

**ICR Working Paper No 1**

# **Changing Patterns and Future Planning**

**Migration and Northern Ireland**

**Neil Jarman**

**Institute for Conflict Research  
North City Business Centre  
2 Duncairn Gardens  
Belfast  
BT15 2GG  
[www.conflictresearch.org.uk](http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk)  
[director@conflictresearch.org.uk](mailto:director@conflictresearch.org.uk)  
December 2005**

In June 2004 the Institute for Conflict Research published a report entitled *Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland*, the result of a research study commissioned for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister<sup>1</sup>. Since that time there has been greater awareness about the growing numbers of migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland, of the changing dynamics of patterns of migration, of the local demand that is attracting migrants and of the need to improve information, advice, support and services for people moving to Northern Ireland to take up employment.

In recent years the patterns of migration to Northern Ireland by non-British or Irish nationals has changed considerably. Since 2001 a substantial number of Portuguese nationals have taken up employment, primarily in the food processing industry, many hospital trusts have been recruiting nursing staff from South Asia and the Philippines and many sectors have increasingly turned abroad to fill vacancies. More recently, large numbers of nationals from the eight East European states that joined the European Union in May 2004 have moved to Britain and Ireland to take up employment.

Much of the focus of attention towards these new migrants has been in responding to issues of harassment and discrimination, improving the quality of information, advice and services to migrants and raising awareness of many of these issues among employers and statutory agencies. Prominent in this work have been NGOs such as STEP, strategic projects such as Animate, statutory bodies such as the Equality Commission, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and local networks in places such as Ballymena, Banbridge and Craigavon. A number of hospital trusts and some private businesses have also been developing innovative practices.

The processes of migration to Northern Ireland, of recruitment of migrants by employers in Northern Ireland and the provisions of services and resources to migrants are currently in a state of flux. The recently published *Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland* (OFMDFM 2005) noted in this regard:

*The speed and extent of the increase in the numbers of migrant workers in Northern Ireland – and the sheer diversity of people involved – pose complex challenges for Government and society alike* (paragraph 3.15)

While this is undoubtedly true it is also evident that considerable work needs to be done in integrating issues related to immigration and migrant workers into strategic planning and policy. The changing patterns of recruitment and immigration have made much of the information in the previous report out of date. This brief review therefore aims to provide an update on some key issues related to the process of immigration into Northern Ireland and to the migrant worker population. It is not a comprehensive review nor is it based on primary research, rather it aims to draw together some fragments of data and information that has been published by other

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<sup>1</sup> Bell, K., Jarman, N. and Lefebvre, T. (2004) *Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland*. Belfast, ICR. See also N. Jarman (2004) *Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland*. In *Labour Market Bulletin* No 18. Belfast, Department of Employment and Learning.

organisations and agencies to highlight some emergent trends and issues worthy of greater consideration or analysis. The intention is to identify some of the changing patterns, to identify some recent initiatives by Government and NGOs and to highlight areas where there is a need to focus more attention. In particular I would argue that to date much of the attention has focused on migrants as members of ethnic and/or national minorities and has considered issues of service provision, information and support. However, whilst this work is important and undoubtedly needs to continue there is also a need to give greater consideration to the economic factors underpinning current migration and to integrate thinking about immigration into a wider process of economic strategy and planning.

## **Migrant Populations**

The 2001 Census identified that there was a total of 26,659 people living in Northern Ireland who were born outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, while a total of 14,279 people identified as belonging to a minority ethnic community. These figures indicate that migration and migrant communities have been facts of life for Northern Ireland for some time, that the historic patterns of migration have been diverse and varied and that only a percentage of migrants necessarily classify themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic community. The current cycle of migration appear to be different for two reasons. First the speed and scale of current immigration is much more rapid than has previously been the case for Northern Ireland and second because most migrants are coming from countries without a recent history of immigration to the UK and Ireland. The current migration is not simply an increase in scale of the previous patterns, but rather represents new trends, with migrants coming from Eastern Europe rather than Eastern Asia, from non-Commonwealth countries and from countries that do not necessarily have widespread use of the English language. Each of these factors adds new dynamics to the patterns of demography, service use and social diversity in Northern Ireland.

