

Voices from the Global South

A Research Report on Migration >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>



The Centre for Global Education (CGE) was established in 1986 by eight development agencies to provide education services that will enhance awareness of international development issues. Its central remit is to challenge dominant stereotypes and commonly held perceptions of developing countries, which are prevalent in our society.

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Centre for Global Education

The Centre for Global Education was established in 1986 by eight development agencies to provide education services that enhance awareness of international development issues. Its central remit is to provide learning that will enable individuals and organisations to address the causes of poverty, inequality and injustice at local and global levels. The Centre believes that in the current era of accelerated globalisation our society is becoming increasingly interconnected with the wider world. Development education equips individuals and organisations to understand the cultural, economic, social and political influences on our lives that result from our growing interdependence with other countries and societies. It also provides learners with the skills, values, knowledge and understanding necessary to facilitate action that will contribute to poverty eradication both locally and globally.

The Centre endorses the United Nation's definition of development education which states that 'the objective of Development Education is to enable people to participate in the development of their community, their nation and the world as a whole'. Development education practice is based on active learning methodologies that facilitate the full participation of the learner and encourage an action outcome. The Centre for Global Education provides training and resources to local target groups that tailor development education content and practice to their needs. We consider the development process in Ireland within the context of the developing world and support multiculturalism and mutual respect by providing opportunities to learn about other cultures, faiths and lifestyles. The Centre supports the view that we can learn more about ourselves and local communities by extending our knowledge and experience of the wider world.

Centre for Global Education Mission Statement

The Centre for Global Education believes in and works towards a just and equitable world. We seek to promote an understanding of the interdependency of people across the world.

We will achieve excellence in our practice through the participation of users in our work and engagement with the increasingly diverse communities living in our society.

Our mission is to use education to challenge the causes of global poverty both locally and globally through action at all levels and in all sectors of society.

Centre for Global Education Mandate

Our mandate is to bring about change in the understanding of development issues and development education practice among those working in the formal and informal educational sectors.

The mandate for our work comes from:

- Our founders who legally constituted the Centre,
- Our funders who finance our work and
- Our partners

Our mandate is dynamic and changes with the engagement and interests of our stakeholders. We will work creatively to develop new ways of fulfilling our mandate to our stakeholders.



Foreword by Centre for Global Education

Background

This report is the result of the convergence of a number of factors relating to the recent activities of the Centre for Global Education which have strengthened our links with the minority, migrant and asylum/refugee communities in the north of Ireland. These activities include our long-standing membership of the Refugee Action Group (RAG), an independent support network advocating for asylum-seekers and refugees. More recently, the Centre introduced an accredited Global Educator course for education practitioners operating in the minority ethnic sector. This course is the first of its kind to be tailored to the needs of the minority sector and is part of a wider capacity building project that included web support and the organisation of an annual conference (see www.makingconnectionsni.org). Another important ingredient to this report is the Centre's enhanced commitment to research that 'illuminates the links between Ireland and the developing world'. Few issues illuminate this link more than that of migration which has become an increasingly prevalent aspect of our more globalised society.

Migration and Development

The Centre commissioned this report on migration to offer a more informed and rounded perspective on why individuals in the global South decide to live in our society. Migration has regrettably become a highly politicized issue frequently couched in overwhelmingly negative terms in language that undermines, rather than supports, community cohesion. The public debate on migration is all too often framed by statistics that ignore the stories and faces behind every individual narrative that starts in the global South and ends in the north of Ireland.

The Centre sought through this report to share some of these stories with our larger communities to outline some of the factors that lead an individual to leave their home, community and country and face an often treacherous and grueling journey to another continent, society and cultural fabric. The factors underpinning migration are varied and include political persecution, human rights abuses, extreme poverty and the desire to create a better life here. But this is only part of the story told by this report.

It also seeks to explore the experiences of our three main sample groups (first generation migrants, second generation migrants and asylum-seekers/ refugees) as they have adjusted to life in our society. How have they been received by the main local communities and to what extent have they received support from local statutory providers of services in health, education, housing and other key areas? While this study is qualitative and limited to a small sample of twelve interviewees we believe that it will point to some of the main issues that should be explored in further studies with a broader scope and remit. We also believe that this small study will benefit educators and policy-makers, community activists and service providers in gaining a more rounded understanding of the life experiences of migrants here. It is contingent on all of us to address the problems and negative experiences outlined in the enclosed narratives and also to build upon the larger positive views of local society expressed by our interviewees.

On behalf of the Centre I want to thank the two researchers, Elly Odhiambo and Philip McDermott, who expertly compiled this report and carried out the interviews with great sensitivity. I most particularly want to thank the interviewees who made this report possible and Lia Shimada and Charo Lanao-Madden for supporting the researchers and commenting on drafts of the document.

Stephen McCloskey

Director, Centre for Global Education

Glossary

ARK	Access Research Knowledge, University of Ulster and Queen's University, Belfast
CWA	Chinese Welfare Association
EU	European Union
GP	General Practitioner
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ITPA	International Tax Planning Association (professional association for accountants)
MCRC	Multicultural Resource Centre
NARIC	National Recognition Information Centre for the UK
NHS	National Health Service
NICRAS	Northern Ireland Community of Refugees & Asylum Seekers
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
North	(euphemism used here to mean) Northern Ireland
NWRC	North West Regional College
RAG	Refugee Action Group
RIA	Reception and Integration Agency
SECA	Strabane Ethnic Community Association
SEEDS	Solidarity Equality Education Diversity Support
STEP	South Tyrone Empowerment Programme
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UKBA	UK Border Agency (formerly the Border and Immigration Agency)
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees

1 Executive Summary

This report seeks to give ‘voice’ to those who have come to live in Northern Ireland from the global South. The study contains life stories of a number of individuals with connections to the global South, who are currently living in the region. Although the researchers recognise that individual case studies can not reflect the life experiences of an entire community or ethnic group living in Northern Ireland, they can collectively provide us with an informative and insightful perspective on life for migrants in our society.

This report explores:

- How the existing literature portrays the issues related to migration and Diaspora
- The challenges faced by those who have come to live in our society
- The reasons why people have left the global South and come to live in the global North

This report contains:

- A literature review which frames these issues in both an international and local context by drawing on previous research on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees
- Statistics on global migration
- Statistics on migration in Northern Ireland
- A background and methodology section which details the approach taken by the researchers in collecting biographical narratives from first generation migrants, second generation migrants, asylum seekers and refugees
- A profile of the participants in the project, detailing their gender, place of residence in Northern Ireland and their country of origin. A number of maps also illustrate the main towns and cities in the region as well as the countries of origin of the participants
- A collection of twelve biographical life histories from people currently living in Northern Ireland, who have connections with the global South. These stories include four people who are first generation migrants, four from a second generation migrant perspective and four individuals who are either asylum seekers or refugees
- A number of findings identified from this project which may inform future studies
- A selection of useful websites from local and international support organisations, research agencies and government departments
- A bibliography, containing a selection of source material on migration, global diasporas and asylum/refugee issues

Summary of Findings:

- In relation to **daily life** most first generation and asylum seeker/refugee participants acknowledged a process of adjustment to the culture and way of life in Northern Ireland. The role of community organisations in assisting this process was vital.
- Participants in all target groups noted the importance of **language** for both practical and cultural reasons. While acquiring English language skills would assist individuals in accessing public services, maintenance of the heritage language was also viewed as significant.
- The celebration of **cultural identity** in the public space was viewed as an important element of belonging in the region. A number of individuals noted that their lives often involved a negotiation of dual identities, with affiliation to both their home country as well as Northern Ireland.
- With regard to **employment and opportunity** many of the interviewees were highly qualified in their country of origin but have not been successful in finding employment that reflects their standard of education.
- The issue of **discrimination and racism** was raised by a number of individuals. While the majority of respondents did not face racism on a daily basis there had been a number of isolated incidents, often involving young children.
- The **relations** between migrant and host community was generally positive, although the aforementioned language barriers were viewed by some as a hindrance to better relations. Intra-group relations were also viewed as generally good, with work patterns and family connections often enhancing a sense of community.



2 Background and Methodology

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This project aims to identify some of the key challenges confronted by individuals from the global South who have come to live in Northern Ireland. The United Nations Development Programme has argued that the term ‘global South’ rests on:

“...the fact that all of the world’s industrially developed countries (with the exception of Australia and New Zealand) lie to the north of its developing countries. The term does not imply that all developing countries are similar and can be lumped together in one category. What it does highlight is that although developing countries range across the spectrum in every economic, social and political attribute, they all share a set of vulnerabilities and challenges (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004: 1).

With this definition in mind, this project draws on the experiences of people living in Northern Ireland who have come from, or who have family connections, to countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

The methodology for the project involved empirical qualitative research in the shape of semi-structured interviews conducted with the target groups. The participants were identified from a network of contacts already developed by the researchers throughout the region, as well as with affiliate networks of the Centre for Global Education. Issues raised in the interviews included questions about countries of origin, occupations in those countries, current occupation, why the participants came to live in the region, their sense of identity in Northern Ireland, and the interviewees’ relationships with their host communities. Also discussed was the duration of stay, as well as issues related to public services.

In order to gauge the complexity of challenges encountered by those who migrate and their families it was necessary to look at a number of target groups in the collection of twelve biographical narratives. For the purposes of the project the target groups were as follows.

First generation Migrants: Four of the participants in the project were first generation meaning that they were born in another country but came to live in Northern Ireland at a later stage in their lives.

Second Generation Migrants: Four participants in the project were second generation, meaning that one or both of their parents had come from another country to live in Northern Ireland. One of the individuals in this category of participants preferred the term, ‘third generation’. This issue will be explored in more detail later in the report.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Four participants in this project were asylum seekers or refugees. These individuals have left their own country to escape persecution, conflict or unliveable conditions in the search of a better life. To be a **refugee** in the UK as defined by international law means that one has well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a social group. Those who are termed as **asylum seekers** are those individuals who have submitted an application to the Home Office to be recognised as a refugee under the previously mentioned international criteria.

In the asylum seekers and refugees narratives of the report, we focus on life stories of three refugees and one asylum seeker from Zimbabwe, Iraq, Sudan and Kenya, respectively. The four interviewees all have unique stories to tell that can be linked to the fear of or actual persecution relating to the themes of nationality, race, social grouping and political opinion.

A further breakdown of the participants and their current location is illustrated in Figure 1. The main towns and cities in Northern Ireland identified in this project are shown in the map in Figure 2. The map in Figure 3 shows the country of origin of those who participated in the project.

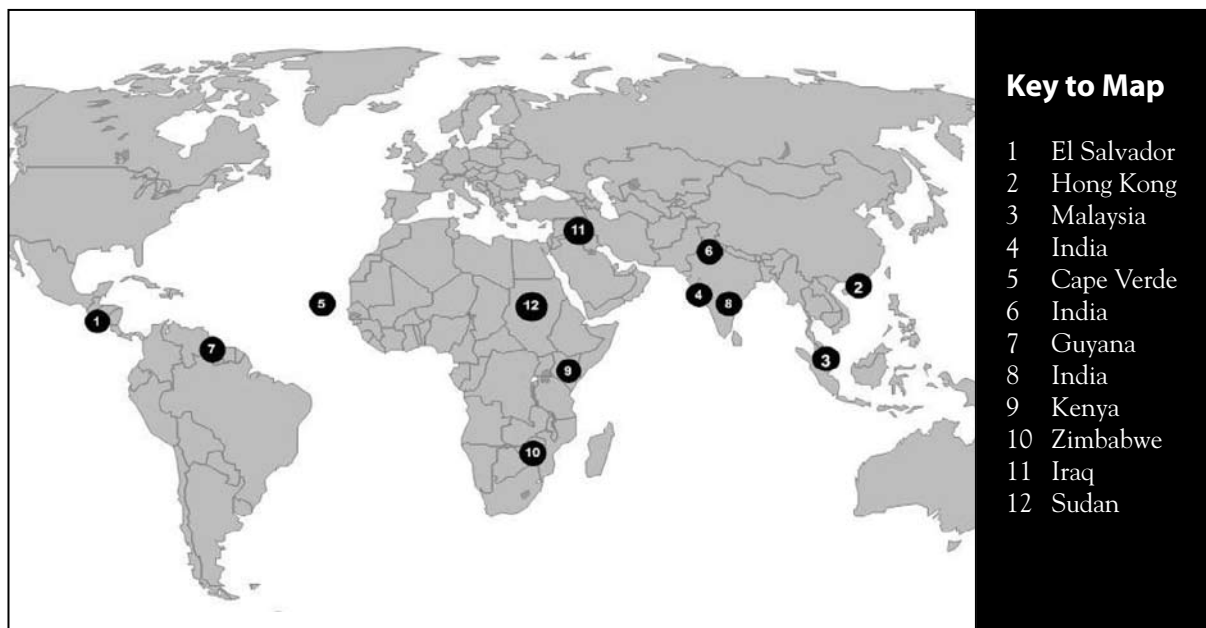
Figure 1: List of Research Participants by Gender, Category, Current Location and Country of Origin

Gender	Category	Current Location	Country of Origin/ Background
Female	1st Generation	Belfast	El Salvador
Female	1st Generation	Derry	China
Female	1st Generation	Derry	Malaysia
Male	1st Generation	Coleraine	India
Female	2nd Generation	Derry/Portstewart	Cape Verde
Male	2nd Generation	Derry	India
Male	2nd Generation	Belfast	Guyana
Female	2nd Generation	Strabane	India
Female	Asylum Seeker	Belfast	Kenya
Male	Refugee	Belfast	Zimbabwe
Male	Refugee	Belfast	Iraq
Male	Refugee	Belfast	Sudan

Figure 2: Map of Northern Ireland

Source CAIN Website: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/maps/map8.htm>

Figure 3: Countries of Origin of Participants



Northern Ireland for many years would have seemed to be an unappealing location for migrants due to its own political troubles from the 1960s until the 1990s. However, the evidence provided in this report suggests a diversity that is rarely discussed in relation to the region's social history. Indeed, individuals from other countries did come to the region, both before and during the troubles. Evidence in this report identifies families who came from India, China and South America at this time.

The oral testimonies collected have captured insight and perspectives on the experiences of these individuals, with an emphasis on various aspects of their lives. The stories have also helped to identify key factors that may lead people to migrate to the global North. In addition, the report also notes many of the major contributions that migrant communities have made, and continue to make, to this region, particularly in relation to areas such as culture and the economy.

Structure of the Report

The following sections of this report contain a literature review which will set the international context of migration and global diasporas. This section draws upon recent research studies and publications on migrant workers and refugees in Northern Ireland and abroad. The literature review also offers relevant statistics on migrants and refugees and their geographical location.

Twelve biographical narratives follow the literature review, with individuals from the three main target groups: first generation migrants; second generation migrants; and refugees and asylum seekers. These biographical studies collectively provide an overview of issues, challenges, opportunities and achievements relating to the life experience of the interview subjects.

The narratives are then followed by sections which identify a number of findings from the interviews. The authors recognise that with 12 participants this is a small sample group but believe that the data collected in this report can serve as a useful starting point for further in-depth research.

3 Literature Review

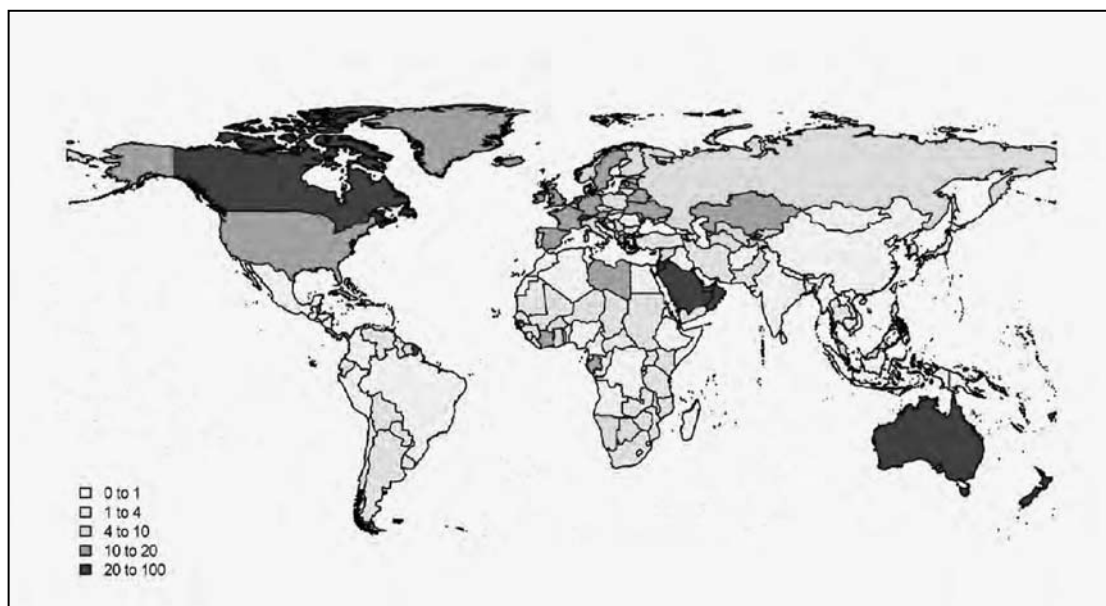
3.1 Global Voices, Global Diasporas: Contemporary Perspectives

“When does a place of residence become ‘home’? This is something with which those for whom travel constitutes a form of migrancy are inevitably confronted at some stage in their lives. And, it is a question that is almost always enmeshed in politics, in the widest sense of the word” (Brah, 1996: 12).

