern Ireland, but without any confirmed employment or place of residence prior to arrival;
2. Arrived in Northern Ireland with pre-arranged employment, but had since lost their job and could not afford accommodation; and
3. Come to Northern Ireland with a medical condition – in most cases an addiction involving drugs or alcohol.

The most frequent group were those that had arrived in Northern Ireland without a job or place to stay. They usually arrived with little money, poor command of English and no support or contacts with the local community. The managers of the homeless centre were unsure how such individuals had heard of or even located their centre, for they did not publicise themselves to the wider community. But clearly the homeless migrants were able to tap into local information networks at some level.

It was also noted that the centre did not have the capacity to deal with an increase in numbers as their regular client base has not diminished and their resources were stretched to the maximum. Responding to the needs of homeless migrants is something they do not have the resources, finances or experience to address.

There is limited information on the impact of the new patterns of migration to Belfast on the housing sector, but what information is available suggests that the impact is being felt in some of the more vulnerable areas: housing converted to multiple occupancy, increased rents in the private sector, increased demand in an already stretched social housing sector and a greater evidence of new migrants among the homeless population.

## 8. Service Provision

There were mixed views on the quality of service provision available for the new migrant population in Belfast. Some people highlighted the funding that had been offered to some the groups working in this particular sector, others felt that many organisations and service providers had an ad hoc approach to migrant workers in the Belfast area and there was a need for a more strategic approach to the issue.

There is a perception that Belfast is not a particularly large city yet there was a lack of information pertaining to migrant workers and minority communities, and too much of the available information was specific to one community. There was recognition of some excellent work by some organisations but also a realisation that it should be delivered in a more streamlined, joined up approach so that all communities could access the resources and be kept informed of relevant information

The lack of any development workers with responsibility to engage specifically with migrant worker communities was identified as a problem. It was noted that little was known of the small, scattered Slovak, Latvian and Czech communities in Belfast or the issues that they were facing. One minority ethnic representative noted that it was difficult to identify people from these communities who could take a lead in organising activities and events that could help to build relationships between service providers and the community. It was argued that the City Council should take a lead in making contacts and encouraging and supporting people from within the smaller communities to become involved in promoting their own communities.

Language continues to be a barrier for many new migrants particularly in accessing services and information within the city, and there have been limited resources to address this issue. However, in early 2007 a comprehensive range of rights based guides was produced by the Law Centre, Animate and the Human Rights Commission. The guide are designed to aid new migrants in understanding their entitlements to social security benefits, employment, health, housing and civil liberties and have been produced in Chinese, English, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovak, Russian and Tetum. Attention was drawn by one minority ethnic representative to the very limited number of bi-lingual workers and/or translators working in organisations that are supposed to provide the services and information that migrant workers often need to access.

Among the key agencies and initiatives on the ground that aim to provide advice, information and support to new migrants are the following:

- The Law Centre (NI) in Belfast is one agency that increasingly provides support, advice and information to new migrants on a number of issues, specifically around employment law, benefit entitlements and legislation around residency.
- South Belfast Roundtable on Racism includes statutory, community and voluntary organisations and representatives from the minority ethnic communities. It helps to develop relationships to promote understanding, contact, interaction and

cohesiveness between the diverse communities in south Belfast. Their initiatives included an intercultural football tournament during summer 2006, in partnership with the Irish Football Association and the PSNI, and involving members of the Polish community and residents of the Village area.

- The South Belfast Highway to Health programme has been engaging with a number of minority ethnic communities in south Belfast and held events such as an information day for Slovak and Czech people; a health information day for the Polish community, and a Chinese health day.
- South Belfast Gems provides a 'Language for Work' programme for jobseekers who do not have English as a first language. The programme aims to improve performance in the recruitment and selection process and provide them with a better understanding of the workplace. The programme was acknowledged as a success, but the funding ended in January 2007, and although the course is still available it has to be self-financed and costs between £200-300 per person.

Other businesses and statutory agencies have also begun to adapt their services to meet the needs of the new migrant population.

- Belfast Education and Library Board responded to the needs of the new migrant population by developing an exploratory course for staff working in a library and information environment, they aimed to show how a library service could respond to the needs of migrant workers who are increasingly using a wide range of library and information services.
- The education system is also adapting to growing numbers of children arriving in Northern Ireland with their parents. Hazelwood Integrated College in north Belfast has for the first time recently offered Polish as a GCSE option for the growing number of Polish speaking students at the school and in neighbouring schools.
- In late 2006 the Ulster Bank Group became the first to offer fee-free banking to migrant workers. Previous research has shown that opening a bank account is often difficult and complex for new migrants, due to a range of factors. The bank has also translated literature into Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese.

