

# Diversity, Economy and Policy: New Patterns of Migration to Northern Ireland

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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. 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* 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)<sup>1</sup>*

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 The rapidly changing patterns of immigration have made previous publications on this subject out of date.<sup>2</sup> This paper reviews some of the key issues related to the process of immigration into Northern Ireland, the intention is to identify changing

patterns and to highlight areas where there is a need to focus more attention. In particular I 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, that only a percentage of migrants necessarily classify themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic community, and that many do not regard themselves as members of minority ethnic communities but rather identify with the category 'white'. The current cycle of migration appears to be different for three reasons. First, the speed and scale of current immigration is much more rapid than has previously been the case for Northern Ireland. 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. Third, the new migrants are not following previous patterns of settlement into major cities, but are settling in smaller rural towns and villages, which do not necessarily have any significant experience of processes of immigration. 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. Firstly, there is data collected by the Department of Social Development on the number of non-UK nationals who apply for National

Insurance numbers. Secondly, the Home Office publish data on nationals from the eight Eastern European EU Accession states who register under the Worker Registration Scheme. 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 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. The data does 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 data on foreign nationals who apply for a National Insurance number (NINO) 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:

- Adults 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.

DSD figures indicate that a total of 45,560 non-UK or Republic of Ireland nationals applied for National Insurance numbers in Northern Ireland between April 2003 and the end of January 2006. This includes 6,849 people who applied in 2003-2004, 16,440 people who applied in 2004-2005 and 22,271 people who applied between April 2005 and January 2006 (see Table 1). These 45,560 people came from 120 different identified countries.

**Table 1: National Insurance Number Applications for top ten countries  
April 2003 – January 2006**

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-Jan 2006	Total
Poland	229	3,594	8,197	12,020
Lithuania	91	2,036	2,860	4,987
Portugal	1,482	1,292	831	3,605
Slovakia	37	1,130	2,302	3,469
India	701	1,041	744	2,486
Philippines	549	501	474	1,524
Latvia	42	558	758	1,358
Czech Rep.	20	570	748	1338
China	405	486	426	1,317
Ukraine	218	367	282	867
NI Total	6,849	16,440	22,271	45,560

*Source: DSD Operations Directorate Support*

The table identifies the annual figures for the top ten nationalities over the period and these indicate how since the enlargement of the European Union nationals of the 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 Nationals**

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 require nationals from the Eastern European accession states (so-called A8 countries) to register under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) if they take up employment for more than one month's duration. The Home Office quarterly report on the number of people registering under the WRS 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 Home Office data therefore only monitors inflow of migrants, it does not monitor out-flow. It therefore does not 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 registered under the Work Registration Scheme in the United Kingdom between May 2004 and December 2005, while 12,355 people have registered in Northern Ireland.<sup>3</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 6,305 registrations) has recorded fewer registrations, while Scotland with 23,930 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 0.72 per cent of the total population, based on the 2004 population estimates. In contrast the figures for England represent 0.57 per cent of the total population, for Scotland 0.47 per cent and Wales just 0.21 per cent (Table2).

**Table 2: 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	283,880	0.57
Scotland	5,078,000	23,930	0.47
Wales	2,952,000	6,305	0.21
Northern Ireland	1,710,000	12,355	0.72

These figures indicate that Northern Ireland appears to be attracting a proportionately larger number of A8 nationals than other countries in the UK, although the data does not offer any indications as to why this might be the case. However, it may be that the process of migration to Northern Ireland is influenced by its geographical location on the island of Ireland, and patterns of migration to Northern Ireland thus have similarities with patterns of migration to the Republic.<sup>4</sup>

### **Working the Economy**

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 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 higher in the case of three employment sectors: construction, manufacturing and food processing. In these three sectors more A8 nationals are employed than might be expected (Table 3). This brief review of the statistics indicates that patterns of immigration of A8 nationals into the region are different and distinctive from other parts of the United Kingdom.

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

	<b>Total Nos. in Northern Ireland</b>	<b>UK Ranking</b>	<b>NI/UK</b>
Admin/Management	3,645	1	9
Manufacturing	2,275	4	6
Construction	1,235	7	6
Hospitality	1,035	2	11
Food Processing	905	8	8
Agriculture	845	3	9
Health	480	5	10
Retail	430	6	10
Transport	335	9	10
Entertainment	45	10	11
Others	1,120		10

It is also worth noting, in relation to predicting future trends, that registrations by A8 nationals increased in each of the first five quarter year periods following the EU enlargement, but that numbers have dropped in each of the third and fourth quarter of 2005. Overall UK registrations also appear to have peaked during the third quarter of 2005 and also dropped back in the final quarter of the year. This may have implications for the sustainability of growing the economy on the basis of workers from Eastern Europe.