The movement of human beings from place to place or from community to community has occurred for thousands of years in various ways, various sizes and for various reasons. Historical examples offer us insight as to why people make, or are forced to make, these decisions. For some, the movement and settlement in a new homeland has been influenced by a curiosity to learn more and make contact with people from different cultures (Davies, 2007: 59). For others, this has been a voluntary decision to create new opportunities, whether they are economic or personal.

However, for many others the movement to, and settlement in, a new homeland is not a voluntary decision but borne out of a necessity to survive, to escape poverty, persecution or discrimination. These decisions have worldwide resonance with recent statistical data noting that 214 million people are international migrants, accounting for 3.1 per cent of the global population (International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2009). Figures published by the United Nations in 2009 show that countries in the ‘more developed’ global North have received the largest numbers of economic migrants, around 128 million. These figures are illustrated in the map below (Figure 4), which shows the clear differences in migrant receiving countries in the global North, compared with migrant giving countries in the global South.

Figure 4: Migrant Stock as a Percentage of Total Population



Source: United Nations (2009: 1)

However, this map offers only a partial picture as the 1951 United Nations *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* clearly affirms. The Convention defines an asylum seeker or refugee as:

“a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her (sic) former habitual residence is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (United Nations, 1951).

The statistics also show that the majority of these refugees and asylum seekers (or simply those forced to leave their homes), number approximately 13 million. However, these are still overwhelmingly housed in ‘less developed regions’, not the global North (See United Nations, 2009). Recent figures produced by the UN High Commission on Refugees show that of the top ten countries currently hosting refugees, only Germany and the United Kingdom are in the global North. This is illustrated below in figure 5.

Figure 5: Top Ten Refugee Hosting Countries 2008



Country	Number of Refugees	Country	Number of Refugees
Pakistan	1,780,900	Chad	330,500
Syria	1,105,700	Tanzania	321,900
Iran	980,100	Kenya	320,600
Germany	582,700	China	301,000
Jordan	500,400	United Kingdom	292,100

Source: United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) (2009, 8)

Life-changing events such as migration have often shaped the celebration and maintenance of collective identities or diasporas in a new homeland many years after first arrival. The word ‘diaspora’ is, in itself, a contested term. However, it is an appropriate concept in the context of this research, as the complexity and contestation of the debates around the terminology exemplify the multifaceted nature of migration, settlement and belonging. ‘Diaspora’ is a word of Greek origin meaning to sow seeds and, until recently, it had been used in relation to groups such as the global Jewish community who had faced persecution and subsequent expulsion from their homeland yet also maintained ‘a sense of loss, and a vision of return’ (Vertovec, 2005). However, a more recent definition of the term states that diaspora relates to ‘self-identification among many varied groups who migrated or whose forbearers migrated from one place to another or to several other places’ (Ibid.).

Examples abound of groups who have migrated but continually celebrate links with their homeland. Processes of globalisation, the development of Internet technologies, e-mail and cheaper airfares mean that communication within diaspora communities, as well as contact with family and friends at home is much more easily facilitated than it was even twenty years ago. Accessing newspapers, Internet sites and satellite television from the home country are all methods that modern day diasporas have utilised to maintain connections with their countries-of-origin.

However, for others that have settled in a new country for a longer period of time this can often be accompanied by processes of cultural contact with various aspects of the host community’s way of life. This is particularly

pertinent for second generation migrants who are caught between the culture of their parents and the hegemonic ways of life in the country in which they were born. Issues such as, language, religion, cultural traditions and values come to be issues of contestation and negotiation for members of the second generation and beyond.

For those in the first generation the level to which this cultural contact occurs has been a matter of concern in the past, with many newcomers being expected to conform or integrate to the new way of life. Indeed, national governments in many Western states have continually attempted to implement procedures to ensure that those who come to live in their societies conform to the way of life of the majority. Citizenship and language tests have become a common means of measuring how assimilated someone can become, and whether or not they can be offered some element of 'inclusion'. In the UK for instance, English language ability is regarded as a key criterion of acceptance and inclusion, as exemplified by the introduction of a new *Life in the UK* test for migrants (see Border and Immigration Agency, 2008; Blackledge, 2006: 27).

In recent years the member states of the European Union (EU), in particular, have become increasingly hostile to migration from outside the continent. While the freedom of movement *within* the union has been facilitated through various accords such as the Schengen Agreement, member state policies have increasingly restricted individuals entering from outside the union, effectively creating what has become known as 'Fortress Europe'.

However, despite the fact that migration is such a politicised issue, it is all too rarely studied in a manner that recognises or charts the human effects of migration on individuals. This often results in the loss of very personal stories, which recount the contributions that migrants and diaspora communities from the global South make to societies in the global North.

3.2 Global Diasporas in Northern Ireland

The study of migrant communities in Britain has increasingly become a field of academic and policy research, as emphasised by various contemporary studies (See Modood *et al.* 1997; Parekh 2000; Pollard *et al.* 2008; See also <http://www.diasporas.ac.uk/>). By comparison, research charting the experiences of specific migrant communities in Northern Ireland has been somewhat underdeveloped. To date, the Indian community, which arrived in the 1930s, and the Chinese community, which arrived in the 1960s, are perhaps the best covered with regard to previous research.

Previous studies of the Chinese community have identified issues such as language barriers, lack of public recognition, and isolation due to unsociable working hours in fast food restaurants as some of the more acute difficulties for the Chinese living in the region (Manwah Watson & McKnight, 1998; Browne, 2002). The experiences of the Indian community have been viewed as an example of more successful integration, with high levels of economic success within business and the retail sector and little in the way of language difficulties (See Kapur, 1997; Irwin, 1998). However, there are clearly more recent concerns in relation to issues around cultural loss for second and third generations of the Chinese and Indian communities, as younger members become more closely associated with the host community (See Delargy, 2007; McDermott, 2008).

Both of these long established groups have been in the region for long periods and have established their own dedicated support organisations. For example, the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) was established in 1986 to assist the local Chinese community here, while the Indian Community Centre in Belfast has provided a cultural and spiritual space for that community. However, despite evidence of these communities and their long-term settlement in the region, official recognition in legislation did not occur until 1997 with the introduction of the Northern Ireland Race Relations Order (some twenty years after the introduction of race relations laws in the United Kingdom). This legislation outlawed discrimination on the basis of colour, race, nationality or ethnic origin. Furthermore, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act also stated in 1998, obligations on all public services to ensure equality of access for all. The 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement also played a role in including ethnic minorities in debates around cultural issues such as language. For example, one clause in the section on economic and cultural issues noted that all political parties would:

“...recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish-language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic minority communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland” (Government of the United Kingdom and Government of Ireland, 1998).

The introduction of the Race Relations Order, the Northern Ireland Act and the Good Friday Agreement undoubtedly acted as a catalyst for further research on diaspora communities in the area of race relations and policy development. Additionally, the introduction of a question on ethnic origin in the 2001 census offered further acknowledgment to these longer established groups, with Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi all being recognised as distinct ethnic groups in the 2001 government census. Nonetheless, problems with data compilation persist, with the Chinese Welfare Association arguing that the information collection methods are limited in their effectiveness by acute language barriers. For example, although the 2001 census counted 4,145 Chinese living in the region, the Chinese Welfare association argued that the figure is closer to 8,000 (see McDermott, 2008: 6).

The 2001 Census also estimated that around 1.8 per cent of the population were born outside of the UK or Ireland, equating to over 30,000 people and representing over fifty countries from all continents. This proportion has increased significantly since 2001, with the arrival of economic migrants into the areas from the new EU states and elsewhere. Currently, the exact estimate is not known as the most credible authority for such demographics would be the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, whose next census exercise is not until 2011. Until then, reports such as this will continue to rely on a combination of sources that give mid-year reports or annual estimates based on the last census.

3.3 New Arrivals

From the early 2000s onwards there has been growing evidence of increasing cultural diversity within the region. The movement from a conflict to a post-conflict society has ensured that the region has become an increasingly attractive place to live for either employment opportunities, or for general stability. In the period 2000 to 2008 the region had been characterised by strong economic performance and a shortfall of labour in certain employment areas. Many of these vacancies were subsequently filled by migrant workers from other areas of the European Union and beyond. Among some of the areas where migrant workers found employment were in meat processing, nursing, seasonal farming, hotel catering and construction (See Bell et al. 2004; Eaton, 2008; McElhinney, 2007; Animate 2004; Animate 2006; Animate 2007).

Reports from a number of sources, as well as from the aforementioned census, indicate that there are now diaspora communities living in Northern Ireland from different regions of the world. The Multicultural Resource Centre in Belfast has produced a number of detailed reports charting the experiences of Latin Americans (Holder & Lanao 2001), Bangladeshis (Holder, 2001), and Portuguese (Saores, 2002), to name but a few. These reports also highlighted problems with issues around public service delivery and lack of recognition within the public space. They often also noted that, ironically, many *communities* cannot be regarded as homogenous groups. For instance, if one takes the local Portuguese community as a helpful example, while those who have settled in Northern Ireland have Portuguese citizenship and speak the Portuguese language, they may have cultural routes, or indeed have been born, in former Portuguese colonies in the global South, such as Timor Leste, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau or Cape Verde. Also, religious groups such as the Muslim community may contain within them peoples from various nationalities stretching from North Africa to South East Asia (Mc Coombe & Khan, 2005).

Other issues such as language barriers have been a hugely significant concern for many migrants, as identified in a substantive quantitative and qualitative report *In Other Words* also by the Multicultural Resource Centre (Holder, 2003). This research stated that in 2003 there were over 70 languages spoken in Northern Ireland (ibid:27). The results also highlighted a serious lack of planning on behalf of government agencies in dealing with the issue of linguistic diversity and the need for policy makers to take the issue of language planning in the public sector seriously. Another area identified in this report was the need to acknowledge the cultural importance of languages to ethnic minorities and migrant communities in the public space, thus emphasising that languages are not merely barriers to public participation, but also serve an additional enriching cultural role to members of communities.

In relation to discovering where many migrants have settled, an analysis of the 2001 census indicates that the majority of the Indian and Chinese communities at that time lived mainly in urban areas, particularly the Greater Belfast area. However, more recent evidence suggests that many of the newer arrivals have now settled in areas beyond Belfast, further west and in more rural areas. For instance, the Multicultural Resource Centre produced a report on the experiences of minority ethnic women in rural Fermanagh (Holder and Lanao, 2003), as well as in the Mid-Ulster Region.

A report in 2008 was released by the University of Ulster on the experiences of Africans living west of the River Bann (Nic Craith et al., 2008; Odhiambo, 2008). Also, a number of reports by the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) and the related project Animate have highlighted issues for the Portuguese, Lithuanian and Polish communities living in the rural mid-Ulster region (Animate, 2004, Animate 2006, Animate 2007). Such reports are important in that they illustrate that diversity is an issue now for all parts of Northern Ireland, east and west, as well as rural and urban. In addition, they underline the issues faced by those in large urban centres like Belfast may be very different from those faced in Counties Tyrone or Fermanagh, as well as the need for continued research which attempts to chart the experiences of those outside Belfast.

The enlargement of the European Union in 2004 from fifteen to twenty-seven member states was undoubtedly a catalyst for even further inward migration. Subsequently, thousands of young migrants from central and Eastern Europe have come to live and work in Northern Ireland, mainly from Poland and Lithuania (See Liubiniene, 2008). The more recent wave of new arrivals from other areas of the EU has undoubtedly increased the visibility of the migrant issue, particularly because of the large numbers that were involved. A recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research noted that in the period from 2004 to 2008, 29,810 individuals from the new member states of the European Union registered to work in Northern Ireland, although it is conceivable that the numbers coming at this time were much higher (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: (WRS) Registrations in Northern Ireland 2004-2007

2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
3,660	8,845	8,970	8,335	29,810

Cited from Pollard et al. (2008: 61)

The visibility of migrants and diaspora communities in the public space has significantly increased in recent years. Cultural festivals, foodstores and even signs and advertisements in other languages are visible elements of these changes (See Geoghegan, 2008).

Also of significance for migrant communities is the development of a number of strategic positions taken by the local Assembly and which seemingly have affirmed a commitment to the promotion of good relations between communities. For instance, a *Racial Equality Strategy* for the period 2005-2010 was introduced. In this document the government affirmed its commitment to 'set a legal and institutional framework to tackle racism' (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), 2005: 2). The primary aim of the strategy is to ensure that the commitments made in the Race Relations Order and the Northern Ireland Act are being implemented. The second strategy developed by the government is the *Shared Future; Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland* (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), 2006). This document was developed after a consultation period with community groups, organisations and individuals throughout Northern Ireland.

The *Shared Future* document also identifies the roles of a number of public bodies as being of prime importance in the promotion of respect for diversity. The role of faith-based organisations and projects are regarded as significant as are the role of the arts, culture and education sectors. However, the *Shared Space and Racial Equality* documents have not been enough to eradicate discrimination and racism, which still play a disturbing part in our society as highlighted by the racially motivated attacks on the Roma community in Belfast in June 2009 (see Radford and Templar 2009). These incidents made headline news throughout the UK at the time.

The global recession will undoubtedly play a role in future inward migration to Northern Ireland, with reduced employment opportunities for all. This was indicated in a recent survey report by the public service trade union UNISON, which suggested that many migrant workers in the region were fearful of losing their jobs, believing that future employment will be ring-fenced for locals (UNISON, 2009: 13). Similar concerns and worries affecting the Polish community have also been published in a recent report by the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (McVeigh, 2009). As a result of such concerns the report also noted that many people will return home due to these fears. Mid-year estimates of the population between 2007 and 2008 showed that a sizeable 15,400 people came to live in Northern Ireland from outside the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), 2009: 3). However, this report also noted that the 2009 statistics reflected a drop in inward migration as indicated by fewer applications for National Insurance numbers, Home Office Worker Registration and Work Permits (Ibid, 4).

However, clearly it is overly simplistic to say that all migrants will now return home. There are of course other factors at play in determining whether people decide to stay in the region long-term. For instance, some people may have started a relationship with a local person (as is the case for a number of participants in this project) or they may have children attending schools here, all of which provide alternative impetus for staying long-term.

3.4 Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Northern Ireland

In order to understand the issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland, the researchers conducted a review of existing literature drawn from commissioned project reports rather than monographic (single subject themes or books on asylum) work. This review on asylum seekers and refugees issues focuses on their experiences as reported in other reports and government policy formations, legislation and how these affect asylum seekers from the global South who live in Northern Ireland today. The literature used is drawn from diverse sources including Britain, Europe, the Republic of Ireland and other parts of the world.

Recent global trends concerning displaced people (UNHCR, 2009:2) indicate that worldwide, more than 839,000 people submitted an application for asylum or refugee status in 2008. As noted previously, in 2008, Pakistan hosted the largest number of refugees anywhere in the world. Currently South Africa is the largest recipient of individual applications in the world. But this does not mean that every potential asylum seeker or refugee has been officially accounted for. In fact most countries, especially poor countries, may receive these new arrivals, but due to inadequate systems or lack of resources to facilitate their registration, their presence is not recorded. Others are largely accounted for under the UNHCR mandate. According to the World Refugee Survey (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), 2009), Iraq remained a significant source of refugee movements in the world fleeing not only to neighbouring countries but across the globe. In this project one interviewee from Iraq shares his experiences on the reasons that made him seek asylum and eventually refugee status in the UK. Many Iraqis have been forced out of their countries essentially as a result of the on-going conflict. However, there are also particular cases of persecution for other reasons. For example, in the course of this research study we interviewed an Iraqi national persecuted on the basis of his sexual orientation.

For the purposes of this research study the researchers contacted an official from the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS). This individual offered some insight into the situation for many living in the region, raising a particular concern about the level of poverty and social deprivation affecting asylum seekers here:

“Asylum seekers who are not in the national asylum support service really face a difficult time. Some have to live with friends and seek help from the church (faith groups) or red cross, something like that. Recently we had two known cases of some asylum seekers being taken off doctor’s lists and others being detained and sent to Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre in England before their eventual deportation” (Personal Correspondence with an official of the NICRAS).

3.5 Statistics

It is still difficult to ascertain an accurate number of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland because their cases are registered within the wider UK framework. The last authoritative report estimating number of refugees (but not asylum seekers) in Northern Ireland was contained in the non-governmental report *Forced to Flee* (Refugee Action Group (RAG), 2007). The report detailed the number of refugees in the region to be approximately 2,000. It indicated that the Home Office disseminates bulletins on the number of immigrants who are granted support by the UKBA. The report stated that by December 2006, the figure for Belfast was 165 asylum seekers.

