

Challenging Myths and Misinformation about Migrant Workers and their Families

“Migration is the mother of progress and invention. (...) Our world today is shaped by the industry of immigrants.”

Peter Sutherland, Special Representative for Migration to the UN Secretary General



What do you know about migrant workers and their families living in Ireland?

Are you sure you have all the facts?

This leaflet is designed to give clear information about migrant workers and their families.

This leaflet is published by the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) and the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI).

The NCCRI is an independent expert body focusing on racism and interculturalism.

www.nccri.ie

The MRCI is a national organisation working to promote the rights of migrant workers and members of their families who are in situations of vulnerability.

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Did you know?

- The 2006 Census suggests that there are now around 400,000 non-Irish nationals in the Republic, representing 9.4% of the total population.
- Nearly 85% of all migrant workers are from the EU (including UK). EU nationals are free to seek work in Ireland without any restrictions.
- It is estimated that 5% of the non-Irish population are refugees or are seeking asylum.
- Returned Irish emigrants are included in general immigration statistics. Between 1999 and 2004 they accounted for 42% of total inward migration numbers.
- Around 30% of migrant workers in Ireland are from the countries that joined the EU in 2004. It is not known how many migrant workers from these states have since left Ireland.
- Migrant workers from outside the EU require permission to work in Ireland, e.g. a Work Permit or Green Card, depending on the job.
- The number of Work Permits issued to non-EU nationals decreased from 47,707 in 2003 to 27,136 in 2005 (including renewals).
- In 2005-2006 there were over 25,000 registered international students in Ireland. International students are allowed to work part-time while studying and full-time during the holiday period.
- Europe had 20% of the world's population in 1900, has 12% today and will have just 4% of the world's population in 100 years.
- Irish people are still emigrating at the rate of 17,000 a year. It is estimated that there are 50,000 undocumented Irish migrant workers in the United States.

Challenging some myths about migrant workers

01 Do Migrant Workers take jobs from Irish people?

- There is always the possibility of displacement in a competitive economy but most available research shows that migrant workers replace rather than displace workers in Ireland.
- Ireland's unemployment rate is the lowest it has ever been (4.5%) and is one of the lowest in the EU.
- There are many reasons why it can be hard for unemployed people to find work ,e.g. lack of childcare and disability access, discrimination, racism, deskilling, educational disadvantage.
- 75% of companies report that they have difficulties in filling vacancies.
- FÁS estimates that 500,000 migrant workers will be needed over the next decade.

02 Are Migrant Workers a drain on the economy?

- Migrant workers expand the economy by allowing businesses to grow and by investing their own skills and money in enterprises.
- Migrant workers are vital for our health services and the hospitality sector, and many other parts of the Irish economy.
- They contribute both as tax payers and consumers of goods and services.
- Of the 162,200 additional jobs created in the Irish economy from 2004 to 2006, non-Irish national entrepreneurs and companies accounted for 53% of these jobs.

- The majority of migrant workers are skilled and educated. This contributes to Ireland's competitiveness and productivity levels.
- Non-EU students pay over double the fees of Irish and EU students. Non-EU students cannot access any social welfare benefits even if working.

03 Do Migrant Workers bring down wages?

- Wage levels including the minimum wage have consistently risen over the past decade.
- Migrant workers should not be blamed for employers who do not pay minimum wage and who violate employment legislation for their own profit.
- Migrant workers are involved in campaigning for fair pay and good standards of employment for all workers.

04 Are Migrant Workers a burden on public services?

- Migrant workers tend to pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits. It is estimated that around 200,000 migrant workers provide an annual surplus in income taxes of around half a billion Euro.
- Despite unfounded fears of 'welfare tourism', less than 1% of the country's migrant workers are dependent on social welfare. Social Welfare is important for any worker as a safety net in times of illness or unemployment.
- Even when migrant workers pay social insurance they can find it hard to access social benefits. A rule called the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) was introduced in 2004. A person has to pass a test before qualifying for social welfare or benefit, e.g. have a work history in the state, and workers from outside the EU must be resident in Ireland for approximately two years.
- There can be pressure on public services when

there are insufficient resources and increased needs (e.g. teachers or language supports), or when waiting lists are already long (e.g. affordable housing lists). This results from public services not being able to keep up to date with the changing needs of the population and is not the fault of any one group.

05 What about Migrant Workers burdening our criminal justice system?

- Criminality exists in all communities. When media stories deliberately use a person's nationality or residency status it can give the impression that members of a particular group are more likely to commit crimes than others.
- 2,185 non-Irish nationals were committed to prison in 2005. Of these 40% were held under immigration-related offences and awaiting deportation.
- It has been suggested that there is a link between road traffic offences and migrant workers. The Gardai have said publicly that there is no link and it is simply a fact that as Ireland's population becomes more diverse this will be reflected in the profile of those causing accidents.

06 So 'illegally' resident Migrant Workers should be told to leave?

- There are no official numbers of who is undocumented in Ireland. It is the MRCI's experience that most migrant workers come here legally but become undocumented through no fault of their own, e.g. when an employer did not renew their Work Permit.
- Like many Irish emigrants who have found themselves undocumented in the US, undocumented migrant workers living in Ireland are simply trying to make a living and support their family, and they do not want to be undocumented.
- Many of those who become undocumented have also experienced workplace exploitation, which often involves being owed significant amounts of money in unpaid wages.

Are Migrant Workers not interested in being a part of Irish society?

- Sports clubs, churches and community associations all over Ireland are experiencing a new lease of life as migrant workers and their families participate and integrate into their local communities.
- Migrant workers often speak several languages, and given the opportunity would like to learn English. This can be difficult when working long hours and classes are not available at times when workers are free.
- Like the Irish experience of emigration, migrant workers generally develop an identification with the country they live in, while retaining a strong attachment to their country of origin.
- Irish society has undergone huge changes in the past 15 years. Only a part of this has to do with migration. Globalisation, communications, wealth, and international travel all shape how we define ourselves as a society.



Some Terms Explained

Migrant Worker

A migrant worker is a person who is working in a state of which s/he is not a national. A migrant worker can be documented and undocumented.

Work Permit

A Work Permit gives permission for a migrant worker to be employed in a specific job. The employer must show that there are no Irish or EU candidates available to fill the position. A Work Permit is normally issued for two years and can be renewed for three years.

Green Card

A Green Card is a type of work permit issued for selected professional areas and for jobs with a salary of €60,000 and over. It is valid for 2 years.

Asylum Seeker

An Asylum-Seeker is a person who has applied for refugee status and is awaiting a decision on their case. A person seeking asylum has very limited rights and does not have the right to work.

Refugee

A Refugee is a person whose application for refugee status has been successful. Refugee status will be given only when there is a well-founded fear that that person will be subjected to persecution if they return to their country. Once a person has refugee status s/he can work without any restrictions.

EU National

An EU national is a person who is a citizen of an EU member state. All EU citizens have the right to move freely within the European Union, including Romania and Bulgaria who joined on 1st January 2007. A number of EU states have restrictions on who can access their labour market. Ireland imposed restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian nationals accessing jobs here.

Non-EU National

A Non-EU national is a person who is not a citizen of an EU member state. They have fewer rights than EU migrant workers.

Information Sources / Useful Links:

Central Statistics Office

www.cso.ie

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

www.entemp.ie

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

www.justice.ie

Emigrant Advice

www.emigrantadvice.ie

Immigrant Council of Ireland

www.immigrantcouncil.ie

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland

www.mrci.ie

National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

www.nccri.ie

National Economic and Social Council

www.nesc.ie