There are two readily available sets of data that provide some indication of how the patterns of migration to Northern Ireland have developed in the last few years. First there is data collected by the Department of Social Development on the number of non-UK nationals who have applied for National Insurance numbers. Second there is Home Office data on nationals from the eight Eastern European EU Accession states who are required to register under the Worker Registration Scheme when they take up work in the United Kingdom.

These sets of figures are useful insofar as they provide some indication of the broad trends in immigration flows and in the changing demographic profile of the general population. They can also be used to identify or point towards some comparative trends between Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK in regard to the varying needs of different employment sectors and in the potential changing demands that this will make on service providers, statutory agencies and government bodies.

But they are also limited in their value in indicating anything about long term changes to the local population as they only identify people who are taking up work in

Northern Ireland. Their data sets do not provide any guide to the number of people who subsequently return home, or move to another part of Britain or Ireland, nor do they necessarily incorporate family members or dependents. The figures are thus useful in regard to the questions they pose as much as the questions they can answer.

## **National Insurance Numbers**

The Department for Social Development collects data on all foreign nationals who apply for a National Insurance number (NINO). This provides one perspective on the number of migrants taking up work in Northern Ireland. However the data set is an incomplete guide to the total migrant population as it only accounts for those people seeking to take up work, they do not monitor total immigration figures. For example the figures do not include:

- Adult dependents who do not seek work and do not apply for a National Insurance number;
- Children under the age of 16; and
- Adults who are undocumented or unauthorised workers.

The DSD figures indicate that a total of 31,421 non-UK or Republic of Ireland nationals applied for National Insurance numbers in Northern Ireland from April 2003 until the end of June 2005. This includes 6,849 people who applied in 2003-2004, 16,440 people who applied in 2004-2005 and 8,978 people who have applied between April and June 2005.

These 31,421 people came from 120 different identified countries. However, this is also likely to be the minimum number of different countries represented among the recent migrants as a substantial number of individuals either did not identify their national background or identified themselves as coming from a region (Africa, Asia, Arabia) rather than a particular country. These figures do however indicate the ever-growing diversity of the population in Northern Ireland, while greater consideration of the range of countries of origin may be useful for example in providing an indication of the calls that may be made on translation and interpreting services.

The DSD figures reveal that the largest number of applications for National Insurance numbers over the past two years and three months came from Poland (6,710 applications), Lithuania (3,586), Portugal (3,246), India (2,140) Slovakia (2,034), the Philippines (1,230) and China (1,085). These figures indicate that since the enlargement of the European Union nationals of some of the new East European accession states have become the main migrants to Northern Ireland, although previously prominent nationalities such as Portugal, India and the Philippines still account for significant numbers of migrants.

## **A8 Worker Registration Scheme**

On 1 May 2004 Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia became members of the European Union. All of the existing member states, except Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom,

restricted the rights of nationals of the eight Eastern European countries to freedom of employment. The United Kingdom and Ireland allowed free movement for employment purposes, although they imposed restrictions on access to welfare benefits. The UK Government also required nationals from the eight Eastern European accession states (the so-called A8 countries) to register under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) if they took up employment for more than one month's duration. Workers are required to register each for each employment they take and they must also pay a fee when they first register<sup>2</sup>. Once an individual has been registered continuously for 12 months they have the full range of EU citizen's rights to freedom of movement.

Registration is thus a legal requirement and there is some benefit from registering particularly for those people who plan to remain in the UK for longer than one year. However, the fee that is imposed may well prove to be a disincentive to some migrants to register, particularly if they do not intend to remain for more than one year. The data from the Workers Registration Scheme will provide some indication of the scale of recent migration from Eastern Europe but it is likely to be a partial, rather than a complete view.

The Home Office publishes a quarterly report on the number of people registering under the WRS. This data provides general information on migration of A8 nationals to the UK and some specific information on immigration to Northern Ireland. However, although workers are required to register when taking up employment in the UK, they are not required to de-register if they leave the UK. The data published by the Home Office therefore only monitors inflow of migrants, it does not monitor out-flow nor does it provide any indication of the total number of A8 migrants in the UK (or in Northern Ireland) at any one time.