The situation with statistics in the Republic of Ireland is much clearer, with regular reports provided by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) of the Irish government. These reports clearly detail by nationality a breakdown of asylum seekers and the number being given accommodation by the state as they wait for a response to their claim (Reception and Integration Agency (RIA), 2009).

Many discussions have been amplified in the UK media and politics about the ‘increasing’ number of asylum seekers and refugees in the country. Whilst this misconception continues, estimates from a number of sources have shown that the number of refugees in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the globe is quite small. For instance, in 2004 Amnesty International asked young people to estimate the number of refugees they thought

were living in the region, and ‘the average estimate of the proportion of the global population of refugees in Northern Ireland was 6.9%’ (Amnesty International, 2004). This was a huge overestimation and an additional report suggests that in fact less than 0.02 per cent of all world-wide registered refugees and asylum applicants live in the region, which is almost 350 times lower than the average figure quoted (Crawley, 2005). Therefore, clearly the size of the refugee/asylum population in Northern Ireland is much lower than what many young people believed. Indeed the United Nations High Commission on Refugees stated that ‘by the end of 2008, developing countries hosted 8.4 million refugees, 80 per cent of the global refugee population, of which the 49 Least Developed Countries provided asylum to 18 per cent’ (UNHCR, 2009:7).

The aforementioned survey by Amnesty, although showing a lack of information about the size of the population amongst young people in Northern Ireland, showed that the majority of them were very positive about asylum seekers and refugees living here (Amnesty International, 2004). Nevertheless, other evidence has suggested that a noteworthy minority of people still show hostility towards refugees (Amnesty International, 2004). When asked about their attitudes to minority ethnic people on the theme of asylum seekers, 15 per cent of people polled in a Northern Ireland survey (ARK, 2005) said they did not want the government to allow people who escaped persecution to stay. A further 6 per cent strongly objected to the idea that asylum seekers and refugees should stay in the region. These numbers give clear indication that the sharing of knowledge in the community about the substantive reasons ‘why’ people leave their countries is important.

It is also worthwhile to note that opinion polls cannot be regarded as an entirely accurate or adequate analysis about how people really feel. The abstract nature of some of the questions used in surveys may pre-empt a certain reaction which could be perceived as negative or positive feedback even though in essence, it is the interviewee who has the clear understanding of how they feel about the issue. An individual’s way of life, cultural perceptions, race or ethnicity may also be an influencing factor into how some questions are responded to. The age of a participating respondent can sometimes be perceived as a contributing factor in how they answer the questions. This is a point taken by Crawley who argues that, ‘Preston’s (undated) analysis drawing on the results of the European Social Survey concludes that older respondents are actually more liberal than younger people. These contradictory conclusions suggest that additional data is needed to test existing theories on the influence of age and position in the life cycle in shaping attitudes to asylum and immigration’ (Crawley, 2005).

3.6 Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Entry Procedures

Asylum seekers in the UK, like in most other European countries, are increasingly being criminalized because of circumstances beyond their control, which can have an adverse effect on their application(s). Many governments in Europe are also restricting the movement of asylum seekers; some of these policy procedures arguably violate the rights of people genuinely seeking international protection. Such procedures are consistent in many European countries, including visa requirements, harsh entry restrictions at borders and stiff penalties for possession of false documents (Guild, 2010:19). In Northern Ireland, some asylum seekers have endured these sanctions that have become commonplace across Europe.

As this report shows, asylum seekers are not allowed to work while waiting for their applications to be heard, processed and concluded. This unauthorised employment clause is sometimes abused by many asylum seekers because they want to earn a personal income like everybody else, and be able to counter the challenges of poverty that often come with their status. The statutory prohibition of employment on asylum seekers in Northern Ireland sometimes leads to other uncharacteristic ways of earning an income. One of the more common consequences of being an asylum seeker is the likelihood of vulnerability. In the UK for example, children as young as 14 years old (Martynowicz et al. 2009:62) have been rescued by police in trafficking and forced sexual exploitation cases by criminals taking advantage of the dilemma faced by those pending asylum decisions.

Asylum seekers across Europe also face criminalization if they fail to report any significant changes in their personal circumstances. Some agencies that have direct contact with government have also been known to casually stereotype certain migrants especially those awaiting their asylum cases, this can lead to decisions that are not justified, as is described in one of the interviews in this report, where an interviewee was de-registered by her local General Practitioner (GP) for a period of up to two years.

The Home Office in its Information on Asylum Seekers Country of Origin indicates that in order to help it make its decisions its primary information on a specific country is obtained through human rights organisations,

journalists and academics. This information subsequently shapes decisions on right to remain. The Home Office also says that the use of secondary sources provides a challenge for them to make decisions on an applicant in the UK (see Morgan et al. 2003). This can be construed as causal-effect example of why certain cases are often left without immediate results for quite some time as is the case with Damaris, one of the participants in this project.

The accessibility and availability of immigration support services in Belfast has made the city an understandable place for asylum and refugee cases in Northern Ireland. As a result of concentration of services, the majority of asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland reside in Belfast. Most of these individuals or families are also dispersed from other parts of the UK by statutory and other immigration support services. Not many asylum seekers from the global South choose to come to Northern Ireland as their preferred location. The numbers cannot be compared with the higher numbers of applications in larger UK cities or in Dublin. Quarterly estimates from the Home Office (Home Office, 2009:40) show that out of a total of 4,900 people in the UK receiving 'subsistence only' support from the state only 15 were resident in Northern Ireland. These official Home Office figures include dependents of the applicants. In Belfast there were also a total of 245 applicants in receipt of support in accommodation as at the end of September 2009.

There are a number of individuals and organisations that have voluntarily given their time to help asylum seekers and refugees in difficulty here in Northern Ireland. In 2009, the charity Refugee Action Group (RAG) launched an out-of-hours Immigration Detention emergency helpline which has made interventions and advised many people in this category. RAG has also put a strong argument in their immigrant advocacy work that clause 193 of the UK's new Immigration and Citizenship Bill is overly restrictive and criminalises people when they arrive at the borders meaning that individuals have to invoke 'refugee or asylum' status defence, 'for any hope of freedom' (Refugee Action Group (RAG), 2008).

So far, as noted, there are no separate statistics on the number of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland with the calculations of the UKBA contained in the contemporary legal boundaries of the UK. This leads to another point which is that the Home Office or the UKBA has many of its main units in England, Scotland and Wales, but not Northern Ireland. Recently a smaller scale, one-stop Belfast office of the UKBA was set up. However, to date, this department has not conducted quantitative research on the Northern Ireland region specifically.

In October 2009, the UK government also introduced a new procedure in asylum applications detailing the banning of proxy claims (Refugee Council, 2009:1). Asylum claims can no longer be made in Liverpool but Croydon and anyone making an application in a place such as Northern Ireland, other than the first port of entry, must do so in person. In addition to this new rule, no travel cost will be incurred by the government even if asylum seekers in Northern Ireland cannot afford to travel to London because of their inability to legally have a source of income. This new rule can pose travelling/application difficulties to individuals or families who already live in Northern Ireland and have new personal circumstances which can adversely affect their safety (some asylum seekers in the UK believe that their total safety may also depend on further proximity to certain urban areas, towns or cities), hence wishing to make an asylum request.

Many asylum seekers do not know about the laws that would affect their application or how long it would take for the Home Office to respond to the case they have forwarded. This lack of awareness (Crawley, 2005: 38) of the asylum laws is exacerbated by the slow pace of response some applicants have to endure from the government agencies. Some of the refugees and asylum seekers who were interviewed spoke of substantial delays in their applications being processed by the government. They are uncertain about their status and whether the final result of the application means they will continue to stay in Northern Ireland or be removed by the Home Office if their applications and appeals fail. In June 2007, the Court of Appeal made a landmark ruling stating that 'the delay in one such case was unlawful and recommended that this should be remedied by granting Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR)' (Refugee Council, July 2007).

This report reveals how some of the refugees or asylum seekers have experienced difficulties in reuniting with their families who are still at home (country of origin). Although the Home Office has continued to support the doctrine of family reunion rights vis-à-vis a settled refugee, it is still a very slow, complicated process (Refugee Council, 2004) which has put off many applicants including most of those who live in Northern Ireland. When an individual's case has been dealt with, and if the applicant is successful in gaining recognition of refugee status, it does not then mean that they automatically have a right to British citizenship or a UK passport. The



applicant will have to wait for five years, the legal period by which they can then apply for British citizenship, if they wish to remain. However, being granted refugee status means that the individual will receive various rights and entitlements. They will be able to apply for social services, welfare benefits, public housing, health services, to seek employment, access education grants, further education, and the right to primary school and nursery school education for their children. They can also travel overseas albeit with certain limitations. Refugees have a right to vote in general elections only if they are from a Commonwealth country or from European Union member states.

3.7 Summary

This literature review has identified a number of current concerns in the study of international migration. While it was noted that the majority of migrant receiving countries are in the global North, it was also emphasised that the majority of countries hosting refugees are in the global South. This illustrates more complex patterns than are often reported in the media. The review also noted that previous studies have dealt with issues around migration in a manner that is often extremely politicised, meaning that many of the human stories about why people decide to leave their home country go undocumented. The literature review has also set the context for this study, identifying recent trends of inward migration to the region, as well as identifying many of the community support structures in place for incoming communities, as well as introducing aspects of government legislation that refer to Northern Ireland as a multicultural society.

This literature review has also paid particular attention to the issue of asylum seekers and refugees by introducing a number of policy documents from the British government as well as reports from various agencies working on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees. The literature suggests that there are numerous problems concerning conditions for asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the policy and bureaucratic procedures which have been questioned not only by the literature in this section but also by some of the individuals who have participated in this research.



4 Voices from the Global South - Biographical Narratives

4.1 Introduction

In this section of the report, the biographical narratives of twelve participants in this research study are recounted. The research groupings and numbers interviewed were: four first generation migrants; four second generation migrants; and four refugee/asylum seekers. The countries of origin and cultures represented in these narratives are certainly indicative of the fact that Northern Ireland is a truly multicultural society with participants from Asia, Latin America and Africa. These narratives form an important element of the region's historical and contemporary social history and recall the experiences and opinions of those with connections to the 'global South'. As noted earlier in the text, first generation migrants are those respondents who came, as part of a group or individually, to live in Northern Ireland from a country in the global South. Second generation migrants are the children of those people who came, in this context, from the global South to live in Northern Ireland. Asylum seekers are those who have made an application for refugee status in the United Kingdom, whereas refugees are those people who have been granted that status by the government.

4.2 First Generation Migrants

Rose - China



Rose is first-generation Chinese and recalled her story via an interpreter. She is in her sixties and has been living in Derry since the late 1970s, having come from the New Territories in Hong Kong. She described economic conditions and poverty as the major reasons as to why she left her homeland in search of a better life. She said:

"I didn't have a job at all in Hong Kong and we were really quite poor. We really wanted to go somewhere, anywhere where we could find a job. At that time in Hong Kong there really weren't that many factories there and we just tried to make ends meet. This opportunity came up for a permanent job in Northern Ireland so I decided to come over with my husband in 1977".

Prior to this, Rose and her husband had spent shorter periods of work in temporary positions elsewhere in the United Kingdom. However, after those periods of work were completed they had always returned to Hong Kong, which was very common among the Chinese community living in the UK at that time. She noted:

"I actually first came to the UK to work back in 1966 and my first stop at that time was Nottingham so I was there for four years until 1970 and then I went back home. Then the next time I came back to the UK with my husband we just went wherever the job was. Sometimes it was at the seaside and some of the jobs were in the town".

In Derry, Rose worked in a Chinese restaurant as a kitchen assistant whose job it was to shred vegetables and peel potatoes. She also had to ensure that the kitchen was kept clean. She said that she was always content with the work that she did while she was here in Northern Ireland, but noted the difficulties with long working hours and irregular working patterns.

"In a way I was happy about being able to work because it was really important for me to have an income. With a permanent job I could keep a steady income so that's why I was happy. I used to have one day off a week, but at that time we also opened for lunch so we would usually start at 9.30. Then we would work through to 2.30 and after that we would have a break and then at about 5.30 all the workers would all have dinner and then the restaurant would close about 12am".

Despite this, at the time a sense of community developed among those working in the Chinese restaurant. The fact that the majority of Chinese who came to Northern Ireland were from Hong Kong also meant that they usually spoke the Chinese language Hakka, as opposed to Mandarin. This meant that there were relatively few language barriers within the community. Rose commented on this period:

"I met friends through my work. I worked in the restaurant but I had accommodation upstairs. In fact we all lived



together in the same accommodation so we all knew each other well, but we didn't know each other before and we all met each other when we arrived here in Northern Ireland".

Rose also noted that her experience of living in Northern Ireland was much more positive than her time in Britain. This she attributed to the permanency of the job here which allowed her to establish a more settled life. She said:

"It was much better here in Northern Ireland and staying in the one place rather than how it was in England. Usually there you were just drifting along and trying to find work but here it was much better. I got to know people; I could speak with them and get to know them. In England I was never in the one place long enough to kind of get to know people so it is very important to meet people from your own community and I would notice a difference in this between my time in Northern Ireland and England".

When describing the differences between Derry and Hong Kong Rose stated that what she noticed was how quiet a life it was compared to Hong Kong. Also, she said that Derry had very few shops. It also got dark very early here. In contrast to this:

"In Hong Kong, even in the middle of the night, there are neon signs everywhere so it's very bright and the shops were very big and they opened always very long hours. Some of the shops in Hong Kong were open 24 hours, or if not they were open to 12 o'clock midnight. It is very populated in Hong Kong but here in Northern Ireland there is so much space".

Rose came to the region at the height of the Troubles and experienced some of the disruption faced by wider society at that time. She recalled a number of incidents that occurred while she was working in the Chinese restaurant. These experiences were compounded in the early years, as she had very little comprehension of the political situation.

"One time we were getting the food ready for the lunch and then this soldier came into the restaurant and he said to us, 'Oh there is a suspicious object at the bus stop and you have to get out'. We didn't want to get out but he held on to his gun and said to us you have to get out. Often at weekends there were bomb-scares all the time and they would tell us that we had to get out of the restaurant, but we had no choice and we had to get out and leave. I remember one experience where the restaurant I worked in, well next door to that there was a pub and one night I woke up and there was a lot of smoke in our building and we were told that we had to get out because there was a fire next door to us and all we could do was to take a quilt outside and cover ourselves. The fire was around 1979 and there were a lot of fire engines all night from two o'clock until about seven o'clock. At that time there were about ten people living in the one place and we all had to get out".

The first time that Rose returned to the New Territories was four years after she first came to Northern Ireland. Rose and her husband also had four young children who had remained in Hong Kong, two with her parents and two with her husband's parents. She described the excitement that she felt the first time that she returned home:

"The first time that I went back to Hong Kong, I was just so excited. On the aeroplane on the way there, there are a few stops and by the time the plane got closer and closer to Hong Kong I just started to get so excited. Now when I go to Hong Kong I just feel normal. I think that first time it was because I left my children and one of my children was three years when I left but I knew I would see them again".

Leaving her children afterwards in order to return to Derry was one of the most difficult and heartbreaking experiences that Rose had to face, and she recalled how difficult it was to return after having spent a long period visiting home:

"There were times when I went home to Hong Kong and I really didn't want to come back, not necessarily because I would have missed Hong Kong but because I really missed my children. One time I heard that my child was getting a bad time at school because, you know what children can be like, they said to her at school 'oh you have no mother; your mother is never there'. That was one thing that I missed being able to be there for the children when things like that happened".

Eventually, a number of Rose's children came to live in Derry after she had been settled in the region for a number of years. They came over to Northern Ireland when they were in their early teens, and this raised a number of challenges for the children in relation to English language acquisition. However, a number of Rose's family are now multilingual. She said:

"They found it very strange and we didn't really like to go out at night but we would just go to the shop look around and go home. They came over here when they were 13 or 14, when they were ready to start secondary school. They only got their English language when they came over here, which was difficult. I can speak both Hakka and Cantonese, and my children now can speak Hakka and Cantonese and English as well".

Socialising certainly proved difficult in the early years of settlement when there were very few support structures in place to assist the community. Rose recalled how a visit to the cinema would be the norm on a day off.

"The thing was we didn't have a television but we could go to the cinema. We didn't have a clue what we were watching we just went and watched, sooner or later you can understand a bit. It was better than having nowhere to go or having to sleep all the time".

There were also difficulties in trying to celebrate traditional Chinese festivals, due mainly to language difficulties and the differences in the Chinese and Western calendars. Rose said:

"Chinese New Year we wouldn't really celebrate that, although at that time the only thing that we would do would be to cook something special. The lunar calendar is very different to the western one and sometimes the boss got us moon cake from London and when we received it we would be able to tell that it was the August moon festival because we couldn't work out when it was from the English calendars".