These examples illustrate the diversity of local initiatives established by a range of service providers and organisations from the community, voluntary, statutory and business sectors. But, as noted at the beginning of this section, these have been provided on a very ad hoc basis, with little co-ordination or integration of services and in some cases little sense of how they will be sustained.

Although Belfast is the base for many of the established support organisations for black and minority ethnic and faith communities, there is no established organisation specifically focusing on providing support, advice and assistance and meeting the needs of the new migrant population of the city.

## 9. Racism and Xenophobia

Racism and racist attacks has risen in public prominence in recent years. The police have recorded a substantial increase in the number of racist incidents over the past decade, from 41 incidents in 1996 to 936 incidents in the year ending March 2006.

Racist incidents in Belfast have always accounted for a high proportion of the total Northern Ireland statistics. Between 1996 and 2001 48% of all racist incidents recorded in Northern Ireland occurred in Belfast, while 22% of the total were recorded in the south Belfast area (Jarman and Monaghan 2004: 38). However, the proportion of the total number of racist incidents that were recorded in Belfast has declined in recent years from 48% of the Northern Ireland total in 2003-2004 to 27% in 2005-2006 (Table 12) and over the same period the percentage of incidents in south Belfast declined from 32% to 11% of the total across Northern Ireland.

**Table 12: Racist Incidents Recorded by PSNI**

	2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
South	147	32	159	20	106	11	111	
East	32	7	54	7	74	8	74	
North	27	6	76	9	62	6	75	
West	11	2.4	13	1.5	13	1.3	15	
Total Belfast	217	48	302	37	255	27	275	
Total NI	453	100	813	100	936	100		

Source: PSNI

There were some indications that the relentless increase in racist incidents in Belfast had perhaps stalled when the figures declined in 2005-2006 compared with previous years. But the latest figures show that there has been a further increase in recorded incidents. PSNI statistics for April 2006 to end of February 2007 indicate that the police have recorded 275 incidents in Belfast in eleven months compared with 255 in the previous full year. The figures also indicate that there has been or will be a real increase in racist incidents in each of the four District Command Units.

In spite of the steady increase in recorded incidents, one should not assume that all such incidents are reported to the police, nor should one ignore the scale of harassment and abuse experienced by members of minority communities. Two recent studies by ICR included questions about experiences of racist harassment among migrant workers and members of minority ethnic communities. The data for those respondents living or working in Belfast has been extrapolated indicates the scale of the harassment from a personal perspective.

The study of migrant workers for OFMDFM undertaken in 2003 (Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre 2004) indicates that 37% of the (relatively small) sample of forty-eight people had experienced verbal abuse, 15% had been harassed and 9% had suffered

physical assault. Thirty five percent of the sample had experienced the racism in the street and 22% had experienced it at work.

A more recent study of the experiences of racism among health service workers (Betts and Hamilton 2006) indicated that 70% of a sample of 275 people had experienced some form of racist harassment outside of their work environment (50% had experienced racist abuse, 37% had a missile thrown at them 14% had their home attacked), while 50% had experienced racist harassment in their place of work. This includes racism from a wide range of people: 53% reported that colleagues had been racist; 45% said patients they were treating had been racist and 18% accused a manager or supervisor.

The various figures thus indicate that racist incidents are still increasing across Belfast and also that forms of racism are being experienced by a wide range of people from the different minority communities and by a large proportion of members of the minority communities.

Despite the high proportion of incidents in Belfast, there has been limited research on experiences of racism in the area. Carew II commissioned research into the attitudes and opinions among residents in east Belfast towards Black and minority ethnic people in the area. A survey of 195 residents and revealed that one in five people had witnessed acts of violence/abuse towards minority ethnic groups, with the most frequently reported incident being verbal harassment (Carew II 2006).

The minority ethnic representative organisations such as NICEM, Chinese Welfare Association, and the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre have been involved in various initiatives to raise awareness of racism and challenge attitudes, so to have organisations like Linc Resource Centre, Intercomm, North Belfast Alternatives, South Belfast Roundtable on Racism, Carew II Centre and the Anti-Racism Network.

Several of the people we spoke to from the community sector noted that working with the local population and involving them in programmes together with different minority ethnic groups was a key to addressing racism in the city. Organisations such as Highway to Health have recently worked with the Chinese, Polish and Donegal Pass communities in an exploration of their cultures and identity.

