



Mid-Ulster: Other Voices

A Listening session with a rural minority ethnic community in 2002



Researched and written by Daniel Holder and Charo Lanao
Minority Ethnic Community Health and Wellbeing Project
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre NI

Contents

Background	p2	Health and Social Services	p7
Methodology	p3	Social Security	p7
Community profile	p4	Education / Housing	p8
Racism /identity/ reading	p5	Bilingualism	p9
Childcare/Transport	p6	Employment	p10
Immigration Service	p6	Summary of issues	p11

Background

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) (the legislation accompanying the Belfast agreement) obliged designated public bodies to promote equality and good relations on a number of grounds including ethnic origin ('race'). One concern about the process was the lack of data and information available to work with regarding issues of concern. As one element of this the Minority Ethnic Community Health and Well-being Project at MCRC decided to research and record information from two emerging minority ethnic communities in NI to compliment and encourage consultation. Reports on the Latin American and Bangladeshi communities were subsequently produced. As a follow up to this work the need to record the experiences of minority ethnic communities in rural areas was identified. This was undertaken with further funding from the original source, the Social Justice Initiative fund of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. The research was conducted in late 2001. MCRC has also recently conducted research into the Portuguese migrant worker community in NI, and as part of the Refugee Action Group commissioned research into refugee and asylum seeker experiences.

Further MCRC publications:

Abelehkoob, A & Leong, F C (1996) Caring for Children from Ethnic Minorities

Greer, E (1999) Recommend Guidelines for Multilingual Materials

Greer, E (2001) Stress, Culture and the Management of Diabetes also as Hindi audiotape
[Report in NI's first seminar on diabetes and ethnic minorities]

Holder, D & Lanao, M (2001) Latinoamérica Está: Trilingual -Spanish/Portuguese/English
[A study on the experiences with public bodies and at work of Latin Americans in NI]

Holder, D (2001) 30 Years Seen but Not Heard also as Sylheti Audio tape
[A listening session with the Bangladeshi (Sylheti) community in NI]

Suarez, A (2002) Relatório Sobre Trabalhadores. Bilingual: English and Portuguese
[Experiences of Portuguese migrant workers in NI]

McVeigh, R (2002) A Place of Refuge? Asylum Seekers and Refugees in NI
[Jointly produced with Refugee Action Group]

(Pending 2002) In Other Words: Minority Ethnic Languages and Communication in NI

In addition MCRC has a reference library which includes reports on minority ethnic communities in NI and best practice research from elsewhere.

© 2002 Multi-Cultural Resource Centre NI
9 Lower Crescent, Belfast, BT7 1NR; Tel: 90244639 www.mcrc.co.uk

Methodology:

The Mid-Ulster area was chosen and the main point of contact was the Mid-Ulster International group, a multi-identity group which had been recently established. The group generally operated in the area covered by the Cookstown and Magherafelt district councils rather than the larger parliamentary constituency.

Snowballing: With the identification of a broad sample in the area a major objective the co-facilitator of the research, Charo Lanao, set about snowballing the community in the area. (i.e. calling those known and requesting further names, which were also called and added to the database if their consent had been given). This had the beneficial side-effect of expanding the community group's database.

Questionnaires: With the database having been expanded questionnaires were sent out to all households on the database to obtain data on age, gender, family size, migration patterns, educational attainment, language proficiency, employment and other areas. 40 questionnaires were sent and 32 were returned, a very high response rate of 80%. The researchers recognised that there were limitations to the reliability of the questionnaire data. The questionnaires were sent to those on the list. Whilst many recipients were in ethnically mixed-marriages and were the only members on the list, with single identity marriages heads of household may have tended to fill in the questionnaire, a concern given the need to cross reference data on lines of gender. In addition due to resource limitation and the diverse range of languages, questionnaires had to be sent out in English. Given the likely different experiences of those with fluent English and those without, this was a major concern. Also as English was the lingua franca of the group, it may have been more difficult to attract non English speakers to it, however, in reality there were significant numbers of non English speaking members. Notably there were a number of responses from members of the Chinese community. In addition to Mid Ulster International group there is also a Mid-Ulster Chinese association. Conscious of the limitations of the questionnaire the researchers used the listening sessions to ensure a the voices of a cross section (on nationality, gender, generation, people fluent or not fluent in English) of the community were heard to lessen impact. The questionnaire's most useful function was to structure the listening sessions.