Such difficulties have been addressed now that support organisations such as the Sai-Pak (North-West) Chinese community project has been established. Organisations, such as these, have been important in allowing the communities to celebrate cultural festivals in the public space. Also, they have served a much more practical role ensuring that communities, like the Chinese, also have access to public services through provision of interpreting. Rose commented on this saying:

"Oh yes, definitely now there is much more atmosphere when there is a festival coming up, and we know more about it. It's good, and another great thing is here at the Sai-Pak now they have an interpreting service. Before if I had to go to the doctors or something like that I had to go and find anyone that would be able to help me make the arrangements. It would always be hard because people would be busy but at least now with Sai-Pak I can phone up and they can help me to arrange and I always know that here I will be able to find someone who is able to speak my language".

Rose acknowledged that although life has vastly improved for the Chinese community in Northern Ireland there are many barriers faced in relation to participating within the wider society. The main issue was still the language barrier. Rose is currently learning English at the Sai-Pak Community Project, but believes that the language differences have not only curtailed access to public services, but are also one of the main reasons as to why there was little interaction between Chinese people and the host community. Rose recounted some of the difficulties that she and friends had experienced:

"When I came over at the beginning there were a lot of Chinese people together and we all spoke the same language. Sometimes local people wanted to speak to us, but we could only speak a little English. If it was a long conversation we didn't know how to reply, that was very hard. It was sometimes embarrassing and then other times you felt that you were wasting another person's time because you couldn't speak the language. That's also really why I don't have local people as friends because I can't speak the language well... but I would say that the people here are very polite and despite the language issue I've never felt negative or like an outsider".

Rose has noticed that there are things that the second generation of Chinese people living in the region benefit from. However increasing interaction with the host community has meant that there have been aspects of the Chinese culture that have been lost which she said is unfortunate:

"For the second generation I think that it is much better for them. The children would be very westernised



though but we always hope that the children will be able to keep the language. Also, the whole idea of the tradition, so it's ok to be westernised but it's really important that they try and keep some aspects of the Chinese culture as well".

For Rose, after having lived in the region for over thirty years, Northern Ireland is now her permanent home and she will remain in the region long-term as she explained that she now has other family here as well.

"In the long-term I am going to stay in Northern Ireland because my children are also going to be living here long-term and also I feel here that I have a very peaceful life and also it is much more secure here for me".

.....

Rhina - El Salvador



Rhina is a young woman originally from El Salvador currently living in Belfast. She first left El Salvador for Northern Ireland in 2005. Rhina described how she first came to the region not only to improve her English, but also due to curiosity and interest about a different place. Northern Ireland's troubled past was also something that interested her, as there were many parallels with the situation in her home country. She said:

"I have always been interested in discovering new places so I wanted to learn about the way they manage to keep their international relations, but I also always wanted to learn English so I felt that it was a good opportunity. I came to Northern Ireland specifically because of my interest in the troubles that happened here and that would be one of the things that would join our history back home with here".

When she first arrived in Northern Ireland, Rhina volunteered at the Corrymeela project in Ballycastle. During this time she had the opportunity to meet people with many different beliefs, cultures and opinions. Rhina also met a local man, who would later become her husband, who was also working as a volunteer. Despite these positive aspects of her life, Rhina noted that the first year living in the region was particularly difficult. The readjustment to another culture and way of life was one of the hardest things for her. She said:

"The most difficult part of things for me was, as an adult, I had to start again learning other things, other customs, other traditions and the ways to do things. It was almost like being a child again and being told how to do things. That was difficult because back home I would have always thought of myself as independent. I was living not an easy life, but I would say it wasn't as dependent as when I was here".

At the end of her first year in Northern Ireland Rhina returned to El Salvador. She noted that during her first year she never regarded the place as her permanent home, but regarded this period as an important part of her development as a person. Also, despite the fact that Rhina was back in El Salvador, her relationship with her local boyfriend remained strong and she kept in contact with him back in Northern Ireland. After he came to see her in El Salvador, Rhina returned with him in September 2006 and since then has regarded Northern Ireland as her permanent home. She noted:

"I was back here in September 2006 and from that time onwards I think that yes I can say that I am living here permanently in Northern Ireland. With that I think my mentality has started to change as well, because I knew that that was not just a year and that it was going to be for a much longer time".

When asked about the main differences between El Salvador and Northern Ireland Rhina first of all commented how good the standard of living is in Northern Ireland, and the social welfare system that would be unthinkable back in El Salvador. Rhina said that she wishes a system like this could be put in place in her country. She said:

"I was also not so used to the social system here. I mean for me looking at the way I see it, it works excellent, but there is a lot to take back home when I look at the way that Northern Ireland is keeping her society running. In my point of view the conditions here are excellent. I can see that if you are a person without a job you can apply for help from the government, which are things that we don't have back at home. We don't have that kind of support that people here have and the security that people have here actually is another thing that's different and taken for granted as well".

Another major issue in El Salvador was the level of crime and the issue of personal safety. In Northern Ireland

Rhina said she felt very safe, but that back in El Salvador this would be a very difficult issue. She described the difficulty of the current situation:

“I mean just for me to be able to walk alone, as a woman back home that would be a big threat and you would always have to be really conscious that something may happen to you. The conditions there in that respect are really bad and you know with crime and corruption it’s a really bad situation”.

Also, Rhina was impressed by the whole Northern Ireland peace process, and viewed the implementation of this as a very successful example of peacebuilding. She said she would like to see some of the structures that have been put in place in Northern Ireland applied to El Salvador. She commented:

“I’d like to think someday that some of the model that this country has followed in relation to their troubles could be implemented in our government and our history as well. Even El Salvador had a peace agreement in 1992, but those agreements were basically not taken seriously and people were then asking where are these promises, and then people started to get angry again so it was like, you know a cycle, but in Northern Ireland it seems to have worked much better”.

Despite the fact that she now views Northern Ireland as her permanent home, Rhina views communication and contact with her family in El Salvador as being of the utmost importance. This has been made much easier because of technology such as Skype, which now allows her to be in contact with home every day. However, these measures are no substitute for return visits; Rhina tries to get back at least one time every year, although this has proven expensive. However, somewhat ironically, when she does go back a part of her also misses Northern Ireland. She said:

“When I go back I’m kind of stuck because when I’m there part of me wants to be there but another part of me wants to be here too”.

Rhina also commented on the huge increase in the cultural diversity of Northern Ireland, even since she arrived herself. Having worked as a volunteer with the Latinoamerica Unida community group, based in Belfast, Rhina has met many other people from Central and Latin America.

“I know another Nicaraguan and a Honduran but I can count the other Central Americans on one hand. I know a lot of Latin American people from the organisation that I work for, and because I volunteer with them I am often having the opportunity to meet with people from Colombia and Argentina, Mexico and Cuba. It is really there you know, I think about 390 people living in Northern Ireland come from Latin America”.

However, life was not always easy for Rhina and when she returned to Northern Ireland with her boyfriend, who had by then become her husband; she found it difficult to gain employment. This was despite the fact that she was extremely well educated with a high level of experience. For Rhina that was a difficult period and she acknowledges that during the recession this is an experience shared by many local people. During this time she tried to do some things that would add to her experience such as various interpreting and translation courses. Rhina said:

“It was killing me, and I was thinking, what is wrong with me, you know I was going to this interview, I was going to that interview and I was trying so many interviews, and I was really trying hard. I had a degree back home but it’s not valid here. I couldn’t get a job and I don’t think that was anything against ethnic minorities or anything like that, I just think that that was the situation that the whole country had as it just wasn’t easy to get jobs at that time”.

During this difficult period Rhina said that she felt indebted to her husband’s family for their help and support, stating that it would have been impossible to live without this assistance. Rhina acknowledged this:

“I was having the support of my husband’s family...it was impossible if I didn’t have that support you know like a sponsor. Impossible! Because I realised how expensive it was to live. It’s not even that you are living in luxury but you are paying rent, paying for electricity, for those things”.

Eventually, things improved for Rhina and she was successful in gaining a part-time position advertised for a



Spanish language assistant at a local school. Rhina described this position as ‘my lottery’ because it is potentially an opportunity that opens more doors. The job and interaction with the teachers and children was something that she was comfortable with.

Rhina commented that in Northern Ireland she generally feels very welcome but that there were two occasions when she had been made to feel uncomfortable by young teenagers because of where she was from. She described one incident:

“There was this time I was going here to town and I was with another friend. It’s always been a gang of teenagers that feel the power to threaten you. We were coming down the electrical stairs and we were speaking in Spanish and I turned to my friend to see these people kicking us in our back. I was feeling a threat but I wasn’t scared because I knew that they were teenagers and we were in a public place but at the time. I just took my friend as quick as I could out of the situation”.

On the second occasion Rhina and another friend were travelling by bus and they were both speaking Spanish:

“This girl in front of us starting slapping her newspaper like she was really mad and she was speaking in English with her friend saying ‘oh these bloody foreigners’. At that I don’t know whether you laugh or what because you know, did they think we didn’t understand English? I had on that occasion to stop my friend and say, ‘hey don’t get involved it’s a waste of time and let them go’”.

Rhina was quick to comment though that there have only been two situations, both involving a very small group of young teenagers.

“I must say it’s probably insecurity in themselves, its just wanting to feel that they have a bit of power, I don’t know. In four years it has been only two occasions so that is something that I shouldn’t even be talking about because it has not been big. It just showed me, I suppose, that that kind of thing exists. As a human being I know that we have differences but that doesn’t mean that you are not going to be accepted, because I did not feel unaccepted when I came here, I always felt pretty welcome”.

Rhina commented that she can relate with anyone coming to live in Northern Ireland as they attempt to adapt to a different way of life. She said that she feels it is important for people to adapt their mind, adapt their mentality to where they are now living and to make a big effort to learn the language and to learn what is respectful and to learn what is not respectful in that country and culture. However, she felt that it is also very important to celebrate and raise awareness of all of these new cultures and to get the host community involved in this two-way process. She said:

“I try to always to promote culture and awareness. I like it when people ask me about El Salvador, that it is not just a dot on the map. In 2008 we were organising an ethnic minority festival in Derry with SEEDS and there we were having an exhibition. There are a lot of clubs too that do Salsa. I love to go to a place where the music is in Spanish. Now in Belfast we have a lot of Latin American events that we try to do things and keep in touch with them. We are also really trying to branch out and get more of the community involved so that it’s not just us. We are also planning a festival for December that everyone will be welcome to”.

Rhina said that by and large she has enjoyed living in Northern Ireland and will continue to stay here. Things that continually draw her to the place are the feeling of community and family and the friendliness that she has experienced, particularly in some of the smaller towns. She said:

“I really feel that I’m like back home because people said hello to you even when they don’t know you. Some of those little things are so important, because it makes you feel like people are not ignoring you and I love that. I like that sense of community. That feeling of the family being at the centre of things, I like that. Identity is good. I like the whole kind of social programmes how people make an effort to work on society and as a result you get a lot of many good things”.

Shaez - India



Shaez is a young student in his 20s and is originally from Bombay in India. He is currently in the final year of his studies for a PhD in Biological Sciences at the University of Ulster in Coleraine. Shaez has lived on the North coast since 2006, the year he came to Northern Ireland to complete a Masters degree. Prior to moving to Coleraine, Shaez had previously lived and studied in Manchester. Shaez described how his decision to come to Northern Ireland was informed by both the reputation of the university and financial reasons.

“The first reason that I went to Northern Ireland was that I was a self-funded student and Ulster is a good university, but it didn’t have high fees. I wouldn’t say it was the cheapest for the course that I am doing, but it was cheaper in comparison to a lot of other universities in England that are of a similar standard, so that was the sole reason that I came over here. When I first came here I knew people from here already because I had been studying with them in England”.

Shaez believed that the standard of education within his particular academic discipline was a major reason why he, and other Indians he knew, had come to the United Kingdom to undertake a lengthy period of study.

“The education standards are much higher here... I’m not saying that its bad back home but it is not that good for sciences, like it would be really good for commerce back home but not for science. I know quite a lot of people from India here but most of them would be like students, they wouldn’t be doing jobs here”.

For Shaez, living on the North coast of Northern Ireland was a completely different experience to living in his home city of Bombay. While Shaez said that he has no problem with living in Coleraine he noted:

“The first difference for me was the size of the place. Obviously, Bombay is just such a big city. When I came over here I completely loved Belfast, it’s a nice place to be, but Coleraine is a fraction of the size of Belfast... The big difference for me though was really the size of the place and how small it actually is”.

However, one of the major benefits to this was that aesthetically Northern Ireland was very attractive and scenic. Another benefit to living in Northern Ireland is the unpolluted environment, which is unlike Bombay.

“Since I come from a big city like Bombay, you really have to search hard to find a place that could be described as scenic, because it is a proper city and all you can see are skyscrapers and buildings, whereas over here, even the university campus, is so green. Northern Ireland is also a really nice place to go on day trips and stuff like that. Back home it really is like a proper urban jungle. It is just like you feel different. Like the air here as well is a lot less polluted than it is in Bombay”.

Shaez noted that there was a nice contrast in Northern Ireland because although he considered Coleraine to be fairly quiet, other parts of the region, such as Belfast, are extremely cosmopolitan. For instance, in Belfast he said he felt that there was a much more multicultural feel about the place:

“I have noticed that when I have been in Belfast that it is a much more multicultural city, you know there are two universities in contrast with just one here - so basically you would find more Indian people in Belfast than you would in Coleraine, if you put it that way. That’s just one perspective and it’s not the same everywhere, so that would be the main difference for me, the size of the place and that it is more like countryside”.

One of the major challenges that Shaez encountered was the local accent. He said that despite having learnt English all the way through school in India, it was one of the most difficult things to adjust to. This was highlighted when Shaez found part-time employment:

“When I started in the pizza place over here I used to be on the phone all of the time, but it was very difficult for me with the accent and it wasn’t my English at all, it was the accent, it was just so strong. I was fine with fifty percent of the people because they could be understood but then sometimes if you got someone who was maybe older and with a really strong accent it could be very hard to understand”.

Another big difference with India was the weather although Shaez said that he had in some ways got used to that due to his previous experience in the north of England.



“With the weather I mean yes there is obviously a big difference between home and over here. I mean I come from Bombay and there, there is no winter at all. I mean it is summer all the way round through the year so it’s a difference that way. I am going home next week and will probably be roasting for a week when I go over there, but you really do just get used to it. I’m used to the cold weather here now and it’s fine. I notice the difference more when I am travelling back and forth all the time, but I am used to it now I would say”.

Even though he has only lived in Northern Ireland since 2006, Shaez has tried to return to India on at least one occasion per year to see his family, whom he contacts a number of times during the week by telephone.

“Oh well, I try and get back to India at least once a year and I would like to try and go more often than that. I would usually go home every December and then come home in January but that would usually be my yearly trip, it wouldn’t be much more than that”.

When he first moved to Northern Ireland, Shaez noted how easy it was actually to make friends in the student environment. Firstly, a number of students that had done their degree with him in England had also come to do their Masters degrees meaning that there was already a well-developed network of friends. Secondly, the close nature of the class itself also helped:

“Our class was... it wasn’t a very big class so we used to always be hanging out together and it was a fairly diverse class there as well, you know we had a number of Greeks and a lot of local people too and a lot of people from the south of Ireland as well so it was really good then”.

When asked whether he had met any other Indians his own age in the region it was noted that most of the Indians that he had met had been fellow students, rather than those who came to Northern Ireland for other reasons. However, Shaez was of the opinion that if he lived in Belfast the likelihood of meeting other Indians would be much greater, as evidenced by the experience of his friends.

“I haven’t yet met any second-generation Indians here in Northern Ireland that are my age. I know people like my friends in Belfast; they would have friends who are second generation but no not myself”.

He noted that in Belfast the presence of a larger Indian population there means that the cultural infrastructure is much more developed with initiatives like the Indian Community Centre. Therefore, the likelihood of celebrating Indian cultural events or religious festivals with other Indians is greatly increased in Belfast, whereas there is no such provision in other places such as Coleraine.

“I don’t know how many Indians live in Coleraine to be honest, because here there is no place where you can go and see other Indians, like there would be in Belfast. I’m talking about Temples and places like that. I mean in Belfast there is a worshipping place and they have quite big Temples in Belfast. So if you were to go to places like that you would probably see other people, but there is nothing of that kind here in Coleraine. I would do things once in a while but it would usually just be a small group of friends”.

Nonetheless, Shaez noted that there was still a sense of community among his Indian friends in Coleraine. Once in a while they would get together for social events, or to watch films and sometimes celebrate festivals, however these were not necessarily done solely to celebrate aspects of Indian culture.

“There are lots of things that we can celebrate so we would do that. It wouldn’t be... I’m living in a small town in Northern Ireland, I mean if I was in Belfast I think that there would be more enthusiasm for doing things like that, and also I think that there would be a lot more people that would be doing the same things that you are. It happens here once in a while - usually it’s not inclined towards my culture or anything, I mean I would never have watched Hindi movies back home or anything like that”.