The Accession Monitoring Report indicates that a total of 329,090 A8 migrants have registered under the Work Registration Scheme in the United Kingdom between May 2004 and the end of December 2005, while 12,335 people have registered in Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup>.

This figure of 7,755 A8 migrants can be compared with the DSD data, which reveals that 11,606 people from the A8 countries requested National Insurance numbers between April 2004 and the end of June 2005. This is a difference of 3,851 people between the two data sources and suggests that around 67% of those who applied for National Insurance numbers also registered under the WRS<sup>4</sup>. Even allowing for some time discrepancy between registering under the WRS scheme and applying for a

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<sup>2</sup> The fee was initially £50, but this was increased to £70 from 1 October 2005.

<sup>3</sup> For comparison purposes, the Department of Employment and Learning issued 275 work permits to nationals from Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Hungary and Latvia between 1 May 1998 and 31 August 2002 and Work Permits UK issued 620 work permits to nationals of the same five countries plus Slovakia between 1 September 2002 and 31 October 2003 (Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre 2003:118-119). No separate figures were available for Estonian and Slovenian nationals.

<sup>4</sup> The DSD data includes figures for one month (April 2004) not included in the WRS data, this will marginally affect the overall proportion of WRS registrations to NINO applications.

National Insurance number, the difference between the two sets of figures suggests that not all people who are required to register are actually registering.

## UK Comparisons on A8 Migrants

The Worker Registration Scheme figures therefore may not be a completely accurate count of the total number of A8 migrants taking up work in Northern Ireland. But nevertheless, they can be useful in providing a comparative guide to migration into various regions of the UK if we assume that the overall registration levels are no lower in Northern Ireland than in any other part of the country<sup>5</sup>.

In terms of the total number of worker registrations, Northern Ireland had the second fewest number of registrations of the eleven United Kingdom regions. Only Wales (with 3,645 registrations) has recorded fewer registrations, while Scotland with 14,845 registrations recorded almost twice the number as Northern Ireland. However, if registrations are considered as a percentage of the total population, then Northern Ireland has the highest proportion of A8 registrations of the four UK countries. The total number of registrations in Northern Ireland represents 0.45% of the total population, based on the 2004 population estimates. In contrast the figures for England represent 0.39% of the total population, for Scotland 0.29% and Wales just 0.12% (Table1).

**Table 1: Comparison of Four UK Countries: A8 – Total Population**

	<b>Pop - Mid 2004</b>	<b>A8 Migrants</b>	<b>A8 as %</b>
England	50,093,000	193,660	0.39
Scotland	5,078,000	14,845	0.29
Wales	2,952,000	3,645	0.12
Northern Ireland	1,710,000	7,755	0.45

These figures indicate that Northern Ireland appears to be attracting a proportionately larger number of A8 nationals than other countries in the UK and therefore a larger number of migrants from A8 countries than might have been expected. However, the figures do not offer any indications as to why this might be the case.

The Home Office data also indicates that Northern Ireland has recorded a steady increase each quarter for the number of worker registrations. The figures increased from 745 for May-June 2004, to 1,340 the quarter ending September 2004, 1,570 for quarter ending December 2004, 1,830 for quarter ending March 2005 and 2,270 for the quarter ending June 2005<sup>6</sup>. Apart from Northern Ireland only four of the ten other UK regions have shown an increase in A8 migrants in each of the five quarters. The others regions are the Midlands, South West, North East and Wales.

<sup>5</sup> A8 Migrants to the Republic are not required to register and therefore it is not possible to compare the patterns on a cross border basis. However, it has been estimated that 130,000 A8 nationals have registered for a Personal Public Service (PPS) number since May 2004 (Irish Times 26.9.2005).

<sup>6</sup> The NINO data also indicates an increase in each of the recent years, see above.