Structured listening sessions: As the information required was largely qualitative in nature most of it was obtained from two listening sessions which were held with a total of 11 participants seven women and four men, making the sample representative of the overall gender profile. The first session was held with eight participants from different backgrounds in terms of employment, nationality and first/second generation and whether fluent speakers of English or not. A second listening session was conducted on a Sunday with African migrant workers who were unable to attend the first session due to work commitments. One absence from the workshops was representatives of the large Chinese community in the area, although considerable research has already been conducted into the Chinese community in NI. Information was gathered in the areas outlined in this report.

Acknowledgements:

- The members of the Mid-Ulster International Group and other participants
 - The Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust for funding the research
 - The Eastern Health and Social Services Board (EHSSB) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) for their funding of the Minority Ethnic Community Health and Wellbeing Project
 - Susan Good (South Eastern Education and Library Board) for studies on bilingualism.
- All those who gave comments on the report including Ulf Hanson, Mena McCullagh, Elma Greer, Nadette Foley, Anne McGlade and the MCRC Task Group.

Community profile data:

The following data was compiled from structured questionnaires sent to BME households in Mid-Ulster. The sample was obtained through snowballing starting with the Mid-Ulster International group database and other sources. Despite the high response rate to the questionnaires the limitations of such an exercise in producing a representative sample of the communities have to be borne in mind (see methodology).

Migration and Generation:

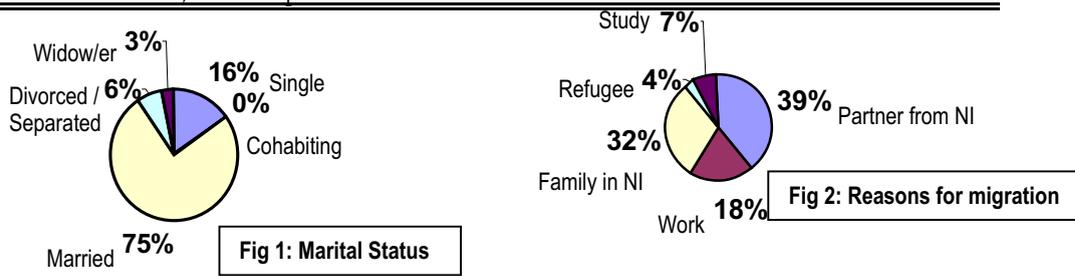
Around 20% of respondents were born in NI and 80% were first generation migrants.

Of the first generation a majority (around 60%) had arrived in NI in the 90s or 2000, around 25% had arrived in the 1980's and the remaining 15% had arrived earlier

Most of the first generation migrants had come to NI as they had family here or their partner was from NI, another major reason was for employment, small numbers had come to study or to flee persecution (see figure 2 below).

Age, Gender and family profile; Of respondents. . .

- Most are women (around 2/3)
- Most were married including a high number of mixed marriages
- Most are young or middle aged families with children - there are few senior citizens
- More than 2/3 of respondents had 1 or more children under 16



Ethnic background / countries of origin:

- Six respondents of the group were N. Irish from Chinese or Indian ethnic origin
- There were first generation members of the group from the following countries: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Ghana, Hong Kong (8), India, Iran, Jamaica, Japan, Mozambique, Nigeria, Peru, Spain, Togo, Sri Lanka, Vietnam.
- A significant minority (around 40%) had also lived in other countries in addition to countries of origin and NI
- Just under 2/3 had Irish or British citizenship

Language:

- Numerous mother tongue languages were spoken by group members including: Cantonese, English (some spoke "pidgin English"), Ewe, Farsi, French, Ga, German, Grushi, Hindi, Mandarin, Mina, Portuguese, Punjabi, Singhalese, Spanish, Twi, Yoruba
- Around ? of the group spoke languages in addition to mother tongue and English
- A significant proportion of the group would need the assistance of an interpreter in an appointment with a doctor, social worker etc.

Suffrage, voting and awareness of equality / human rights structures

- Of the 2/3 of the respondents with the right to vote 2/3 of them exercised this right
- The majority of the respondents (around 2/3 in each case) knew that NI had a Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and a law against racial discrimination (RRO) however, the role of the NIHRC and the scope of the RRO were generally not known

Identity & terminology: minority ethnic, multi-cultural, international?

There was broad diversity within the participants on the question of identity, and many people felt they had multiple identities. For those who moved to NI from elsewhere as adults, the identity of countries of origin was paramount, this could also be a regional identity as with Latin Americans. For others, such as members of the Bahá'í faith, religious identity was more important than national or ethnic factors. Northern Irish people whose parents or grandparents had been from elsewhere felt Northern Irish first and foremost. The extent of this diversity meant it had been very difficult to choose a name for the group that encompassed everybody's identity. Some were happy to use the term minority ethnic or ethnic minority, others felt terms such as multi-cultural were more encompassing.