When asked if he had any problems in accessing services Shaez said that he had rarely encountered difficulties. This he attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, he noted that because English is taught in schools in India he did not experience a language barrier in place when he arrived. If he did have a problem he said that he would ask local friends that he had made at the university for advice. Finally, being a student at one of Northern Ireland’s universities meant that he had access to the University of Ulster’s International Office, which was a very important factor in assisting students who had come here to settle into life in Northern Ireland.

“I mean also when we moved over here we had the International Office at the university so they are really good because they helped us to find accommodation. That was like me and my other friends from India were able to go to them together and they helped us in that way. That’s the only kind of direct help that I have had to take from a support organisation. Since that class was so small and we met so many people so fast so it was really easy then to just ask the other students a question if we had something we needed help with”.

When asked about living in Northern Ireland and the accommodation that he had found, Shaez said that he had been surprised at how cheap the region was to live in, particularly in comparison to his previous experiences in England. Shaez currently lives in student accommodation in Portstewart, which is close to the university.

“I find that it is really cheap to live here, even in Portstewart; you can live quite a good standard of living here. I’m on a stipend and I think that we are paying nothing for the size of the rooms. When I moved over from England... I mean in England I was paying a lot for a box room and it was so much more than I have been paying now in Portstewart, but I am happy with my standard of living here, I am more than happy”.

When asked if he would stay in Northern Ireland Shaez said that he would be very happy to stay here, but that the decision would depend on career opportunities. If Northern Ireland is not a viable option he hopes to remain in the UK if offered the right job. Like many of the participants in this project he noted that the whole experience of moving to another country had taken time to get used to and that he was not ready for such a dramatic change again. He commented:

“I would kind of tend to stay in the UK, I mean I already have moved between countries and I think it was like a big move, because I was only 19 when I moved from home so it was a big move for me to come over. However, I really don’t think that I am ready yet to move on to a different country again... If I found a job I would stay... I wouldn’t think twice but obviously I would have to move to where the job is”.

Norjehan - Malaysian



Norjehan is a 30-year-old woman who was born in Malaysia. Her ethnic origin is Malay and she practises the Islamic faith. Norjehan’s faith is very important to her way of life, but this does not affect how she perceives the cultures and different identity groups in Northern Ireland. Since she came to Derry, being a first generation migrant meant that Norjehan had to learn many aspects of a new life in a different country. Charity work through volunteering was one of the key areas where she felt there is a radical departure when compared to Malaysia. She said:

“In my country you wouldn’t get to volunteer. They would select based on skills. Here in Northern Ireland there are more opportunities for volunteering. There are so many opportunities for volunteering even for free education, for example at the Women’s Centre, and this is available for foreigners. Here in Northern Ireland, you can have English classes for free as well. They do lots more here”.

Some newcomers have had greater access to full tertiary or third level education depending on their personal or family economic status. Norjehan described her situation back in Malaysia:

“I was doing engineering at university there. After graduation I wanted to do a bit of teaching. A few months later I did a Masters degree in engineering in my country. At the same time I was also handling my mother’s chocolate business. All my sisters were still in university overseas. My eldest sister is married to an American. I also have a brother who is also in business, totally different from my mother’s. So I thought, my mum’s business was doing well and I passed it on to my younger sister. For me, I wanted to be a teacher. I realised there were too many qualifications needed. Being new in Northern Ireland, I didn’t know what to do with my academic career. I did not know where to go. I joined the ITPA (professional academy) course. This course takes 6 months at the North West Regional College. But still I did not know my way around. When I did teaching, it was just with school children and the main subject was mathematics that I was doing with them over there in Malaysia. I was also part-time tutoring ‘A-Level’ students in Malaysia.

Norjehan had also attempted to develop her own skills while in the region by undertaking various qualifications. She commented:



“When I joined the ITPA course here at the tech (NWRC) it was also refreshing. I quit my MA degree at the University of Ulster, Magee after four months. Back in my country, myself and my husband lived separately because he was doing his degree in the south of Malaysia and I was doing my undergraduate course in the north of the country. I thought, we lived separately too long and now we can be together. I can also ask for a scholarship from my government. If I do an MA here with that state (Malaysian) grant scholarship for a year here, then back home I’d have to work for at least two years as part of the contract”.

Some complex issues of gender and culture were also identified by Norjehan. For example she explained that the general convention is that a Malaysian woman is not much appreciated if she marries or lives with a foreign man. But a Malaysian man who marries a foreign woman is readily accepted. Norjehan feels more comfortable in Northern Ireland expressing her love for her husband, who is not Malaysian. She goes as far as remarking that equality is more valued in Northern Ireland than in Malaysia:

“My husband is from Algeria. In Malaysia it is not easy for a foreigner to get a job. My husband had difficulty but also there are many foreigners working there in Malaysia. In Malaysia the local communities would not want to give their daughters/sons away to be married to foreigners. In addition, if I had children, they would not get Malaysian citizenship. Foreign women in Malaysia find it easier to be accepted in Malaysia by Malaysian men. That is why Malaysian females married to foreign men find themselves outside Malaysia (like me here) and my sister in Saudi Arabia. We don’t have the same equality system like in Singapore. Some communities in Malaysia Bumiputra (native Malaysian people) and all the other races are there. But the Bumiputra have more privileges; scholarships, grants, loans and so on. But new laws will soon come to address the equality. I am Bumiputri so I am more privileged compared to other Malaysian races. I think in those terms, there is so much equality here in Northern Ireland”.

Apart from the constant mention of the cold and rainy weather conditions in Northern Ireland, as a significant matter, there were also some cultural and national celebrations which most migrants miss when they are away from their countries of origin. Even though they still celebrated some while here, it is not exactly the same, as Norjehan continued:

“The biggest differences between Malaysia and Northern Ireland would be the weather. You’d have to face it all year long, the weather here! The celebrations are also different. The Islamic Ramadan celebrations, Diwali, Chinese holiday, Christmas are all recognized in Malaysia. East Malaysia would have their own traditional religion typical to them, in that geographical area”.

Norjehan has not yet returned home since she came in 2007. She contacts her family and some of her friends. She noted:

“Because my parents live near the city, it is easy for me to get in touch with them from here over the phone to Malaysia. I only knew my parents properly when I was 26. I’m now 30. They have always worked. It upset me. That is why I really want a family life. My sister seems to be interested in the lecturing profession again, fulltime and so she will forget about family life. This is a repetition of what my parents did and it is not good. I manage to keep in touch with my grandma but she lives in a very remote area, where there is not even public transport. Over there, everybody rides a motorbike, it’s an absolute necessity. I like the fresh air, the traditional setting but not the transport there. My husband has settled here. My younger sister is planning to come here but my mum relies on her to help in the business. I miss my friends in Malaysia. My friends in Malaysia were Sudanese, Vietnamese, Bosnian and from many other countries”.

She has also tried to find some work related to her professional background in accounting, although this has proven particularly difficult. Norjehan said:

“When I joined ITPA, they’d try to find a job for me. They sent my CV to hundreds of companies. They were very committed in trying to help me get a job. But most of these good jobs are in Belfast and it means I have to move there. I have not had full-time employment here in Northern Ireland. It is my husband’s job (salary) that supports me”.

There are social interactions (integration) and voluntary activities that citizens from the global South have taken up here in Northern Ireland and Norjehan has been active in the community sector. She said:

“I was a volunteer at the Ulster Cancer Foundation in 2007. The job was good and I got to know the people better. They also brought school children to help. They always invited me to parties but I could not attend because usually people are taking alcohol. Because of my religion, I would not take alcohol. I had Malaysian colleagues of different religions and I never really saw them drinking even though we have bars too in Malaysia”.

It is often assumed that integration and appreciation of diversity in the community is primarily an awareness exercise aimed at the host population. This near universal approach by most district councils in the North, voluntary organisations, statutory bodies and individual activists in the integration discourse have not given particular attention on how minorities can be involved without losing their own unique cultural identities. In this example, we see that the Malaysian community in Northern Ireland are largely inward-looking or to some extent, involuntarily invisible in the public arena:

“Malaysians here find it difficult to adapt to the environment so they like meeting up and always stick to each other. Some here cannot master the language, even after staying here for a long time. Malaysians here don’t mix much with the local communities - this is the general perception. Deliberately, the Malaysian government wanted students to integrate well in Germany for example. So what the Malaysian government did was to send scholars in small numbers to different German universities. This was in the 1990s. Malaysians love one another too much, they are like family. It is good and it is also bad. Language is a problem to some Malaysians at Trinity College, Dublin. They are mostly medical students and some have to struggle with English anyway. Many Malaysian students graduate from Trinity and come to work in Northern Ireland”.

Many families and friends often advise their kin or colleagues to move to the more economically vibrant metropolis of Belfast. This reinforces the notions of socio-economic marginalisation experienced west of the River Bann in comparison to the east. She noted:

“They wanted me to move to Belfast when I first got here. There are more jobs there but I am comfortable here in Derry”.

Norjehan noted that even though there are some events for ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland, often she finds it hard to attend events. The will to participate is there but the authenticity is not the same as, sometimes they would wish to identify with their very unique ethno-national religion or celebration rather than a national event:

“Because of Id Il Fitr or end of Ramadan and many of us Malaysians here meet for such functions. After Ramadan, and the cow slaughtering event 3 months after Ramadan, in my country it’s not as big a celebration as Id Il Fitr. There are Chinese and Indian Malaysian here so sometimes I would not remember their traditional celebrations. I wouldn’t be really involved in Chinese, Indian or Malaysian cultural celebrations here in Northern Ireland”.

Norjehan responded to the question of challenges by saying that there are no particular problems affecting people from Malaysia who live here. Even as a Muslim, she emphasises that because of the small population of people of the faith here in Derry, a mosque is not a high priority issue. She noted:

“We do not have a big Muslim community here so we don’t need a mosque”.

Relationships with the host community are very good, as Norjehan described:

“I know people here in their 50s, 20s, and 30s and so on. They are friendly because Derry is a small town. My Egyptian friend who has only just arrived says the Irish are friendlier than the English. I have only experienced very little negative experience here, so I don’t care. For example I am a Muslim and I thought like they do in the media, I might be called a terrorist. But I have never experienced this”.

It is also important to note that many migrants make their long-term choice of staying or going back to their home countries based on their personal circumstances and collateral issues facing them:

“I am not sure of the future. My husband has finished his PhD research. I prefer here in Northern Ireland than going to Sweden where my husband would like to go. It is also very hard for other people to get visas. For me it is good to live here because you get good opportunities”.



When asked about the many positive areas of life in Northern Ireland, Norjehan said:

“There are cheap clothes and cheap food. The standard of living is cheap compared to Malaysia. Salaries are high in Malaysia. The salary for a lecturer in Malaysia is equivalent (emphasis) to £1,000, which is a lot of money there. The global recession has not affected me. We do not pay tax. My husband is on a student scholarship from the University. Prices are higher in Malaysia so my family is affected. My eldest sister is not affected, she moved to Saudi Arabia”.

4.3 Second Generation Migrants

The next section explores stories relating to individuals who are second generation migrants; with one or both parents from the global South who ultimately took up residence in Northern Ireland. Many ‘second generation’ migrants have lived in the region their whole lives, have local accents, have been educated in the region and have friends from the ‘host’ community. Individuals from this category often find themselves in a situation of negotiation between multiple identities or cultures. These questions are explored and detailed in the following four narratives.

Abby - Cape Verde



Abby is in her 20s and has lived in various locations throughout Northern Ireland, including Portstewart, Belfast, and her current home, Derry. Abby was born in Scotland to a Cape Verdean father and a Scottish mother. However, the family came to Northern Ireland in 1994. Although she returned to Scotland for a short period in the late 1990s Northern Ireland is now her permanent home. Abby’s father had initially come to the UK as a sailor and met her mother in the Scottish port of Montrose:

“Well you see, my dad was in the merchant navy and at that time Cape Verde was so poor that basically all his siblings left and scattered to the four corners of the earth. Montrose is a harbour, so obviously there are a lot of ships coming in and out so it was here that he met my mother.... at that time Cape Verde was colonised by the Portuguese but I’m not sure if it was the Portuguese merchant navy or not. I was too young at that time to remember the exact details”.

Contact with her father’s family, many of whom still remain in Cape Verde, has remained difficult due to geographical distance and other cultural issues. While her father still has contact with the family, Abby has only secondary contact, primarily due to language barriers:

“We have a kind of secondary contact with them through him because there are a million language barriers. Not very many of my Dad’s side of the family would speak English, but I know that he is still very much in contact with them all. For me though the contact that I have with my father’s family is only secondary because of that language barrier, which is a real shame”.

In order to redress this Abby has in the past year been attempting to learn the Portuguese language. She views this as an important means of being able to communicate with her father’s family, as well as reconnecting with an important aspect of her culture. Abby also described how although her father had managed to maintain contact with all of his family in Cape Verde he had only recently managed to make the long visit back to the islands for the first time in decades. She said:

“This was actually the first time that he was able to get back there in almost thirty years. He was kind of stuck here once he ended up here. It was just so expensive to go back, so this was really the first time for him to go back after all these years!”

Abby acknowledged how this had made her think about how difficult it must have been for her dad and his family to separate and not see each another for such a long time. She commented:

“I really don’t have any understanding of what it’s like for a whole family to be split due to economic reasons. I

mean when I was growing up we all grew up in Scotland and then Northern Ireland but we were together. Like my dad hasn't seen a lot of his siblings in like thirty years! That's just mad for me to think about, I couldn't even imagine that".

Abby and her family came to Northern Ireland in 1994 and settled in Portstewart. Initially, Abby found her initial experience in the region as a bit of a cultural shock, which brought with it a number of difficulties. She said:

"Well when I first came here in 1994 to Portstewart, I absolutely hated it, I absolutely despised the place, it just seemed to me like I'd stepped into a time warp or gone back in time. It wasn't very different in Scotland but definitely people were more used to seeing our black faces there than they were in Portstewart. I mean it was a year and a half that I lived here until I saw another black person and I was shocked to the core... and I suppose that was really because the troubles were still kind of at the end and no one really wanted to come and live here at that time".

Abby acknowledged that the first year or so at a school in Coleraine was difficult as she was subjected to teasing, name calling and bullying by other children because of the colour of her skin. However, she was quick to state that since leaving school she has never experienced any such discrimination as an adult in Northern Ireland. She said:

"I have to say that I had a year, year and a half of absolute hell when I first moved to Portstewart, but then again Portstewart is a small place... but after that initial year here I have to say never, never again in this country have I had any other problems with racism... not since then. Even then that was just kids you know".

Despite her initial dislike of Northern Ireland, Abby grew to love and develop a strong affiliation with the place. When the family returned to Scotland in 1999 she noted that her affinity had grown to such an extent that she had to get back one way or another. Abby applied for a course in Theatre Studies at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, not because she wanted to do the course as such, but because she wanted to return to Northern Ireland. This is a decision that has ultimately shaped her long-term future in the region. She noted:

"Between 2002 and 2004 I studied theatre studies in Coleraine and I absolutely loved it. I didn't have a plan and it just ended up working out brilliantly for me and I ended up discovering what I wanted to do, rather than knowing about what I wanted to do. I always knew I liked the theatre, but had never really planned to study it. It was literally a case of me dying to get back to Northern Ireland! I rang up the University and they sent me out a brochure to me and I looked through it and I thought yeah that seems great. I really didn't expect to get in for some reason, so when they sent me back the unconditional acceptance offer I was delighted. It was great for me and it really sent me off on a good path".

Currently, Abby is working as a writer and performer of spoken word poetry and theatre in Northern Ireland. Although, she has not worked with any NGOs that represent Diaspora communities, Abby's writings have explored the issues that she herself has grappled with, particularly in her early years here. She said:

"Well, I wouldn't really have a specific role in those things you know but I have done lots of multicultural events. I do a lot of performance poetry and definitely in a lot of my earlier writing, a lot of the earlier ideas were centred on ideas of race and the ideas of fitting in and belonging. I just felt that there was a lot of that stuff that I needed to deal with from childhood that I had never really confronted, so a lot of my earlier writings were pretty much based around that theme".

Abby also commented on how she felt the recognition of other cultures in the public space and listening to their stories is an important element for any multicultural society, as it attempts to come to terms with diversity. She said:

"As people hear personal stories they become less and less alien to people. I think that we tend to imagine if somebody comes from a completely different culture we think that there is a huge gulf and you wouldn't be able to understand each other, but if you get a chance to listen to personal stories you see them more as a human being and there are a lot of things that you can engage with then. That is definitely helpful for the general populace".

This led on to another theme that she touched on earlier, namely the importance of gaining knowledge of her



cultural background. Abby commented on getting to know more about her Cape Verdean background, saying how she had recently become more interested in Cape Verde. She noted:

“I’ve done a rudimentary amount of my own research on Cape Verde and Cape Verde’s role in the slave trade and all that sort of stuff. The islands were completely uninhabited before the Portuguese brought slaves there. I reckon that that means that my ancestors were probably slaves”.

