

Executive Summary of research by Neil Jarman, on *New Migrants and Belfast*

In September 2006, the Good Relations Unit of Belfast City Council commissioned Dr Neil Jarman, Director of the Institute of Conflict Research, to undertake research on migrants in Belfast.

This was to provide information on the number and make up of the new migrant communities in Belfast, to help the Council meet its responsibilities in challenging racism and inequality and in developing positive and inclusive responses to the changing face of the city.

The Council has just received the report and is considering its response.

The research was undertaken between December 2006 and February 2007. A summary of the findings shows that:

- There has been a significant increase in the numbers of migrant workers moving to Northern Ireland over recent years.
- This new migration has been generated by our growing economy and a demand for workers which cannot be met from the local population.
- Our understanding of the issue is based on Northern Ireland wide research or based on the Dungannon/south Tyrone/County Armagh area; there has been no specific research on Belfast.
- There are difficulties in calculating exact numbers, but the report used NISRA statistics, figures from the Worker Registration Scheme, work permits issued, new registrations with GPs, registrations for National Insurance nos. and school census figures.
- These figures indicate that the *minimum* number of working migrants who arrived in Belfast between April 2004 and March 2006 is 4,224 people.
- By including figures for dependants and those outside the formal recording system, it is possible that as many as 7,500 migrants came in the same two year period; this is considered a conservative estimate.
- Most new migrants to Belfast come from Poland, followed by Slovaks, Filipinos, Indians and Czechs. There are considerable variations by employment sector, with health sector employees predominantly Filipinos, Indians and Malays.
- The term 'migrant worker' covers a diverse range of nationalities, ethnicities, skills, and employment sectors and as such can not be considered a homogenous group. Caution must be exercised when generalising about the experiences and needs of 'migrant workers'.
- There is a roughly 60/40 male/female split, most are within the 18-34 age range.
- Around 16% of new migrants are children under the age of sixteen.

- The Polish community is the most prominent, with a number of shops selling Polish products, bars selling Polish beers, a Polish magazine *Glosik*, regular meetings of the Polish community and social events, including a regular church mass in Polish.
- A primary motivation for many migrants is improving their English. The Belfast Institute reported a 7-fold increase in the numbers of (adult) students taking the 'English as a second language' course between 2002 and 2005, but no consequent increase in budgets for these programmes.
- Growing numbers of migrant workers' children will have an impact on school places. Increasing numbers of children with English as an additional language in schools are creating demands in terms of language support.
- Most migrants in Belfast work in the construction industry, in the public and private health sector, in hospitality and in IT.
- Recruiting staff locally is difficult in some sectors, resulting in a growing reliance on migrant labour and a perception that some sectors would struggle without it.
- Local recruitment agencies reported a greater willingness from employers to take on migrant workers, some of whom are over-qualified for their posts.
- Their level of English language skills is vital in determining their job prospects.
- There are some examples of good practice among employers of migrant workers, for example, the Code of Practice developed by Business in the Community.
- The Trade Union movement (ICTU) has been proactive in supporting the rights of migrant workers, in research and in developing policy in this area.
- There have been limited resources to address the issue of providing services to the new migrant population. However, there have been various notable ad hoc initiatives, including, e.g.
 - a comprehensive range of rights based guides from the Law Centre et alia
 - Hazelwood Integrated College offering Polish as a GCSE option
 - the Ulster Bank Group offering fee-free banking to migrant workers.
- NI people are not noted for their tolerance and racist incidents in Belfast have always accounted for a high proportion of the total NI statistics.
- Not all incidents are reported to the police and survey evidence indicates a substantial level of racial abuse and harassment experienced by many migrants.
- Attempting to make a projection of the size of the migrant worker population in Belfast over the next five years has proved difficult.

Recommendations from the research report *New Migrants and Belfast* by Dr Neil Jarman, Institute for Conflict Research

- 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 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 liaise with the NCC/ICTU who are currently in discussions with statutory and community groups about the establishment of a migrant worker unit in Belfast.
- 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.
- 3.** Belfast City Council should convene a workshop or conference of key employers and employer organisation to discuss issues associated with their needs and the 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.