The UK Accession Monitoring Report indicates that Poles made up 57% of A8 registrations in the UK, with Lithuanians accounting for 14%, Slovaks 11%, Latvians 7% and Czechs 6%. The breakdown by nationality is only available on a UK wide basis but the DSD data for requests for National Insurance numbers can offer some comparison with the data on the Worker Registration Scheme. The DSD figures indicate that 47% of NINO applications were from Poles, 23% were Lithuanians, 14% were Slovaks, 7% were from the Czech Republic and 6% were from Latvia (Table 2). These percentages suggest that Northern Ireland is attracting a somewhat higher percentage of Lithuanians than the UK average and a lower percentage of Poles.

**Table 2: Applications for National Insurance Numbers by Nationality**

	<b>Total NI applications<sup>7</sup></b>	<b>% of NI Total</b>	<b>% of UK Total</b>
Poland	6,169	47	57
Lithuania	3,013	23	14
Slovakia	1,827	14	11
Czech Republic	859	7	6
Latvia	837	6	7
Hungary	155	1.5	3
Estonia	70	0.5	1.5
Slovenia	32	0.25	0.1
Total	12,962	99.25	99.6

This information again may raise more question than answers. Should we ask why are more Lithuanians and Slovaks coming to Northern Ireland than to the UK generally or is the question why are fewer Poles migrating here? Is it related to the particular type of jobs that are available, or some other factors?

Breaking down migration figures by national groups may also be of some value in identifying the needs of migrants for the purposes of provision of information, translation and interpreting and others services. For example to date the Department of Trade and Industry in London has produced a booklet for migrants providing information on a range of subjects to help them establish themselves in the UK. This information is currently only available in Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese. Evidence on the current pattern of migration and also information on the demands made of translator and interpreter services in Northern Ireland suggests that information in Slovak, Czech, Latvian, Ukrainian and Russian might also be useful resources. Monitoring migration patterns may thus help indicate any potential changing information needs and service provisions.

## **Areas of Employment**

Northern Ireland also reveals a distinctive pattern of immigration in regards to the number and proportion of individuals being recruited to work in different employment

<sup>7</sup> Figures relate to number of NINO applications for April 2004 - July 2005.



sectors. The Accession Monitoring Report identifies the ten main employment sectors to which A8 migrants are being recruited. In order of importance these are: administration, business and management; hospitality and catering; agriculture; manufacturing, food, fish and meat processing; health and medical; retail; construction and land; transport; and entertainment and leisure.

In seven of the ten categories Northern Ireland falls at ninth, tenth or eleventh place in the UK ranking based on the total numbers of registered A8 migrants. This is the position that might be expected given overall immigration figures. However, Northern Ireland is ranked much higher in the case of three employment sectors: food processing, construction and manufacturing and in these three sectors more A8 nationals are employed than might be expected. Northern Ireland is the fourth ranked UK region in terms of the overall number of A8 nationals who are employed in both food processing and construction, and is the fifth ranked region in terms of A8 nationals employed in manufacturing (Table 3)<sup>8</sup>.

**Table 3: Breakdown of A8 Migrant Labour by Employment Category**

	<b>Total Nos.</b>	<b>UK Ranking</b>	<b>NI / UK</b>
Admin/Management	2,005	1	9
Manufacturing	1,585	4	5
Food Processing	1,180	5	4
Construction	815	8	4
Hospitality	670	2	11
Agriculture	555	3	10
Health	280	6	10
Retail	245	7	10
Transport	225	9	10
Entertainment	30	10	11
Others	160		10

In overall UK terms one in thirty A8 migrants has obtained work in Northern Ireland, but in three sectors, food processing, construction and manufacturing around one in ten A8 migrants working in the UK is based in Northern Ireland.

This brief analysis of the statistics from a Northern Irish perspective indicates that patterns of immigration of A8 nationals into the region are different and distinctive from other parts of the United Kingdom. However, to date there is little data that will allow a more detailed analysis of these trends or provide any indications as to why this is the case or whether such trends will continue.