As noted previously, Abby’s father had returned to his homeland in 2009. As a result, a visit to the islands is on Abby’s high priority list:

“I would have gone this time around if I had had the money with my Dad. It will definitely be one of my first stops whenever I get some money saved... I’d just like to see where a large percentage of my family comes from. I’d like to have some deeper understanding of their lives and what they came from, you know. I really don’t have any understanding of what it’s like for a whole family to be split due to economic reasons. I mean when I was growing up we all grew up together”.

When asked if she felt that Northern Ireland has changed much since she first arrived in 1994, Abby responded by saying that she felt that the society was much more multicultural than it was when she first arrived, and that a more diverse society is a positive and enriching value. She said:

“I’m glad to see it because there are things like the multicultural shops and music and I feel that it just makes the place so much richer culturally”.

In addition to this, her sense of multiculturalism could be attributed to Abby’s newfound desire to find more out about her own background as she explained:

“I have actually met a couple of people here in Northern Ireland from Cape Verde. I was shocked to bits when I first met them. They were telling me then that there are actually a few people from Cape Verde to have settled in this country. It did spark something and made me realise the importance of starting to research that part of my own history, because I would like to get to know some of these people more. I think that’s why learning the Portuguese language would be so important so that I could communicate with them better and then of course that would open up a whole world of family that I have never been able to communicate with”.

Abby has decided that Northern Ireland is now her permanent home for many reasons. She said:

“People have been so friendly here. And the landscape I just absolutely love all of the landscapes... love it. I’ve met a lot of brilliant people and the talent of people is exciting and for me many people are creative and that really feeds myself”.

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Harjesh - India



Harjesh is a 28 year-old man of Indian decent. His grandfather came to Northern Ireland in 1954 from the Punjab State in India, to join his two brothers who had moved here two years previously. They started a small business here in Derry. Harjesh said:

“So, really it was the presence of my grandfather’s family (brothers) in Ireland way back in the 1950s that influenced him to come here. Other Indian families had already been here since the 1940s”.

School life was a mixture of different denominations but this did not have a great impact on Harjesh’s own traditional faith as a third generation Indian. The religious affiliation or doctrine in a school’s ideology or policies did not affect him. He said:

“I am still a devout member of the Sikh religion, from as far back as the days when I was in school. First, I went to a largely Protestant primary school called Lisnagelvin till I was seven. I really enjoyed being there. I had no problems at all. I then joined the Model Primary when our family moved to the Cityside of Derry. This was a more integrated or mixed school. There were both Protestant and Catholic kids there”.

Initially, Harjesh found it difficult adjusting to school life where almost all the children were of one specific ethnicity and faith group. He found it difficult to integrate with the children. But within a short time he met some young people of Indian decent. This boosted his confidence and in fact helped him to even engage more with the other children. This confidence has followed Harjesh into adulthood and he now is involved in the running of his family's business which is well known in his local area. He explained:

“After completing my A-levels, I decided to join the family business in retail and I really enjoy it. The clothing shops we run are very popular especially amongst the young in Northern Ireland and we employ a lot of people from local communities as well”.

On cultural issues, Harjesh remarks that Derry is an ideal place to stay because there is strong sense of culture and identity that is not hostile:

“Cultural diversity and understanding of people's customs here in Derry is a fairly organic thing. There is no hindrance to my beliefs. By organic I also mean that we can practice both of our mixed cultures here, received or what we are born with. So I personally have a mixture of Indian culture and Western heritage in our household. The only thing I regret very much now is the little or no exposure in detail to my Indian culture. For example when I go to England and meet my friends of cultural identity as Indians, I find that they know more culture-wise, so they talk about Indian films and music and so on. They talk about Bollywood stuff that I hardly know anything on”.

Harjesh commented that, despite recognising the fact that he has strong connections to Northern Ireland, he had felt the need to learn more about his Indian heritage.

“I still feel a very strong allegiance to here, Northern Ireland, but now as I am growing older, I am learning more about my Indian side that I did not know much about before. My wife is also second generation. She was born and brought up in England and over there; there is more exposure to Indian cultures because of the large population of families from that part of the world, whereas here it is the total opposite. So, I have to say my wife has influenced my culture now over the years”.

On race relations in the community, Harjesh feels that he has not actually been targeted for the colour of his skin, either verbally or physically. He says that this may also be because he has lived here all his life so the community feels that he is one of them. However, in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 terror attacks in the US, some of the local reactions and encounters he had were not pleasant:

“Before September 11, I had not faced any form of prejudice or discrimination. After the atrocities in the US, some people looked at me and thought I was one of those people who committed the attacks, just because of the way I looked; you know keeping my long beard. All this happened instantly. But this happened more in other parts of Northern Ireland on my travels. Sometimes even now, if I go to some parts of Northern Ireland where I am not known, then people do pick up on my cultural heritage as if it were a problem to them”.

Despite this Harjesh commented that, like other second-generation participants in this project, he had been able to share aspects of his cultural heritage with local friends. He noted:

“I also share my culture with local people here; tell them about our traditions and celebrations. Within the Sikh calendar, we have a number of great celebrations, Diwali, the birthdays of Gurus and Vasaki, another day on our calendar”.

Harjesh has a very interesting unexpected take on the global financial crisis that affected many people from 2008. He noted:

“Looking at people in my father's home region, Punjab, there is not so much of a crisis there. Punjab is blessed with food as it is the main agricultural community of India. People were not suffering that much because their farming activities were enough to keep them going. They mostly did not have the financial worries affecting people here in the developed world”.

Peter - Guyana

Peter was born in Belfast in 1963 and is second generation Guyanese. His parents settled in Northern Ireland, having first migrated from South America to London in 1960. They had travelled to the UK to study medicine, and they then continued their studies in Belfast from 1962. When both parents were offered positions in the medical profession they decided to stay. The family have been in the region ever since. When asked what his parents' lives were like back in Guyana, Peter said:

“My grandfather actually owned a factory, a food-producing factory. He also owned land and stuff, so financially he was pretty well off. My mum was the first person to go into medicine from her family. She was very intelligent and always got A-grades in her studies in Guyana, so to develop that further and basically make her a better all round or well-rounded person she wanted to study medicine. At that stage it was between London and Barcelona! To go to Barcelona she would have had to learn Spanish. Spanish is, of course, the predominant language in South America, but in Guyana it's English so she decided on London”.

Education had driven the decision to travel to London, and subsequently Northern Ireland. Unsurprisingly, education has continued to be viewed by Peter's family as extremely important, not only for economic reasons, but also for personal satisfaction and achievement:

“I mean if you have a social climbing ethos, if you want your children to do well, if you want them to have good jobs or good living, if you want your children to be brought up properly, its through education. It was always education that was pushed to the fore in my family, so that was the same for both parents as well”.

Peter noted that his mother had returned to Guyana only twice since she first came to Northern Ireland, but that he had relatives, such as his aunt, who had been to Belfast on a number of occasions. The difficulties of travelling between the two locations were noted as major factors that hindered further contact. However, Peter also noted that he had more family living in the Caribbean island of Barbados, than in Guyana.

“Most of our family are fairly scattered throughout the world, but most of them would be in Barbados on my mum's side. Cousins, second-cousins, great aunts, that sort of thing”.

Peter had visited family and friends in Barbados on four occasions, and had also been to Guyana himself. He noted how the lack of employment opportunities in Guyana had forced many people to look for work elsewhere, most often in Barbados.

“...there are not so many jobs there in Guyana. Especially in the likes of the medical field, professional jobs, even in terms of jobs like hospitality and tourism it is not a country that is well known for tourism. Whereas, on the other hand you look at Barbados and loads of people go to Barbados, it's seen as a glamorous exotic location with big yachts and palm trees. Guyana is more like a jungle and it is not so much known as a tourist destination... its kind of like people moving away from Belfast to go to a place like London or Edinburgh or somewhere like that”.

Talking about his life in Northern Ireland, Peter noted that he did feel closer to the local culture and way of life because he had grown up here. His father and mother had allowed him to make his own choices. He said:

“Well.... I feel that I relate more to the Northern Irish culture, now I look different to your typical person from here because of the colour of my skin and stuff, but I have a Northern Irish mentality. I have to say my mother and father didn't push religion down our throats, they didn't mentally manipulate us into following a particular religion or a particular fashion or way of living. They gave us choice and I am very grateful for that because it opens your minds to others...My father was Christian and my mum is Hindu so they had that mixed thing but they were joined together at the same time, so they wanted us to pick our own way”.

Having been brought up in Northern Ireland, a divided society certainly raised challenges for the family in Belfast from the 1960s onwards. One of the issues raised was the notion of 'fitting-in' to an already divided society. Peter commented that in his own family some of his siblings became closer to one side or the other. He said:

“I would have a brother who would be more on the Protestant side and a sister who would be more on the Catholic

side, but not hardcore. My other brother would be atheist and my own religious beliefs would be spiritual, but I don't particularly believe in religion but I have that openness and acceptance.... Well now in work we get the 12th July off and we get St Patrick's Day off too and I have to admit that I like both!"

In contrast Peter had both Catholic and Protestant friends. He said that he was lucky because his background meant that he felt that he could make friends more readily than some of his classmates, and he noted that a lot of people that he went to school with didn't have that opportunity. Peter also commented on the importance of education that respects cultural diversity. When he was younger, Peter studied at a school in Belfast which had both Catholic and Protestant students. However, he commented at that time that there was no education on cultural diversity. He noted how important he felt it was for his own children to be educated in an institution that recognised diversity.

"Well there was none when I was at school. It's only been in the relatively recent past that we've had integrated schools. With my own children, we were the founding parents of an integrated school in Belfast, and that is something that I felt very strongly about whenever my kids got to school age... All my three children went to integrated schools both primary school and secondary school. I believe in that form of education because it goes a long way in dispelling so many myths".

This led to another issue, common to the third generation living in Northern Ireland. Peter noted that in relation to his own children there were still many issues of culture that were maintained, but that there were also many examples of where the younger generations are beginning to lose aspects of their parents' and grandparents' culture. Peter said:

"I think often it happens that you come together to celebrate your culture together, but we went out and that's been diluted a bit. My children do, I mean they eat foods that my mum would eat which could be described as 'ethnic' for want of a better word, which is good, and they see and hear from her about the way that she lived".

In relation to celebrating cultural festivals Peter noted that as Guyana has a large Hindu population that there would be an interest in many of the festivals celebrated by the Indian community in Northern Ireland as well. Therefore, the Diwali festival of lights, celebrated in November, was always an interesting event. Peter said that attending these kinds of events wasn't necessarily pre-planned:

"It is not something that we celebrate on purpose. It is just if it is there and it looks attractive we'll go down and have a look and see what its like".

Peter noted that these events were extremely important in the context of Northern Ireland, not only for diaspora communities but also for all members of society. Such events, he argued, potentially break down barriers. He noted examples of this:

"These events gel you with your friends, your family, your history, and your roots. They also help to bring people from ethnic minority backgrounds into the greater community. I have friends who I work with who ask me questions like 'oh where are you from? What's it like there? Where's your mum from?' So if there is an event like that in Botanic gardens I say to them come along, have a look for yourself, sample some food, read about other religions, see how we live, see what we do, see how we laugh. Like it's pretty much similar to you".

Despite the many positive aspects of living in Northern Ireland, when Peter was asked about whether he had ever been treated as an outsider, he commented:

"Occasionally, yes and sometimes still yes even though I speak with a Northern Ireland accent. One example was when I was at work and this middle-aged member of the public came up to me and said to me, 'what are you doing here?' I said, 'Pardon' and he went on to say to me, 'sure look at you, you can't even speak English'".

When asked how he responded to such incidents Peter noted that he always replied with courtesy and explained that he had lived in Northern Ireland his whole life. In addition to this, he also commented that such negative experiences were always balanced with those local people who had become very close friends, and who would always be there to offer support and help. By and large, he felt that one of the best means of fighting discrimination is about being open with other people and:



“Letting other people see who you are. It’s about that building up of some kind of rapport with people”.

Cultural institutions, such as museums, were viewed by Peter as an important vehicle for the promotion of cultural diversity. Peter commented that many institutions in the public space are crucial because they have the potential to target both adults and children. He noted that every child goes on a visit to a museum and exhibitions on a multicultural society could create a better understanding. However, he noted that there needed to be a greater effort to promote such institutions to those groups who would not traditionally visit a museum. He said:

“The only area I feel where that could be really improved is that adult trips could be introduced more, because adults, if they maybe are from a certain background, won’t go into a museum. So yes things like that should be exhibited in other public places too like the City Hall here in Belfast libraries are also a perfect place, even in leisure centres. There was a recent Latin American event in Shaftsbury Recreation Centre and it was a huge success. Things like that are perfect. Local community centres and touring multicultural exhibitions would be a great thing to do”.

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Kamini - India



Kamini Rao is a young woman in her early twenties from Strabane. She is second-generation Indian and has a younger brother and sister. She is currently studying for a Bachelors degree in health and social sciences that she hopes will lead to a job in social work. Kamini’s father came from Hyderabad in India to Northern Ireland as a professional cricket player in the 1980s and stayed in the region. She described his story:

“Well it was actually my dad that came over here to play cricket in the UK. I think that that was around twenty years ago now. Actually, he had been in England first before he came over here. There were small clubs here in Northern Ireland and they used to bring professionals over here from England, so he was in Lancashire first and then they brought him over here. When he came over he met my mother, and really I suppose that was one of the big reasons why he stayed”.

Kamini also commented that she knew how difficult it had been for her father’s family when he first left India, as the anxiety of a family member leaving for another country came to the fore. She said:

“When he came over at the start his family, I don’t think was too happy about that, they really didn’t want him to come over because I suppose they were just worried about him going away from home. Then gradually, I think after a while they got used to the idea of him being away from home. He has been living here now years”.

There is still an extended family connection in India with an uncle and aunts and cousins. Because of this Kamini has made a number of visits to India. Firstly, when she was five, and then twice more in more recent years. She also noted that other members of her father’s family had also made the decision to leave India to live in other parts of the world and that some of these relatives had also visited the family in Strabane. She commented:

“Well actually there is still only one brother and one sister who are permanently living in India, the rest of them are living in other parts of the world. I mean he has other brothers and sisters that are living in America and also in South Africa, so they are all over the place. But then the other part of the family they are still there”.

Even though visits to India have not necessarily been commonplace, communication with other family members in India has been facilitated through Internet social networks, like Facebook, which Kamini noted as a good way to keep in touch. She also noted that this year she is visiting India herself for a few months. Although apprehensive about the thought of travelling alone, this has been viewed by Kamini as a very important aspect of her own personal development. She said that this would be something that would also please her father:

“My dad really wants me to do it and thinks that it will be really good for me to see India, it’s him really. I mean he isn’t making me go or pushing me to go or anything like that, he is just encouraging me to go and see India. My mum wants me to go too. It would be good because it is so different to Strabane because it is so crowded. It’s like a huge city with lots of people around and it always seems to be so busy in comparison to Strabane”.

Despite her desire to go to India to experience the place by herself, Kamini said that she still felt more affiliated to

the local culture in Northern Ireland and that when she was younger she never really realised that she came from a different culture at all. She explained:

“I would definitely say that I relate more to the local culture. We do of course practice my dad’s culture but it would only be like at certain times. Like we would go to mass every weekend with my mum and we would be around Irish people all the time. My dad, he would have some issues with us because we would like to go out with friends to nightclubs, but he doesn’t really like the idea of girls going out to pubs and drinking because that just wouldn’t be done in India”.

She noted language as another issue. Communicating with relatives in India was not a problem as English is spoken quite widely in India as a second language. However, Kamini noted that she cannot speak Hindi, which is her father’s first language. She felt that at this stage in her life it would prove particularly difficult to learn.

“Well I don’t speak Hindi at all, but my dad would speak it fluently, he speaks fluent English as well. My Mum always says to my dad ‘you should have taught them Hindi when they were younger’. I think though that Hindi is a very hard language to learn. It probably now would be even harder because I have such a broad Strabane accent as well!”

However, there were occasions when Kamini and her family would celebrate aspects of her Indian culture. This would be particularly the case around the festival of lights Diwali in November, which would be an important event for the entire family in the family. Kamini explained some of the details of what happens at this time:

“Well we would have done Puja in the house where you pray and make offerings at home. Then we would have gone to my dad’s friend’s house, who is also Indian, and he lives in Strabane as well. Diwali means the festival of light, so we would have to bring candles to light with us as well. Then we would go up to my uncle’s house and then we would get our dinner there, and then at the end of the day we would set off fireworks to celebrate the day”.

Kamini also noted splits in the ways that some of the younger second generation would celebrate some festivals compared with their first generation elders. She noted:

“You are supposed to fast all day but we don’t. We just don’t eat meat. Well the older people they would fast, like my Dad would fast, but no the young people wouldn’t”.

Despite the fact that events like this were important, living in Strabane provided some difficulties in terms of organising events to celebrate such festivals:

“I mean there aren’t many Indians in Strabane compared to what there would be in Belfast. Obviously if there are more people there is going to be more of a big deal made about things. Here in Strabane it is a much smaller group who would all be friends. I mean it would be all my dad’s friends who would get together to celebrate something privately, rather than it being a big thing”.

