

## Migrants

### Do we need migrant workers?

Despite the current recession, migrant workers continue to make an important contribution to many sectors of the Irish economy, including the health service, information technology, hospitality and horticulture. In addition, many migrants set up their own businesses which then offer employment.

Migrant workers contribute also to the Irish economy as taxpayers and users of goods and services. Migrants, generally, have been prepared to do work not favoured by the local population. However, there is often less recognition of the contribution made by highly skilled migrants in a great number of sectors in the economy.

Research indicates that most migrant workers come to Ireland legally but become undocumented / irregular ('illegal') through no fault of their own - for example, when an employer fails to renew their work permit.

Many migrant workers who become undocumented experience injustice in the workplace, for instance, not being paid the minimum wage or having deductions made to their earnings for accommodation which is often substandard. Increasingly, there is substantive evidence of people being trafficked to Ireland for work and for sexual exploitation.

### What about emigration from Ireland?

In 2008, about 45,000 people emigrated from Ireland. It is estimated that there are some 50,000 undocumented / irregular ('illegal') Irish migrants in the United States.

### What about migrant workers without 'papers'?

## REFUGEE AND MIGRANT PROJECT IRISH BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

**Columba Centre  
Maynooth  
Co. Kildare**

**Phone: 01 5053157**

**Fax: 01 6016401**

**E-mail: [refproject@iecon.ie](mailto:refproject@iecon.ie)  
[www.catholicbishops.ie/refugees](http://www.catholicbishops.ie/refugees)**

*Published: May 2007 Revised: Sept 2008; 2009*

**Who's who?**

**People Seeking  
Asylum  
Refugees  
Migrants**



**'Every migrant enjoys inalienable fundamental rights which must be respected in all cases.'**

*Pontifical Council for Migrants*

## People Seeking Asylum and Refugees

### About whom are we speaking?

A Person seeking asylum (refugee), is someone fleeing persecution in her/his own country who has applied to the State to be recognized as a refugee. While in the asylum system, a person has limited rights and is not allowed take up employment.

A **Refugee** is a person whose application for asylum has been successful. A refugee has largely the same rights as an Irish citizen.

A person with *leave to remain/subsidiary protection*, although having fewer rights than a refugee, is allowed to live and work in the State.

### What is Ireland's obligation to people seeking asylum?

Ireland, as one of the countries which signed the Geneva Refugee Convention (1951), has agreed to allow any person who arrives at the borders seeking asylum to enter the country and to make an application for asylum. Having examined the application, the authorities decide on whether or not to recognize the person as a refugee.

People seeking asylum are legally in the country while their asylum application is being examined and, should their application be turned down, are legally resident here until they are removed (deported).

### How many refugees and people seeking asylum are there in the world?

Worldwide there are some 42 million forcibly displaced persons of whom over 15 million are refugees, 827,000 are people seeking asylum and 26 million are people displaced within the borders of their own country. In addition, it is estimated that some 12 million people are stateless.

Up to 90% of people forced to flee their homes in the developing world find refuge in a neighbouring country.

### How many refugees and people seeking asylum are there in Ireland?

To date Ireland has recognized some 9,700 people as refugees (including all categories). We do not have statistics on how many of those are still living in the State.

In 2008, just under 3,900 people came to Ireland seeking asylum, less than .05% of those who sought asylum worldwide. In the same period the highest number of asylum applications was made in South Africa (30%), followed by U.S. (7%) and France (6%) (*UNHCR Statistics*)

## Migrants

### About whom and about what are we speaking?

A **Migrant** is a person who is living and/or working in a State of which s/he is not a national.

A **Work Permit** gives permission for a non-EEA national to be employed for a specific job. It is issued for two years and can be renewed for three years. Persons who have held employment permits and been working for 5 or more years consecutively will, on a year by year basis, be exempt from the requirement to hold a permit.

A **Green Card** is valid for two years and entitles a non-EEA national and her/his family to live and work in the State. It is issued for specified, highly skilled, well-paid positions.

An **EU** (European Union) national is a person who is a citizen of an EU member state. In general, all EU citizens have the right both to live and work in the State. However, for the moment, Romanian and Bulgarian nationals are subject to work restrictions.

An **EEA** (European Economic Area) national is a person who is a citizen of an EU State or of Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein. EEA nationals have the same rights, in general, as EU nationals.

**Non-EEA** nationals have fewer rights than EEA citizens and need travel visas and work permits to live and take up employment in the Irish State.

### How many migrants are there in Ireland?

Official estimates put the number of non-Irish nationals in the Republic (from within and without the EU/EEA) at about 420,000, representing almost 10% of the total population. Of this 10%, over 7% come from Europe, 1.1% from Asia, 0.9% from Africa and 0.5% from America.

Of the top 10 nationalities (other than Irish) living in the State, some 54% come from UK, 28% from Central Europe, 8% from Asia, 6% from USA and 4% from Africa. Of 1.9 million people at work in Ireland in 2006, some 67,000 (3.1%) came from outside the EU/EEA. (Census 2006)

### Migrant Workers in Ireland

Irish Government employment policy strongly favours migrant workers who come from EU/EEA countries. With the enlargement of the EU, increasing numbers of migrant workers now come from the EU/EEA. The number of permits issued to non EEA nationals decreased from 48,000 in 2003 to 23,600 in 2007. This number was further reduced to some 13,600 in 2008. The highest number of permits issued in 2008 were, firstly, for work in the *Service Industry* and, secondly, in *Medical and Nursing*.

To qualify for social welfare payments, an EU/EEA national must already have worked in the State and an applicant from outside the EU/EEA must be resident in Ireland for approximately two years.