The statutory agencies have also been active in responding to racism within the city, although most of the work to date has focused on the established minority ethnic communities rather than new migrant communities. The Community Safety Unit launched Project RIOH (Recording Incidents of Hate Crime) in 2006, a pilot project in south Belfast providing victims of hate crime with a range of opportunities for reporting incidents. This project is currently being evaluated. More recently the PSNI received a citation from the Race Action Net UK Awards in recognition of their bridge building work in South Belfast in after an upsurge of violence against the Polish community.

## Belfast Migrants

Racism remains a problem for all of the different minority ethnic and national communities in Belfast and it is a problem that is continuing to increase. While the police data provides some indication of the scale of the problem and some serious incidents get reported in the media, much of the low level and 'mundane' racism is not reported. A recently published study of attitudes and prejudices towards minority communities in countries across Europe has asserted that people in Northern Ireland are among the most bigoted in the western world (Borooah and Mangan 2007), this suggests that the problem of racist violence and harassment will remain a problem for some time.

## 10. Review and Recommendations

The evidence of the recent patterns of migration to Belfast indicates that they are distinctive and different from those other parts of Northern Ireland. Areas such as Dungannon have seen a dramatic increase in migrants in a relatively short period, whereas Belfast already has a number of established minority ethnic communities. However, the new migration is leading both to an increase in the minority population in the city and a greater diversity among the minority communities.

The migration to many parts of Northern Ireland has largely been in response to the needs of the food processing and rural industries whereas in Belfast it has been a more diverse series of events, which has involved responding to the needs of construction, health, the service sector and high tech industries. But it is also driven by the opportunity offered to the people who are moving: to earn money, to improve their language skills and develop career opportunities.

Furthermore, the new migrant communities are becoming increasingly diverse internally as partners, family members and children move as well; but also as people become established and children are born here. The focus can be sustained less on the work side of the migration process and will inevitably focus on more general social needs.

The research indicates that the term 'migrant worker' increasingly covers a diverse range of nationalities, ethnicities, skills, employment sectors and personal experiences and as such it can no longer be considered as a homogenous group. Thus there must be some caution exercised when generalising about the experiences and needs of 'migrant workers' throughout Northern Ireland.

Although migrants are not a feature of the social dynamic of Belfast the current pattern of migration is distinctive: in terms of its speed, the numbers of people and the countries they are coming from. This poses challenges in relation to processes of integration, community cohesion, racism and xenophobia. It also poses challenges in relation to meeting the needs and providing appropriate services to the different members of the new communities.

### Patterns in Belfast

Any analysis of the experiences of migrants and the issues that they face must take into consideration the different socio and economic factors of life in Belfast, but we must also acknowledge that the city itself is not a homogenous entity and differences are emerging in relation to the minority communities in different parts of the city.

- South Belfast has long been the base for the Chinese and Muslim communities and evidence from a range of organisations points to a growing diversity of minority ethnic communities. Furthermore, the recent success of the Alliance candidate, Anna Lo, highlights the diverse nature of the local community. Unfortunately, the negative response to this growing diversity can be seen in the increasing number of racist incidents in south Belfast.

## Belfast Migrants

- In north Belfast there is diversity of established minority communities, with the Indian Community Centre, the Sikh gurdwara and the Jewish synagogue all based in this part of the city. The local CAB also indicated that they had witnessed an increase in eastern European people contacting their branches in north Belfast, which suggests a convergence of new and established minority communities in the area.
- There is anecdotal evidence of an increase in minority ethnic communities living in east Belfast and research has noted some negative perceptions among the local Protestant population, while a large number of people had witnessed racist incidents in recent times. However, there is little hard evidence of the new demographic patterns that might be emerging.
- There is something of a dearth of information on minority communities and migrant workers in west Belfast. Our discussions revealed a minimal knowledge on the presence of minorities the area, with a lack of knowledge or information relating to the demographics, employment or residential patterns of minorities this part of the city. There were some anecdotal references to the presence of new migrants, but this was difficult to substantiate.

One recent source of data that provides some indication of the relative numbers of new migrants in different areas of Belfast, was provided by the Electoral Office. The released data of the number of European Union nationals who were on the electoral register prior for the March 2007 elections. This revealed that there were 587 people in the South Belfast constituency, 249 in East Belfast, 233 in North Belfast and just 93 in West Belfast.

It is also worth noting the growing numbers of children with English as an additional language in the schooling system. While this is currently creating demands on that system in terms of language support, the new pupil population will also have an impact on future demands for places in schools and this will need to be reflected in local education strategies.

The research noted a number of local initiatives in relation to the delivery of service provision for migrant workers, although it has been argued that this is currently happening in an ad hoc manner. At a more strategic level the government has recognised the need for a more joined-up approach to these issues and the Department for Employment and Learning convened a Migrant Workers Thematic Group to help produce a strategy and action plan on migrant workers. This was completed in September 2006, although the document is still awaiting publication.