Kamini’s friends from Strabane have also learned more about India from Kamini and her family. She commented on how at times, some of their queries had bordered on the comical, but that she always tried to answer any questions that they would have.

“Some of my friends have this funny thing in their head that I am going to end up getting an arranged marriage. They would always ask me like about India and what it’s like, and things like that. If they would see something on the TV about India they would always be interested in asking me. Most of their questions I can answer for them, like they would ask me about the languages spoken there and stuff like that. They would ask me can you speak those languages. They definitely do take interest because they know that I am from a different culture”.

Friends have also been given a wealth of first-hand information on India by her father, who would often tell those stories. He also shows them the space where he worships at home. This has helped to instil an interest in India, and as a result, “some of them now are thinking about going to India in the summer with me just to see what it is like”.



When she was younger, Kamini attended an all-girl's Catholic school and then a mixed grammar school. In her primary school Kamini noted that there was little in the way of recognition of the fact that she was from a different background. In her grammar school there was also not much in the way of events that celebrated diversity, but Kamini noted that the environment was certainly better in terms of being more aware. She said:

“Well, in my secondary school because it was already a mixed school with Catholics and Protestants. Like with religion classes I had the option of whether I wanted to continue and do religion because of the fact that I was half-Hindi as well, but I just did it anyway”.

Kamini stated that she has never felt as if she were an outsider in Northern Ireland. She attributed that to the fact that she had lived in Strabane all of her life, and that because it is so small everyone knows her as a local. She said that her father, as a first-generation Indian, had previously encountered a number of negative experiences. One issue that she had faced was not so much in relation to being treated as an outsider, but was related to a mistake by a practitioner in the local health sector. On one occasion Kamini had visited the opticians for an eye test. She explained:

“One time I went to get my eyes tested at the opticians in Strabane and they said that there was something wrong with the back of my eyelids because it was thicker than what it should be. Then I went to the doctor and he was an Indian doctor and he was really angry because he said, ‘your optician should have known that because you are mixed race that the back of your eyelid is thicker’. That was really bad because the optician was saying ‘oh this could cause a lot of problems for you in the future’. I thought I was going to go blind the way they were going on. I think in things like hospitals here there are so many doctors who were originally from India. I think that is good though because they know certain things specific to the Indian community”.

Kamini is hoping for a career in social work and has been actively involved in a number of initiatives in the Strabane area in relation to tackling questions around anti-social behaviour, as well as issues affecting ethnic minority groups. She commented:

“I’ve done some volunteering work that will help me. Over last summer I did some magazine articles for Strabane Ethnic Community Association about the economy and about student loans and things like that. I used to do stuff for the junior youth council in Strabane. So with that we would have been working on projects where we were trying to get young people off the streets and things like that”.

Despite this, Kamini finished on a pessimistic note, stating that like many young people in the region there are serious concerns and worries about finding employment in a chosen profession. This means that it looks likely that when she returns from her trip to India she will look for employment beyond Northern Ireland:

“It is so hard to find jobs at the minute so I think that I’ll look in England when I’m finished my degree to get experience and then maybe think about coming back to Northern Ireland. It’s hard enough for anyone to get a job in Strabane at the minute so it will be even harder for a young person like me”.

4.4 Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Amin - Iraq

Amin is an Iraqi man who first came to England in 2003. It was in Northern Ireland that he originally claimed for asylum status. In Iraq, Amin had been a student of Information Technology. He has carried on his studies in Northern Ireland and is currently a student at a local college in Belfast. He described his initial arrival in the UK and the treatment that he received:

“On arrival, I went to a police station in London and explained as best as I could. I do not think they understood much of what I said but eventually they booked a taxi for me to go to the Home Office in Croydon, where I made my asylum application”.

Amin noted however that the process that he was forced to go through in order to gain asylum in the UK had not been very efficient and he was generally unsatisfied by the whole process that he had to go through. Amin

particularly noted that the process had taken far too long for the Home Office to hear his case. He commented:

“I think it was slow because the whole process took me two years, yet I also appreciate the stages that were involved. For instance, I had to go to court and that was bound to take time. It took too long to be finalised because the Home Office declined my case. It was difficult while it was being processed because it was declined twice but all is fine now. My solicitor put in an appeal which was declined in court. He put in another, where finally I got my status through judicial review. I got justice in the end”.

In England Amin began a relationship with someone from Northern Ireland and this influenced his decision to leave England and to come and live in Belfast. He noted that at the time he moved to Northern Ireland his case had not yet been heard.

“When I lived in England, I was involved in a relationship with an Irish man who influenced me to move to Northern Ireland with him. I have been here ever since. I originally claimed asylum in London but moved my case here. My asylum application was also related to the persecution of gay people in Iraq. I was told I would be killed as I was an abomination to the Muslim faith and was tortured and jailed for that. I got help to escape to the UK and I would not want to go back home to Iraq”.

He sees himself as one, who has easily adjusted to the way of life in Northern Ireland, and has become accustomed to the way of life in the region. He particularly commented on the freedom of choice that he has here. He commented that:

“The culture is different here; I dress the way I like, the food we eat here, the freedom the government affords me as a resident. Also, religion here is much of a personal choice than everybody’s way of life”.

Amin, like all other refugees and asylum seekers interviewed for this project, did not apply for refugee status under the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme which is a joint mechanism between the UN/IOM and the host country, in this case the UK. Amin commented that he has never used services such as the Refugee Integration and Employment Service in Northern Ireland. He said that he can still reach his family through telecommunications. The immense political crisis and conflict in Iraq, however, compounds the communication problem:

“I am in contact with a few members of my family and friends. With mobile phones and Internet I do get in touch. However, there are others I have been unable to reach. With the many problems, including the political situation in Iraq, I do not know their fate”.

There are a small number of people in Northern Ireland from Iraq, most of whom came here as asylum seekers. Amin noted that there was support for people from Iraq in Northern Ireland and that the issue of language was the major problem faced by other Iraqis living in the region.

“We are very few Iraqis here. I have met some through college and other community organisations that support the welfare of immigrants. My relations with people from this country are good. Language would be the main problem. As we speak Arabic in Iraq but we do have access to translators here in Northern Ireland. Most Iraqis would need help filling out application forms”.

He stated that one of the good things about living here is the statutory laws regarding discrimination, which Amin said protected many people like him. In his experience, Amin said that while living here, there was a general feeling of no prejudice. He commented:

“I find that in Northern Ireland there is no discrimination, especially about my sexual orientation. I want to complete my education and live in this country”.

Finally, Amin commented on the difficulties that he has experienced with the onset of the global recession which have been a negative aspect of current life in Northern Ireland. He said:

“The cost of living like rent here in Northern Ireland has gone up, but because it is only my partner and me we do manage”.



Amin noted that despite the fact that life was difficult due to the recession that he wished to remain in Northern Ireland, something which his accepted status as a refugee facilitates.

Timothy - Zimbabwean



Some asylum seekers and refugees have fled persecution linked to their political conscience. They have been directly involved in calling for change in places where the state has grossly violated the human rights of citizens. Because of their political opinions, the state has repressed their views in many ways, such as through torture and imprisonment without trial. Over the last ten years, opposition activists have been arbitrarily arrested and tortured in Zimbabwe, a country in the southern part of Africa. Timothy, a young Zimbabwean man moved to Belfast and consequently applied for refugee status after living here as an asylum seeker. He recounted his story:

“I am 31 years-old. I distribute marketing flyers here in Belfast. In Zimbabwe I was a freelance marketing consultant working for different firms and also had a garage for car sales and repair. We had a construction company which supplied materials. I operated my father’s business as well. I used to enjoy my work back in Zimbabwe. I had all the freedom to operate the business, so it was better there. I want to make my life here exactly the way it was in Zimbabwe; I need more freedom as well. Conditions could be better here, the more people accept us here then the more conducive it will be for us to work or run a business”.

Timothy raised a very important point, which is that when someone leaves their country of origin for a new life, they are also leaving much behind; including material possessions, jobs and family. He stated:

“When you come here as an asylum seeker, we lose what we did back home as well; jobs, business and also my son. Many asylum seekers end up doing cleaning jobs and so on. There is no market information on what people can do”.

Timothy said that communication with his family back home in Zimbabwe had proven difficult since he came to Northern Ireland. He said:

“I have contact with my family in Zimbabwe, but it is not always easy, and there is no active use of the Internet in my area. I have family in both rural areas and also in Harare, the capital, but technology or IT is still low. If I sent a letter by post, it could take about a month to arrive”.

Timothy explained the complex reasons as to why he had to leave Zimbabwe. This was related to his role as a politician and the position that he took in opposition to the government.

“In Zimbabwe, I was also a politician. It became dangerous for me to live there because we were looking for change for all Zimbabweans. Because of the generation gap between us and the rulers, the older generation were not concerned about developing the future. We, as the youth, wanted to transform Zimbabwe. Due to political violence, I couldn’t stay there no more. It was a threat to my life. I moved to Northern Ireland, a peace haven. I also think that with my being here, I am also able to be involved in improving society here in Northern Ireland”.

It is not surprising that in Zimbabwe, like many other countries facing similar problems, more young people are taking the risky option of advocating for radical progressive change. This often comes in the face of resistance, sometimes fatal resistance, by instruments of the state. They form or join political parties as a means of formalising and mobilising more youth to action. For them, it is a call for democratic change. Timothy described how he had set up a new political party,

“Zimbabwe New Generation is the party that myself and colleagues founded. It was an opposition party formed by the youth, new blood”.

Timothy commented that when he first came to Northern Ireland he did not have many problems with the asylum application process. However, he noted that the status of refugee had on a number of occasions made life problematic for him. He also stated that since he had been in Northern Ireland he had experienced racial abuse on a number of occasions.

“My asylum application was reasonable. It was properly done; I have no complaint to make about it. But when you have got the status of a refugee, you are not going to do what you want to do wherever you go. For example, when you travel to England, you are stopped at the entry points, airports and you are asked so many questions. Anywhere you go here, agencies and other departments just see you as someone who doesn’t know anything because you are black. Even in the streets some people call us niggers. A couple of times it has happened to me but I just ignore it (sic). One day, my wife and our baby were on the Shankill Road, and this wee boy who was only about eight, spat at my wife. They need to show us respect. If you are living in a society like that, it leaves you with a question mark! We didn’t look forward to seeing more problems when we came here”.

Timothy felt that he, and members of his community, have much to contribute to life in Northern Ireland, but that this is only possible when acceptance comes from the host community. He explained why he first came to Northern Ireland:

“So that I’d be able to live, work and be free in Northern Ireland. Those aims are not fully achievable, because the community has not accepted us yet. This is because of our colour. We are not able to contribute fully what we have got for the development of Northern Ireland. When I was an asylum seeker, it was very difficult; it was very difficult because I was not allowed to work. The benefits were also not enough to sustain me. But the benefits are supportive because in Africa you do not expect the government or someone to give you benefits”.

Timothy felt strongly that although the asylum system has not been a challenging experience, his application was processed within a reasonable time, compared to what other people would have reported. The overtone of racial prejudice in some parts of the public arena in Belfast is still of major concern to him and his family. Timothy’s evidence illustrates the sense of persecution through physical or verbal abuse that an asylum seeker may feel in a country which has guaranteed them safety.

Timothy also noted that although there had been a number of negative incidents involving members of the local community, in general he gets on very well with the majority of people. He said:

“Some people here are very good. Others haven’t accepted me because I am black. It seems that the majority of Irish (Northern Irish) Catholics accept us, more than some of the Protestants do. Most black people enjoy their drink in West Belfast and even are married to Catholic girls more than Protestants. I can drive at night time to West Belfast but it is different in some areas”.

Timothy noted that one of his major problems in Northern Ireland was gaining access to information, commenting in particular that things in the region could be very closed.

“The system here is not open. In Zimbabwe you can go anywhere and ask for information. Here in Northern Ireland, you have to research on your own to get information. It is very complicated. So, you find yourself doing the wrong thing at the wrong time. There are also too many restrictions”.

When asked if he would one day return to Zimbabwe, Timothy was quite apprehensive and very uncertain. He also harbours mistrust for the Voluntary Assisted Returns system:

“The situation is still not too good. But if you manage to settle properly, the integration into this society - you can stay here in Northern Ireland and make it your home. Integration is still far behind here in Northern Ireland. The integration here, I mean is people working together and appreciating each other’s values. Integration will determine who you are in society or you are nobody! Our potential is not being accepted. The voluntary returns systems liaise with these governments that persecute people. It is not safe especially for illiterate people. Yes I would like to remain here in Northern Ireland. My son was born here. So I did not apply to return”.

Timothy felt that a lot needs to be done by immigrants in order to create meaningful multicultural diversity and understanding in Northern Ireland. Timothy said that in some cases, immigrants tend to keep or share their social, leisure and support networks exclusively amongst themselves, this defeats the multicultural diversity agenda; he used the term “foreign clubs” to elaborate the exclusivity of such social or community groupings that rarely includes the host community. He noted in particular that in some cases there was an overreliance by people on certain support agencies. He said:

“I have never used the Refugee Integration and Employment Service, but I found that foreigners using such services are not integrating. My expectations were higher; it is like a foreigner’s club some of the crèche facilities in public places. There was no integration with indigenous families of Northern Ireland. It is only foreigners that bring their kids in these public facilities”.

In relation to social life, Timothy commented that there was a quite a sizeable Zimbabwean community in Northern Ireland and that there was a sense of community, even though at times there could be disagreements within that community.

“I know many people from my country because I met them at Zimbabwean national holidays, festivals, sports events and parties that were held here. There may be two hundred to three hundred Zimbabweans here. This includes their children. Some Zimbabweans are not interested in meeting their country people. Zimbabweans here have disagreements sometimes based on facts and no facts! Some people try to emphasize ethnicity but this is not a major thing about Zimbabweans. When we are here we are not really in touch with Zimbabwean politics. We are governed by Northern Ireland politics. There is also a Zimbabwean Solidarity group”.

There are social divisions among some migrants related to the visa status of compatriots within those peer groups:

“There are some people who have lived here for seven years and even more. Their asylum claims have not been accepted and so these people are really stressed. The more status people are given, that is the more numbers of refugees, the better. Some communities are now separated. Some of our community who have been granted refugee status or granted papers do not want to socialise with those who are still asylum seekers. Some people have stayed here for so many years. They even have family with white (indigenous) girlfriends but still have no status”.

The global financial crisis has also severely affected displaced people across the world:

“Economically, I think Northern Ireland is developing and I can be part of that in the future. The cost of living there in Zimbabwe is very high. There are no drugs and medical facilities. There’s no foreign currency in the country and an increased HIV problem, all because of poverty. But here too the cost of living here in Northern Ireland is high now and there are no jobs. We used to choose jobs but there are no options now. The cost of food is also very high and my business here is also suffering now”.

This narrative shows a picture of some of the challenges that face young refugees who in their country of birth, had promising lives as entrepreneurs and who were making their mark as agents of social change. The reader should note that asylum seekers or refugees have also largely left an economic life behind and so their escape from their homeland is often a heartbreaking experience.

Damaris - Kenyan



A 33-year-old mother, Damaris, is an asylum seeker from Kenya. She narrated her living standards as follows:

“I didn’t want to end up here for an asylum application. But it is the agency that brought me here. I explained to the police about my fears back home in Kenya. So I applied for asylum in the UK. It involved interviews. I was interrogated or interviewed by immigration officials, then I was to sign at the police station every month like a criminal. I lived in temporary accommodation often sharing with four to five people”.

Damaris took a view that even though her concerns of personal safety and fear back in her country of birth were of the utmost importance; they also ran concurrently with the process of relocation and finding a new safe haven in Northern Ireland. She spoke of an uncertain future because of the length of time her asylum application has taken and that it is still yet to be decided. The fundamental priorities for her were not so much the statutory and other related services offered but foremost, her asylum to refugee status which is yet to be decided upon. Damaris feels that her economic difficulties relating to her asylum status are further translated into social impediments of not having a comfortable family life and by having to share a small space with other people in similar situations. Therefore, in her words, to be an asylum seeker can lead to ‘not being recognized’ by the official state mechanism. She said:

“I was seeking asylum on the grounds of being discriminated or persecuted and belonging to a religious (quasi-political) organisation which the Home Office did not recognise. The persecuting organisation is called Mungiki. I was persecuted by Mungiki because my husband was a member of this disbanded organisation. The Home Office declined my case. Because of the double-jeopardy rule, my case cannot be re-done; no solicitor was interested in re-applying on my behalf. The UK Border Agency has also not replied for three years”.

In addition to the sense of individual anxiety, this narrative shows the extent to which legal barriers can complicate the lives of those who are seeking asylum or refugee status while based in Northern Ireland.

As this Report observes, multi-ethnic diversity is increasingly becoming a core facet of the region’s demography. But this does not mean that asylum seekers being part of this diversity are generally appreciated by some of their hosts. Damaris emphasised this point:

“My relationship is not with many local people and they do not really understand why I left my country”.