The incorrect term 'ethnic communities' is often used informally. It is important to stress that 100% of people come from 'ethnic communities' some from minority ethnic backgrounds and others from majority ethnic communities (such as the Northern Irish/Irish 'Protestant' /'Catholic' communities). This study will follow current trends and generally use the term black and minority ethnic (BME) to encompass the identities discussed above.

Experiences of Racism

Discussing experiences of racism most said they had not been victims of open racism. Many felt NI was much less racist than other places they had lived such as GB or the USA where minority ethnic communities had had to polarise themselves into separate areas with separate services. This was not their experience in NI where they felt very welcome. Others felt NI could be equally prejudiced as everywhere else; the difference was it was more hidden or invisible here. A number of people recalled children being bullied on racial grounds, one woman had been called a 'Nigger Fenian' in her area and others had been occasional victims of verbal abuse. In general it was felt that experiences were due more to 'ignorance' than hostility. Some felt that they were stared at in the street for being a different colour. Others who did not have English as a first language felt they were often treated with impatience or as if they were stupid, or laughed at. When they spoke their first language with others in the street this was often seen as rude, despite the fact this is normal between native speakers of English speakers abroad. Some felt the current misinformed and inaccurate press coverage over asylum seekers is having a negative effect on treatment and there was a need for accurate information. Different cultural perceptions on issues such as breastfeeding were also discussed; in mixed marriages cultural differences had sometimes caused considerable tension. The minority ethnic partner was often left isolated in such circumstances.

General useful Reading:

Connolly, P. & Keenan, M (2000) Racial Attitudes and Prejudice in Northern Ireland Belfast: NISRA

Connolly, P. & Keenan, M (2000) Opportunities for All: Minority Ethnic People's Experiences of Education, Training and Employment in Northern Ireland. Belfast: NISRA

Connolly, P. & Keenan, M (2001) The Hidden Truth: Racist Harassment in Northern Ireland, Belfast: NISRA

Hainsworth, P. (ed.) (1998) Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland. London: Pluto Press

Mann-Kler, D. (1997) Out of the Shadows: An Action Research Report into Families, Racism and Exclusion in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Barnardo's et al

Rolston, B. and Shannon, M. (2002) Encounters: How Racism Came to Ireland. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications

Childcare

The absence of childcare facilities in the area was felt to be a major barrier to both employment and further education. This has an impact on all parents but has an increased impact on minority ethnic parents who are less likely to have family in the immediate area and a smaller support network. There are not enough crèches in the local area. Those that do exist are private and expensive. It was felt that many private individuals were frightened of litigation and therefore unwilling to childmind informally. It was felt there was also a lack of information on childcare opportunities or benefits, such as Working Families Tax Credit. In addition it was felt that there was a lack of leisure services and social areas for children and young people meaning they had to hang around the streets.

Transport

The lack of available and affordable public transport was also felt to be a major barrier to both employment and further education opportunities. Whilst this again affects the entire population it is likely to have an increased effect on first generation ethnic minorities who are less likely to have access to a car or recognised driving licence. Many had to rely on private taxis for transport, which if shared worked out less expensive.

This was exasperated for some by experiences with the driving test. There had been inconsistent experiences with language. Some candidates had been allowed to bring an interpreter others had not, and had not been allowed a dictionary in the theory test. The test was also felt to be very expensive.

The Immigration Service (British Home Office)

Unlike the other public services mentioned in this report power over the immigration service is not devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, but remains an 'excepted matter' in the hands of Westminster. Also, unlike the other services, immigration is not yet designated under Section 75 (see p2). There were a number of negative experiences with the service including:

Administrative disaster: many had experienced delays in the processing of documents. The worst case was when immigration lost the passport of one woman and she had to return to her country of origin for a replacement at her own expense. Concern was also expressed at the increasing use of the private sector to enforce immigration rules. Airline and security staff would often challenge passengers on whether they had the correct visa or not, often without having a good grasp of the laws. The service was felt to be inaccessible with many documents having to be posted to Croydon and the service often not answering its phones.

Use of powers: a number of people were known to have suffered detention by the immigration service. One woman had been detained for eight hours at a port and a number people knew others who had been held in Maghaberry high security prison. It must be stressed that those detained had not (nor were accused of) committing crimes, but were held for alleged breaches of immigration rules. In addition those returning to NI from abroad via Heathrow were often interrogated by immigration officials for so long that they missed the last connecting flight to Belfast and had to stay in London at their own expense. Whilst such actions may well be within the law, the perception was that the immigration service has too much power for a democracy. A number of people had also had the length of time they had requested on their visas cut short by immigration on arrival at the airport, often with no reason given or any clear right to complain.