Initial research on the overall impact of A8 migrants on the UK economy (Portes and French 2005) suggests that it has led to an increase in both output and the total employment figures, while having a minimal impact on native workers. The authors found that the overall impact on employment issues of EU enlargement has been

<sup>8</sup> The regions with higher numbers than NI for these three sectors are as follows: Food Processing: Anglia, Scotland, Midlands. Construction: London, Central, Anglia. Manufacturing: Anglia, Midlands, London, Central.



modest but broadly positive. Other recent research in the UK also indicates that immigrants overall make a net contribution to the economy (Sriskandarajah, Cooley and Reed 2005). To date there has been little work done on the impact of recent economic migrants on the Northern Irish economy, although Animate has highlighted the fact that migrants are net contributors to the economy<sup>9</sup> and anecdotal evidence from employers has indicated the increasing reliance that rural industries are placing on migrant labour.

Immigration to Northern Ireland is obviously responding to distinctive local patterns of need and demand. This appears to be the case both in relation to the UK as a whole and for different areas within Northern Ireland. However, there is clearly a need for more focused research to explore the dynamics of local demand and to offer some indications as to whether such demand will continue, and if so how it will be met in the context of the Government immigration strategy (Home Office 2005). It is worth noting that members of the Scottish Executive have raised the issue of whether Scotland's future labour needs will be met within the wider UK immigration strategy and it has been suggested that Scotland might need to define its own needs with regard to migrant labour. The same question could be asked of Northern Ireland.

At present there is no distinctive Northern Irish approach to immigration, and the current pattern of migration is largely responding to the needs of the private sector and to market forces. But this brief review suggests that the needs of Northern Ireland may well be significantly different to the needs of the United Kingdom as a whole. There is clearly a need for some research into the likely future labour needs of Northern Ireland, and some projections made on how these will be met.

## **Undocumented Workers**

The current focus on migrant labour is very much on those who are formally documented through the Workers Registration Scheme or through requesting National Insurance numbers. Little attention has been paid recently to those working as undocumented workers. Recent experiences in Northern Ireland only too readily highlight the precarious status of undocumented workers. In the summer of 2002 the presence of undocumented migrants in Northern Ireland made the news when two Lithuanian men were found murdered near Warrenpoint, and more recently in late 2004 the case of Oksana Sukhanova, the young Ukrainian woman who had her legs amputated after suffering from frostbite while sleeping rough, made headline news. These cases illustrate the marginalisation and insecurities that migrants can experience.

There are various ways in which migrants may end up as undocumented workers. For A8 nationals failure to register under the Worker Registration Scheme will result in any employment being declared illegal. For those who are working on a work permit losing a job can result in the individual having an undocumented status. Some individuals may have entered the UK illegally, they may have been smuggled in or

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.animate-ccd.net/Publicns/ANinf\\_mths.pdf](http://www.animate-ccd.net/Publicns/ANinf_mths.pdf)

have been trafficked. The Organised Crime Task Force has immigration crime as part of its remit but its publications provide little information on this issue<sup>10</sup>.

A report prepared for the North Ireland Human Rights Commission suggested that many undocumented migrants might have entered Northern Ireland from the Republic (Latif 2003) and also that some migrants might be unaware of their unauthorised status, while others might be placed in work in the north by unscrupulous recruitment agencies. A recent press report suggests that movement of undocumented migrants may equally occur in the opposite direction. The *Irish Times* reported that the Garda Siochana Border Control Unit, established in October 2004, had identified 477 people crossing the border on trains or buses who were refused leave to remain in the Republic between January and June 2005 (*Irish Times* 4 August 2005). This number compares with a figure of 366 people who were refused leave to remain for the whole of 2004. There are no comparable figures for migrants who have been detained or deported in or from Northern Ireland. Unlike the Garda, the PSNI have no responsibility for immigration issues and therefore do not collect on statistics on this issue. Responsibility for all immigration matters lies with the UK Immigration Service, based in Liverpool and statistics for deportations from the UK are only available on a national basis (see Dudley, Roughton, Fidler and Woolacott 2005).

Latif notes that between April 2001 and April 2003 a total of 110 undocumented workers were deported from Northern Ireland (Latif 2003:2), although she does not cite her source for this figure. In a more recent case thirty six foreign nationals were detained at various locations including seaports, airports and the Craigavon area in a joint operation involving the UK Immigration Service and the PSNI, while seventeen of these individuals were reportedly deported for various offences including working illegally (*Belfast Telegraph* 25 August 2005; *BBC On Line* 25 August 2005). While the Government interest is primarily on removing people deemed to be in the UK illegally, the case of Oksana Sukhanova has highlighted the need for emergency support and advice in a wide range of service areas for people who cross over from a documented to an undocumented status (see also *BBC On Line* 26 October 2005 and PICUM 2005).