At one point Damaris felt that there were still individuals in this society who prefer to see her as ‘different’ or other. She said:

“I have been asked to leave a bus stop because the driver saw me dressed in African clothing. I was going to court for my immigration appeal. That day I felt awful. ‘Get off the bus’ the driver said”.

But like many other people interviewed here, she says that at least her safety is not compromised:

“I feel safe here and there is rule of law compared to my country”.

Asylum seekers are mostly forbidden from paid and voluntary work and this is also a matter of great concern:

“I was self-employed and my income was guaranteed. I was a busy woman in Kenya. In Kenya I was a businesswoman, working as a farmer mainly in horticultural supplies. I can do nothing here in Northern Ireland until the UK Border Agency makes a decision. I don’t get any financial help from the National Asylum Support Service”.

Destitute asylum seekers in a similar position have often relied on support from various faith groups, friends. In some cases, they have been rendered homeless and effectively living on the streets. Some have become isolated to the extent that they feel their circumstances here and the persecution in their home country becomes parallel. Of course, this perceived similarity can be directly linked to the consequences of their current situation, stress, emotional difficulties and the overall poverty that comes with no access to official support or when it is withdrawn as is the case with the GP’s list.

“I would have liked to return but my circumstances and fleeing persecution would not allow me to return. Also, the recession must have affected my family but I am not in contact with them. I am not sure to what extent. It is difficult to make plans when you don’t know where you stand on the asylum case. My situation here is just as difficult now. At one point I was deregistered by my GP because they wanted an up to date letter from the UKBA. They couldn’t believe my asylum application had taken so long. A family support worker helped me with the issue and I had been de-registered for almost 2 years, so imagine if I was sick”.

Damaris’ experiences in Northern Ireland have highlighted the many difficulties that are faced by those who have not yet been granted ‘official’ status as a refugee and point to the many challenges faced by those in a similar situation.

Ibrahim - Sudan



Ibrahim is a 28-year-old Sudanese man living in Belfast. He has no family here in Northern Ireland. Ibrahim comes from the Darfur region, where there has been armed conflict in the last number of years:

“I am from the Dinka tribe. I got asylum in Birmingham, England but there was no accommodation for asylum seekers as they were too many so through speaking to other asylum seekers, I realised that Northern Ireland



was still part of the UK and there were very few asylum seekers. Therefore, there would be no accommodation problems. I asked that my case be moved to the Northern Ireland one stop shop. I came by bus. When I arrived here, there had been an influx of asylum seekers from Somalia so we still had problems with accommodation and food just like in Birmingham, but I decided to stay”.

The reason for Ibrahim’s displacement from his home and country of origin is the Darfur conflict:

“We have a problem in Darfur where the Arabic Muslims oppress us Black Muslims. The conflict started in 2003 when the SLA (Sudan Liberation Army) went to war with the government. The Sudanese military and the Janjaweed, which is a Sudanese vigilante group, are the Arab Muslims while the SLA and Justice and Equality movement are on the side of the black Muslims. I applied for asylum in 2006 after the Janjaweed attacked my village. My parents were killed and the rest of the family were scattered. My two brothers were killed in the process. The government was not protecting us citizens. It tampered with evidence like covering up mass graves etc. They also arrested and harassed journalists, thus limiting the extent of press coverage of the situation in Darfur. I got refugee status within 4 months. My life was in danger and I had to flee. My asylum or refugee claim was better than what I have seen others go through. My friend has been here for seven years without any decision made yet by the Home Office”.

Ibrahim was employed full-time in Sudan before he travelled to Europe. He described the difficult provisions that were made in relation to education in his home country:

“I was a primary school teacher in Sudan. School started at 8am till 12pm. I taught Arabic. We had limited resources. Due to the war situation our school buildings were burnt down so we had our classes in temporary shelters, you know, built to shelter us from the sun. We could not keep the children very long as we did not have food to feed them. We just did what we could in the circumstances. It was difficult”.

On the subject of returning to his home country, Ibrahim felt that his safety is paramount and Darfur is still not his safest destination after the loss of his family. Although he noted that he will stay in Northern Ireland, he hopes that one day the situation in Darfur will change:

“In the circumstances prevailing, in Darfur I am not safe there. I do not want to die like my parents and brothers if only to sustain the family name. Maybe ten years down the line, the situation will have changed. I will want to go and rebuild my country. In Northern Ireland, we have peace. I can go about my business without interference or fear. I have no family in the UK. The closest I have to family would be my countrymen. I wish I could get married and start my own family”.

Although Ibrahim worked as a teacher in Sudan, he is employed in a job that does not correspond to his qualifications and past career. He expressed fears that because English is not his first language, he is having difficulty finding a position.

“Yes I do work on and off as a security officer, sometimes 10 hrs a week. I applied for the job through an agency. I have great limitations to working in the UK as my English is poor. However, I am studying English in Belfast Metropolitan College. Maybe soon my situation will change and maybe I can get a teaching job here, like teaching Arabic which is what I was doing before in Sudan. My employer has been very good and patient with me especially considering the fact I do not speak English very well”.

Ibrahim commented that there are a small number of Sudanese nationals currently living in Northern Ireland, but that they celebrate aspects of their culture together.

“The Sudanese are very few in Northern Ireland. We know each other. I met them through the one stop shop in Belfast. We do have an organisation of the Sudanese in Northern Ireland but we meet, talk, organise events and celebrate our national days, like independence days together. We are a strong community here. My relation with local community is good as far as I know”.

Ibrahim highlights some of the challenges the Sudanese community face in interacting in the public sphere, or with statutory bodies. Language barriers are yet again noted as one of the major issues for Ibrahim and his friends.



“Problems will always be there, but the worst is when we have a communication breakdown because we speak Arabic where we come from. We always need an interpreter. But we get by ok. I have not had a problem accessing public services. I have never really had a negative experience in Northern Ireland. Peace is what money can’t buy and there is also no persecution or fear in Northern Ireland. My long-term plans are to stay here and have a family. The financial crisis in the world has affected everybody. When I arrived here I could get a lot of food for £10 but now I can only get a half of that, yet I see, there has not been a significant change in benefits”.

5 Findings and Common Trends from the Narratives

This report has detailed the experiences of twelve people living in Northern Ireland who came from, or whose family came from, the global South. The stories relate a complexity of experiences faced in these circumstances, and have attempted to put a human face to the often-politicised issue of migration. The stories have also emphasised the experiences, encounters and contributions of people who have made Northern Ireland their home.

As independent research consultants, we have outlined our conclusions and made some initial recommendations below and hope that these can be explored by stakeholders in the minority, development, refugee and human rights sectors as part of a wider-scale project. Such research could involve a larger sample number of participants, therefore giving a broader range of opinion and a greater opportunity for in-depth analysis.

The research study compiled for this report arrived at the following conclusions:

Daily Life

- The stories of those coming to live in the region are an important element of our social history. The stories that are told here serve as a means of humanising the often dehumanised debate on immigration that regularly appears in the media;
- Refugees and asylum seekers who were interviewed in this project in particular commented that they felt safer and also had a greater sense of general freedoms in Northern Ireland than in their home countries. In the past, the hypothesis has always been that because of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, it would have caused formidable challenges for many asylum seekers or refugees wanting to stay in the region.
- Multicultural diversity is now a phenomenon throughout Northern Ireland, in both urban and rural areas and further specific research should recognise this particular dynamic;
- Many participants noted that community support organisations offer major assistance to migrants in their daily lives. The role of the community sector is particularly important in assisting first generation migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. This was evidenced by the role that the Sai-Pak project has played in assisting individuals from China, like Rose. Government should be aware of the important role that such groups play in their allocation of community sector funding;
- Learning and readjusting to a new way of life was identified as a difficult factor for a number of participants. For example, first generation migrants and asylum seekers/refugees in particular found issues like local accents, learning the 'local' way of doing things and the weather as being amongst the most challenging aspects to get used to;
- Northern Ireland institutions that are mandated to offer services to immigrants especially in the asylum/refugee category should provide information to the public through continuous research as this area is very fluid in terms of policy changes and new statutory rules;
- There is need for appreciation that multicultural diversity in Northern Ireland is not simply a numbers game denoted by demographics and statistics produced by government agencies. A new agenda should focus on qualitative research with communities themselves which should be conducted by bodies such as the Councils, Housing Executive and other government agencies in order to shape future policy development and implementation. This recommendation could also take on board a national or cross border perspective so that institutions in Northern Ireland can share and learn from similar bodies in the Republic of Ireland and Britain;

Language

- Language has proven to be a major issue across all target groups. For first generation migrants, asylum seekers and refugees language barriers often impinged on the capacity of individuals to access services, gain employment and communicate with the host communities. Even for those who had a good standard of English, the Northern Ireland accent has sometimes caused communication difficulties for migrants;

- One of the case studies in this report indicates that long-term settlement in the region has not necessarily meant English language acquisition. English Language acquisition is a voluntary and personal pursuit but for those who face social barriers, for instance in relation to irregular work patterns, this is not well facilitated. If this area is not addressed, then immigrants will continue to face associated difficulties for example access to proper healthcare, education, disparate economic power and unequal competition in the job markets;
- The state should also foster a greater toleration of multilingualism. Northern Ireland and the UK are not monolingual societies, therefore whilst addressing acute language barriers facing immigrants or the host community, the state should emphasise the positive aspects of a multilingual presence in our society. This can be an enriching component of local society and culture and can also strengthen the economy through a categorical loosening of 'English fluency' criteria in the jobs market or academic entry at universities;
- In higher education in the UK, most universities require that an international student takes either an IELTS or TOEFL as a precondition for joining these institutions. The entry requirements mean that these tests assume a one-size fits all model. However, some international students from countries where English is the primary language of instruction may in some cases still be obliged to take this exam, resulting in higher fees. For example, a Ugandan or Kenyan student will almost certainly have been educated in English whereas a student from a former French colony in Africa would have different needs. Therefore, the language entry requirements of the two should be viewed as acutely different. This current situation does not take a common sense approach and changes should be made to ensure a fairer system;
- For second generation migrants interviewed, the issues around language were related more towards cultural issues, with a number of participants commenting on how they did not know the language of their parents or grandparents. In some cases this caused communication problems with relatives, while for others it symbolised an element of cultural loss;
- In order to challenge the sense of isolation felt by a number of the participants there is a need to produce information, through pamphlets and brochures on general life in the UK and Northern Ireland which is tailored towards the particular needs of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, in particular;

Culture

- The celebration of cultural events, whether in private or public, was commonplace among many of the interviewees. However, the celebration of events in public places was viewed as hugely important by a number of participants as they offered a space where members of migrant communities and the host community could come together;
- All four of the second generation migrants identified affiliation towards both the culture in Northern Ireland and that of their country of origin as important. All of them acknowledged that an interest in their cultural identity had grown as they got older. These participants also commented that when they were children, schools had rarely acknowledged cultural diversity in the classroom. One participant noted that this was now beginning to change to a certain extent for his own children who attended schools in the integrated sector;
- One second generation participant noted that he would also like to see an exploration of issues for his own children and their experiences. Therefore, further study is required on the lives of younger 'third-generation' migrants in the region;

Employment and Opportunity

- Many first generation and migrant/asylum seeker participants were highly qualified in their countries of origin. Of the twelve participants, two first generation migrants were educated to university standard. All four of the refugees/asylum seekers were professionals or students in their country of origin but also noted difficulties with income and employment opportunities. Three of the four second generation migrants noted satisfaction with their employment. The other individual in this category is currently a student and commented that like many young people she feared for future opportunities;
- Some UK universities and employers use the National Recognition Information Centre for the UK (NARIC)



as comparison resources to determine their admissions criteria to international students. This equivalence of degrees and other qualifications to UK academic certificates is commendable but should not be used as a gauge for all students because people have their individual graduate testimonies and transcripts. Many immigrants have seen this as a major drawback and a number of respondents in this study noted that they had experienced extreme difficulty in having their qualifications recognised by local employers;

Discrimination and Racism

- Racism is a political issue that must continue to be addressed by the State through statutory provisions such as the Northern Ireland Race Relations Order 1997 which states that ‘it is unlawful for service providers who offer services to the public to discriminate against a person on racial grounds in relation to the provision of goods, facilities and services’. The implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such provision is important for the success of these approaches;
- The provisions on racism, race related violence and other aspects in Northern Ireland should be made clearer and categorical because at the moment, many who have faced this problem believe there is a burden of proof that limits their ability to go forward with a case to the police, the Equality Commission or the courts of law;
- Of the twelve people who were interviewed, six had experienced open discrimination on the grounds of race. For two of the asylum seekers/refugees these were not isolated incidents. One had been subjected to verbal and physical abuse, while the other had been denied access to a public service. One of the first generation migrants had experienced physical and verbal abuse, but noted that these had been isolated incidents. Finally, three of the second-generation migrants stated that they had also experienced some problems with racist comments and in some instances bullying at some stage of their lives;
- Of the six participants who stated that they had encountered racism, three noted in particular that this involved children and young teenagers. This suggests that further work in the area of educating young people in the awareness of cultural diversity should be viewed as a priority area for educators;

Community Relations

- Only two of the participants had little or no communication with the host community. In one instance this was caused by an acute language barrier. In the other case this was caused by lack of support and subsequent general isolation;
- However, many also noted that negative experiences that they had were often outweighed by their positive interactions with the host community and ten of the participants had local friends;
- According to the participants, relations within their respective migrant communities were generally good. These links were often enhanced through work patterns, like the case of the Chinese community; through family connections, like in the case of the second generation Indian respondents; through participation at educational courses, such as at universities; and also through the efforts of the aforementioned community groups and support centres.

As noted, the consultants believe that with a larger sample size these issues could be explored in further detail in a larger-scale project involving participants from across Northern Ireland.



Useful Websites

African and Caribbean Association of Foyle (ACAF)
<http://www.acafni.org>

Afro-Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI)
<http://www.acsoni.org>

Amnesty International
www.amnestyinternational.org

ARK
<http://www.ark.ac.uk>

Arts Ekta
<http://www.artsekta.org.uk/>

Asylum Law
<http://www.asylumlaw.org/>

Asylum Support Adjudicators
<http://www.asylum-support-adjudicators.org.uk/>

Belfast City Council-Good Relations Unit
<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/goodrelations/index.asp>

Belfast Islamic Centre
<http://www.belfastislamiccentre.org.uk/>

Border and Immigration Agency
<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Bryson Charitable Group-One Stop Service
<http://www.brysongroup.org>

Centre for Global Education
<http://www.centreforglobaleducation.com>

Chinese Welfare Association
<http://www.cwa-ni.org/>

Citizens Advice Bureau
<http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/>

Derry City Council-Good Relations
<http://www.derrycity.gov.uk/goodrelations/index.html>

Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council-Good Relations
<http://www.dungannon.gov.uk>

Embrace
<http://www.embraceni.org>

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
<http://www.equalityni.org>

Home Office
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

Immigration Advisory Service
<http://www.iasuk.org>

Indian Community Centre
<http://www.iccbelfast.com/>

Institute for Conflict Research
<http://www.conflictresearch.org.uk/cms/>

International Organisation on Migration
<http://www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp>

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
<http://www.jcwi.org.uk/>

Latinoamerica Unida
<http://www.latinoamericaunida.org.uk/>

Latin American Street Children's Organisation (LASCO)
<http://www.lasco.ie>

Law Centre for Northern Ireland
<http://www.lawcentreni.org/>

MigrationInformation.org
<http://www.migrationinformation.org/>

Multicultural Resource Centre
<http://www.mcrc-ni.org/>

Northern Ireland Assembly-Good Relations Action Plan
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/goodrelations.htm>

Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers
<http://www.nicras.org.uk/>

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
<http://www.nicem.org.uk/>

Northern Ireland Muslim Family Association
<http://nimfa.org/>
 Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister
<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/>

Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner
<http://www.oisc.gov.uk/>

Omagh Ethnic Community Support
<http://www.omaghcommunityhouse.com/directory/Default.aspx?module=info&directoryid=2d17ac71-dcd9-432c-aa0e-6554a67d0f22>

Refugee Action Group (RAG)
<http://www.refugeeactiongroup.com/>

Refugee Council
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/>

Runnymede Trust
<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/>

South Tyrone Empowerment Programme
<http://www.stepni.org/>

SPIRASI
<http://www.spirasi.ie/>

Strabane Ethnic Community Association
<http://www.seca.org.uk/>

UK Border Agency
<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

United Nations Development Programme
<http://www.undp.org/>

United Nations High Commission on Refugees
<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/>

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Philip McDermott has previously published research papers on issues relating to multiculturalism in Northern Ireland and Europe. He is also an associate lecturer in the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ulster. Philip completed a PhD in 2008 and is currently preparing his thesis on migrant community languages for publication.

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Elly Odhiambo has a Masters in Peace Studies and is a consultant Research Associate with the Institute of Conflict Resolution. His main interests are research in the fields of integration, migration and conflict resolution. He has been involved in writing many reports in these areas. He also had a small part in the Jamaican migrants themed BBC 2 Film which was an adaption of Andrea Levy's Orange Prize winning book, *Small Island*. Elly is a community activist from Kenya.