Initial research on the overall impact of A8 migrants on the UK economy<sup>5</sup> 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 modest but broadly positive. Other recent research in the UK also indicates that immigrants overall make a net contribution to the economy.<sup>6</sup> 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>7</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.<sup>8</sup> 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 requests for National Insurance numbers. Little attention has been paid recently to those who are undocumented. 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, a young Ukrainian women whose legs were 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 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>9</sup>

A report prepared for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission suggested that some undocumented migrants might have entered Northern Ireland from the Republic and that some migrants might be unaware of their unauthorised status, while others might be placed in work in the north by unscrupulous recruitment agencies.<sup>10</sup> Press reports suggest 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 as the PSNI have no responsibility for immigration issues and therefore do not collect on statistics on this issue. Responsibility for immigration matters lies with the UK Immigration Service, based in Liverpool. Statistics for deportations from the UK are only available on a national basis.<sup>12</sup> Latif notes that between April 2001 and April 2003 a total of 110 undocumented workers were deported from Northern Ireland<sup>13</sup>, although she does not cite sources for this figure. More recently 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.<sup>14</sup> While Government interest is focused on removing people deemed to be in the UK illegally, the case of Oksana Sukhanova 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.

Media reports from 2002 suggested that most undocumented workers were 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 has had on this flow, as many such people would now be able to work in Northern Ireland legally. 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<sup>15</sup>. 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.

### **Policy Development**

Previous research has highlighted concerns by migrant workers with regard to the employment practices of various agencies or gangmasters, and the terms and conditions under which they were forced to work and live. These concerns have resulted in attempts to impose greater control over gangmasters and other employers. Several pieces of legislation have been introduced that aim to have a positive impact on the employment of migrant workers in Northern Ireland. These include: the Gangmasters (Licensing Act) 2004, which requires employment agencies (who supply staff for other employers) and employment businesses (who employ staff who are lent to other employers) to be registered; the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, which sets out limitations on the practices of employment agencies and businesses; and the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, which allows for the inspection premises related to employment agencies and businesses. It is too early to assess the impact of these new pieces of legislation.

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*<sup>16</sup>, but migrants and immigration issues do not get mentioned in the *Economic Vision for Northern Ireland*, which was published in February 2005.<sup>17</sup> The Racial Equality Strategy focuses on 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.<sup>18</sup> 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 the rapid development of a new migrant population may 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).<sup>19</sup> 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 increasing 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*<sup>20</sup>, highlighted the importance of

migrant labour for the Irish economy and argued for the need for a public debate to inform planning and policy. 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.

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. 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*.<sup>21</sup> 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 a discussion underway within the European Union about developing an EU wide approach to managing economic migration.<sup>22</sup> The various Northern Irish institutions, agencies, trade unions and civil society organisations should be involved in this debate.

It is evident that there is currently a lack of 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 there is very little monitoring of migration trends in Northern Ireland by the Government; there does not appear to be any joined up approach to gathering, monitoring or analysing data. The information available through applications for National Insurance numbers and the Workers Registration Scheme produce divergent numbers and they 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.<sup>23</sup>

Nor does there 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 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 to the main centres of population. Current migration involves more widespread dispersal 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 many migrants have in common is that they have moved 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 too will differences between the 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 increased 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 minority ethnic population and support networks and within the available 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?

## **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. 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 become a problem.

## Notes

- 1 OFMDFM, 2005
- 2 Bell, Jarman and Lefebvre, 2004; Jarman, 2004
- 3 Home Office, 2006. 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. DSD figures for applications for National Insurance numbers indicates a significantly larger number of A8 nationals seeking work since May 1 2004 than registered (see Table 1). The data is not available for exactly the same period, so exact comparisons are not possible, but DSD data suggests that about 50% of A8 nationals registered under the WRS.
- 4 Barrett, Bergin and Duffy, 2005; Hughes, 2005; Hughes and Quinn, 2004; Mac Einri, 2005; Quinn and Hughes, 2005.
- 5 Portes and French, 2005.
- 6 Sriskandarajah, Cooley and Reed, 2005.
- 7 [http://www.animate-ccd.net/Publicns/ANinf\\_mths.pdf](http://www.animate-ccd.net/Publicns/ANinf_mths.pdf)
- 8 Home Office, 2005.
- 9 <http://www.octf.gov.uk/>. However, ongoing work by Women's Aid and Amnesty in Northern Ireland suggests that there is an issue with trafficking which needs more attention.
- 10 Latif, 2003.
- 11 *Irish Times*, 4 August 2005.
- 12 Dudley, Roughton, Fidler and Woolacott, 2005.
- 13 Latif, 2003:2.
- 14 *Belfast Telegraph*, 25 August 2005; BBC On Line, 25 August 2005.
- 15 PICUM, 2005; Woodbridge, 2005.
- 16 OFMDFM, 2005.
- 17 DTI, 2005.
- 18 Sections 3.10-3.15 and 4.45-4.46.
- 19 DTI, 2005: 3-4.
- 20 *Irish Times*, 26 September 2005.
- 21 HM Government, 2005.
- 22 Commission of the European Communities, 2005.
- 23 See FAS 2005 for some analysis in relation to the Republic.

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