The difficulties of identifying the number of undocumented workers are obvious and figures for the number of such workers within the UK have varied widely. A recent Home Office paper set out a formula for estimating undocumented workers and this suggested an upper figure of 570,000 unauthorised migrants in the UK, a low figure of 310,00 and central estimate of 430,000 people (Woodbridge 2005). The central estimate was based on an 'unauthorised population' at 0.7% of the total UK population and at 12% of the total foreign-born population. Following this broad formula the estimates for the number of undocumented workers in Northern Ireland would range between 11,970 people (based on 0.7% of total population) and 3,173 people (based on 12% of foreign born population, based on Census 2001). These figures compare with a UK Immigration Service 'guesstimate' of up to 2,000 undocumented migrants working in Northern Ireland in 2003 (Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre 2003:29).

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.octf.gov.uk/>

Media reports from a couple of years ago suggested that most undocumented workers were probably East European nationals working in the agricultural sector. If this was indeed the case then it is unclear what impact the enlargement of the European Union would have had on this flow of migrants, as many such people would now be able to work in Northern Ireland legally. The large number of A8 nationals registering for National Insurance numbers may in part thus be accounted for by individuals already working here and subsequently formalising their legal status.

The issue of undocumented workers is another area where there is currently very little information available: of their numbers, location, status or the context in which they are living and working. Given the extremely vulnerable status of undocumented migrants it is an issue that should be given greater consideration with some urgency and consideration needs to be given to ensuring that appropriate standards of services are provided to protect their basic human rights.

## **Legislative Control**

The previous research by ICR highlighted a number of concerns raised by migrant workers in Northern Ireland with regard to the employment practices of various agencies and the terms and conditions under which they were forced to work and live. Similarly over the past few years the worst practices of ‘gangmasters’ operating in the agricultural and shellfish gathering sectors in the UK have received extensive coverage in the media. This may particularly be an issue for undocumented workers, but can also be a factor in the exploitation and discrimination of migrants more generally.

The growing concerns about the exploitation of migrant workers has resulted in attempts to impose greater control over gangmasters and other employers operating in the UK. A number of pieces of legislation have been or are being introduced that will, or are aimed to have, some impact on the employment of migrant workers in Northern Ireland. These primarily focus on the regulation and monitoring of businesses that employ or supply labour for other businesses. The legislation includes:

**Gangmasters (Licensing Act) 2004:** This requires all labour providers operating in the agriculture, shellfish gathering and associated processing and packaging sectors to be licensed. It will require both employment agencies (who supply staff for other employers) and employment businesses (who employ staff who are lent to other employers) to be registered. A Gangmaster Licensing Authority will be responsible for maintaining a register of licensed gangmasters; this will include a separate register of gangmasters operating in Northern Ireland. This legislation has been enacted but has yet to be brought into operation. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development are the lead agency in Northern Ireland.

**Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005:** This order outlines the series of limitations on the practices of employment agencies and businesses and sets out greater responsibilities for them

both towards the people they employ and to those hiring temporary workers. This order came into force on 25 September 2005.

**Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 2005:** This order will allow the Department of Employment and Learning to appoint enforcement officers with powers to enter and inspect premises related to employment agencies and businesses and examine their records and documents. DEL expects this order to take effect from December 2005.

**Health and Personal Social Services (Quality Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003:** This order established the NI Health and Personal Social Services Regulation and Improvement Authority with responsibility for monitoring and regulating the quality of health and care services in both the public and private sector. It provides for the registration of various categories of nursing and care establishments, the establishment of minimum standards and has provision for the regulation of managers and employees.