### **Future Trends**

Attempting to make a projection of the size of the migrant worker population in Belfast over the next five years has proved difficult. There was speculation that Belfast would continue to attract and employ significant numbers of migrants due to the diverse range of employment possibilities, and a predicted growth in the local

economy. This was evidenced by the increase in the numbers of more skilled and better educated migrants that were locating in the area. The decision of easyJet to provide direct flights between Belfast and Poland from spring 2007 was a further opportunity for an increase in the number of eastern Europeans migrating (or commuting?) to Northern Ireland.

There was also a possibility that migrants residing and working in other parts of Northern Ireland or currently living in the Republic might eventually move to Belfast. Some people involved in the construction industry felt that if the economic boom in the south begins to stabilise there would be a potential for many of the existing migrant population to seek employment on new construction sites in the north, particularly if the Titanic Quarter development takes off.

The new migrant population in Belfast and Northern Ireland in general, was dependent on three main factors:

1. The state of the national and local economy;
2. Levels of employment; and
3. Levels of employment and state of the economy in their own countries.

The balance of these factors will determine the numbers of migrants in Northern Ireland, along with the level of resources and service provision required to adequately respond to their needs. Attention was drawn to the fact that countries like Poland were now receiving extensive European funding in an attempt to regenerate their infrastructure and economy. Government organisations and employers were making attempts to lure back many of the skilled workers that had left their country. A BBC Newsnight (06/07/06) for example, reported on attempts by elected representatives in Poland to reduce the 'brain drain' to the UK and encourage Poles to return home.

There were also some concerns raised that if the European Union continued to expand there could be a further influx of migrant workers into the city, which could increase opposition to new migrants. This seemed to be a guarded reference to the potential for migration from Bulgaria and Romania. However, in general it was felt that in the current economic situation, and with the potential for further economic investment in the Belfast area, the city could support the existing levels of migrant workers.

### **A Role for the Council**

Many of the people we spoke to believe that Belfast City Council should take a more active role in engaging with the issue of migration and the emergence of new minority communities. This might include developing a local strategy for the delivery of programmes and initiatives in relation to the new migrant communities, support for a migrant rights centre, and taking a more proactive role in assisting the new communities integrate into the wider community. The following recommendations are based on the findings from this research.

**Recommendation 1:** Belfast City Council should support and assist the current initiatives to establish an information, advice and support centre for migrants. This might be focused on the addressing the needs and supporting the rights of migrants living and working in Belfast, but could also become a centre for people across Northern Ireland. In the first instance BCC should consult and liase with the NCCICTU who are currently in discussions with statutory and community groups about the establishment of a migrant worker unit in Belfast.

**Recommendation 2:** Belfast City Council should convene a working group on migrant issues to develop a local strategic action plan. The group should be similar to that initiated by DEL and should include representatives of key statutory agencies and minority community organisations. The action plan should also address the wider issues of integration, cohesion, racism and xenophobia, but should also explore the impact of the recent developments on housing and education.

**Recommendation 3:** Belfast City Council should convene a workshop or conference of key employers and employer organisation to discuss issues associated with their needs and with the rights and needs of the migrant workforce. Employers would have an opportunity to share experiences and good practice around training, management and the recruitment of migrant workers. The workshop should also aim to explore possible future trends in relation to the labour needs of employers. Consideration should also be given to creating an employers forum that could meet on a more regular basis.

**Recommendation 4:** Belfast City Council should establish a means of monitoring trends and patterns in relation to the diversity within the city. BCC should also undertake a review of the diversity of minority communities in different areas of the city, and in particular research is needed on the diversity and needs of new minority communities in both east and west Belfast.

**Recommendation 5:** Belfast City Council should explore how they can better support the work being done by community and voluntary groups in relationships between the established population and the new minority communities. It is also important that such work is documented and where applicable developed into models of good practice.

**Recommendation 6:** Belfast City Council should explore how they might establish links with representatives and members of the various new minority communities across the city. These groups should be encouraged to develop appropriate levels of organisation to ensure they can access appropriate levels of support and access to council resources.

**Recommendation 7:** There is need for central government to review the level of support that it provides Belfast City Council to enable BCC to meet the growing needs of and opportunities presented by the new migrant communities in the city. BCC itself also needs to explore other way of providing the necessary support for the new communities.

**Recommendation 8:** Belfast City Council should encourage the BELB to revise the information gathered as part of the school census to reflect the increasing diversity of languages. The majority of such children do not speak the Chinese and South Asian languages that are currently highlighted.

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