The three pieces of legislation relating to employment agencies and businesses have yet to be fully implemented so it is too early to determine any impact they might have. However, the Equality Commission has already undertaken a number of initiatives with regard to informing employers of their responsibilities with regard to migrant workers and the Commission has also worked with a number of unions and employer bodies to produce a good practice guide to *Promoting Equality in Intercultural Workplaces*. Unpublished research by ICR has determined that there is an emerging body of good practice being developed by some employers with regard to employing migrant workers. It would clearly be useful if this was documented in more systematic manner and a more formal guide to good practice was produced and promoted among employers.

## Policy Development

To date much of the policy interest in relation to migrant workers in Northern Ireland has been with regard to their status as members of ethnic or national minority communities, rather than the position within the wider economic sphere. This is highlighted by the fact that migrant workers feature throughout the recently published *Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland* (OFMDFM 2005), but migrants and immigration issues do not get mentioned in the *Economic Vision for Northern Ireland*, which was published in February 2005 (DTI 2005).

The Racial Equality Strategy focuses on issues of service provision and information supply, raises concerns about exploitation and the rights of migrants and also highlights the need to maintain positive relationships between new migrants and local residents (Sections 3.10-3.15 and 4.45-4.46). The documents also notes:

- 3.15 The speed and extent of the increase in numbers of migrant workers in Northern Ireland – and the sheer diversity of the people involved – pose complex challenges for government and society alike.

If one is being charitable one might suggest that this rapid development of a new migrant population may well be a factor in the lack of any reference in the *Economic Vision for Northern Ireland*. This document notes that the aim of the economic vision is to address some of the key weaknesses in the Northern Ireland economy, notably competition for traditional industries, such as textiles and food and drink, the undeveloped nature of the private sector and a large public sector (DTI 2005: 3-4). But interestingly while the document notes the importance of the 'increasingly global nature of the marketplace' and highlights the need for a more entrepreneurial approach within the private sector, the report does not acknowledge the increasingly globalisation of the recruitment of labour role by the private sector in Northern Ireland. Nor is there any consideration given of the potential for development of specialist services and resources for and by the members of the new migrant population. These are issues that need to be taken on board in any future planning for economic development in Northern Ireland.

## Issues and Questions

The recent trends in migration to Northern Ireland appear to be driven by a number of factors. Three of the prominent ones are:

- The lack of skilled labour in certain key areas of the public sector.
- A lack of appropriate quality labour for many private companies.
- A lack of appropriate opportunities at home for many people in Eastern Europe.

These trends will raise a number of issues for Northern Ireland if migration is to be considered as an opportunity, for economic development and social diversity, rather than become a problem of racism and discrimination. But it is also important that the opportunity is acknowledged and planned for in a strategic manner or problems of racism and discrimination will undoubtedly increase.

Martin Ruhs from Oxford University's Centre on Migration Policy and Society, writing in the *Irish Times* recently (26.9.2005) highlighted the importance of migrant labour for the Irish economy and argued for the need for a public debate to inform planning and policy<sup>11</sup>. He argued there was a need for:

1. Facts about the numbers of migrants, their dependents and their plans for staying or leaving is necessary for effective government planning.
2. Information on the impact of migration both for the host country and for the country of origin.
3. A discussion about policy objectives: Who determines migration policy, the private sector, government?
4. A long-term strategy for migration.

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<sup>11</sup> See also Barrett, Bergin and Duffy (2005) Hughes (2005) Hughes and Quinn (2004) and Quinn and Hughes (2005).

These factors are equally true for Northern Ireland. To date there is little indication that much consideration has been given to developing an appropriate strategic framework for migration policy for Northern Ireland. The following section highlights some of the questions that will need to be considered in constructing such a strategy.

One obvious question is whether the future labour needs of Northern Ireland will be the same as the UK as a whole, or whether they will be able to be met within the broad framework set down by the Government in *Controlling our borders: Making migration work for Britain* (HM Government 2005). Any debate will be complicated by the fact that Northern Ireland is not an independent country and immigration policy is determined by the British Government, rather than a devolved administration at Stormont. However, there has been some discussion in Scotland, for example, over the need to develop a specific approach to immigration based on the particular needs of the Scottish economy and demographic predictions for the country. Is there need for similar consideration of a Northern Irish debate and strategy?

It will also be important to consider patterns of migration to Northern Ireland in relation to the patterns that are emerging in the Republic. It is quite possible that the developments, needs and demands of the north and south of Ireland will have more similarities than differences and the north-south patterns may prove to have more in common than the east-west patterns.

Finally, there is also a discussion underway within the European Union about developing an EU wide approach to managing economic migration (Commission of the European Communities 2005). The various Northern Irish institutions agencies and civil society organisations should be involved in this debate.

It is evident that there is currently a lack of any strategic planning around issues of immigration into Northern Ireland. There are no predictions of labour needs or the types of skills that will be required over the next 20-30 years, or of how they will be met. At present migration policy is largely being left to the demands of the private sector and of the market. Is this adequate or appropriate?

At present it appears that there is very little monitoring of migration trends in Northern Ireland by the Government. A number of departments gather some bits of information, but there does not appear to be any joined up approach to gathering, monitoring or analysing data. Some information is available about new arrivals through applications for National Insurance numbers and the Workers Registration Scheme but these two sets of figures produce divergent numbers. These figures also only monitor inward migration, we do not know anything of outflows of recent migrants, or the length of time migrants might expect to stay or hope to stay, or of whether they intend to bring family members.

There also does not appear to be any projections for future patterns of migration into Northern Ireland. There have been two main waves of immigration so far: Portuguese and Filipinos between 2001-2003, and A8 nationals since May 2004. But will this continue or will there be a further shift with the next enlargement of the European



Union in 2007 if/when Romania and Bulgaria joins? Will current patterns of migration from the A8 countries continue? Does the Northern Irish economy need immigration to continue at the current levels, at lower levels or at higher levels? How will the any future migrant labour requirements be met?

The patterns of migration are responding to different needs in different areas. The current pattern appears to be dissimilar to migration from the Commonwealth countries in the post World War Two period when migrants tended to move the main centres of population. Current migration involves more widespread dispersed to rural towns and industries. But what impact is the current migration having at a local level in terms of provision of services, housing and resources? Is any of the local level of strategic planning taking such patterns of migration into consideration?

There is also a need to consider the wider social impact of current migration trends. What is the impact of private sector recruitment on the current planning of statutory sector service provision? For example, what is impact of private sector recruitment of migrants on local health and education provision? What impact is it having on local housing markets and resource provision? While labour immigration can boost the local economy it can also impact on planned or available service provision. Is this happening? If so how? What type of impact is being experienced and what type of responses are being developed?

We currently talk about migrant workers in terms of being a homogenous group, but the only thing they have in common is that they have migrated to Northern Ireland to take up work. Increasingly the different ethnic and national groups will come to distinguish themselves as different from others, and as the population of new migrants grows so to will tensions between different population groups become more evident. Strategic planning will need to address this diversity and the differing needs of different national groups.

What impact will the growth of minority ethnic and national communities have on the resourcing of the minority ethnic population? There are recent shifts happening both in scale and the make up of the minority population of Northern Ireland. The non-UK and Irish population has perhaps doubled in the past three to four years, and the current patterns of migration are leading to changes in the overall composition of the minority population. Poles and Lithuanians are now among the largest minority populations in Northern Ireland. But should we consider them as populations rather than as communities? How will these changes fit within the current BME population and support networks and within the available the resourcing of this sector by Government? If the Racial Equality Strategy is aimed at a minority population of 20,000-30,000 people, will the resources (and the strategy) be appropriate for a population twice that size?

## **In Conclusion**

Migration patterns to Northern Ireland have changed considerably over recent years and this is leading to significant changes both to the size and the ethnic/national



background of the overall minority population. The currently available evidence suggests that the patterns of migration are distinctive in relation to the UK as a whole, with larger numbers of Eastern European migrants moving to Northern Ireland and a larger than expected numbers of migrants in the manufacturing, food processing and construction sectors.

The current focus of attention has been on issues of discrimination, service provision, information and advice for migrants. There has been little overall policy development to address the prominence of migration as a factor in the current and future economic development of Northern Ireland, while most current responses and initiatives appear to be being developed in isolation and with no sense of a coherent or joined up approach. This is an issue that will need to be addressed if migration is to continue to be an opportunity for Northern Ireland rather than a problem.

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