Rigidity of Immigration rules: Many of the community were in mixed marriages following relationships during study or work in NI or abroad. This often mean changes in visa status or extensions which caused problems as people are forced to take long-term decisions on their future by approaching deadlines. The tying of marriage visas to staying with a partner was felt to present difficulties in cases of domestic violence.

Health and Social Services

First and foremost it was emphatically stated that the existence of free health and social services was much valued. There was praise for the services and staff. In regards to the health services many experienced the long waiting lists felt by all patients, some also knew practitioners in the service and felt they were under pressure. No one in the focus group had had experiences with the Social Services. There was a consensus that the approach to health should be holistic, in relation to diet and overall well being. Many areas from mental health to eligibility for services were discussed. The following equality issues were raised.

Culturally sensitive practice and structure:

It was felt that health systems differ and there was a need for information on both accessing services and services available. For example, some were unaware they could request a female practitioner wherever possible, an issue that was important to many; others, particularly migrant workers, did not have medical cards nor had registered with GPs. Cultural differences in care and practice were also discussed. Examples include a feeling there was an over reliance on antibiotics compared to other treatments and families staying permanently at the bedside of a patient being the norm for many, but discouraged in NI.

Language barrier:

For many of the community who are native speakers or otherwise fluent in English the language barrier was irrelevant and other issues were felt to be much more important. For those not fluent in English however the language barrier was the major issue and barrier to services. Interpreters had rarely been provided leading to confusion and misunderstandings.

Eligibility:

Many in the community had family overseas who would visit them, yet not be eligible for free healthcare during the visit. The cost of using the health service, particularly as you would first need to see a GP then other practitioners was high, to an extent that some had preferred to cut visits and return to countries of origin for treatment. Relatives in NI being used to free NHS care are often unaware that relatives can be charged until the situation arises.

Useful Resource: The resource *First Steps in Accessing the Health and Social Care Services in NI* was produced by South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust (SEBT) and MCRC as a leaflet, audio tape and video in nine languages. It outlines the steps for GP registration, obtaining medical cards and accessing other areas of the health and social care services. In addition many multilingual leaflets can be obtained from the publications section of the Department of Health in London website at: www.doh.gov.uk

Useful reading:

Northern Health & Social Services Board (1995) *First Steps: A Survey of the Health and Social Care Needs of the Chinese Population in the Northern Board Area Ballymena*: NHSSB

In addition to the above local report a considerable number of reports and conference reports have been produced specifically on health and social care issues. These include the 'Health for Everyone' conference report produced by the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and SEBT and the 'Racial Equality in Health: Good Practice Guide (draft)' produced by DHSSPS and the Equality Commission.

Social Security:

Many felt at a disadvantage due to language / jargon barriers and the feeling that people born in NI knew how to work the system whilst others did not. There had also been difficulties in obtaining National Insurance Numbers.

Education

As with health and social services there was much praise of the free schooling system. From questionnaire data on schooling in NI or in countries of origin all of the respondents registered they had received a primary level education and the vast majority secondary level education. A significant minority had received further education and a small number had been to university. Considerable interest was shown in education and the following issues were extensively discussed:

The II+ Exam

A participant's son was taking the test on the following Friday. There was a consensus that the test was unfair and should go.

Bullying "Growing up a different colour here I had to grow second skin"

The prevalence of racial bullying was perceived to be high, it was felt that racial bullying was increasing physical as well as verbal. The problem was felt to be largely invisible. A number of incidences were recalled including severe bullying a child had received from other pupils travelling to school by bus. The pupil had been left psychologically scarred by the incident, and had been too frightened to tell her parents. Eventually a school councillor was told and intervened, but the victim had had to travel by car to school. One incident was recalled of a child being victimised by a teacher for being too slow at IT a new subject, this incidence was only resolved with parental intervention.

Cultural Awareness

It was felt schools should drop a Christian ethos to be more accommodating to pupils from different backgrounds. This was already happening in some schools. It was felt existing pilot schemes involving the group where members gave presentations in schools and the awareness raising at the group's first international night had had a positive effect. Further material resources were needed to continue this.

Adult / Further Education Classes

English as a Second Language (ESOL): Due to small numbers needing classes there was considerable difficulty in the availability of ESOL classes in the area. Most further education outlets in the area did not offer ESOL classes, of those that did there was not always sufficient numbers for the continuation of the class. When classes did proceed the learning environment was difficult for both teachers and pupils due to the different levels of proficiency of the group. The situation was felt to be improving, as 20 years ago when other group members had arrived there were no classes at all. The lack of classes was felt to be a major barrier to employment and other higher education opportunities. Some had to get private classes or go to Belfast for classes, others had been unable to do this due to reasons of cost, childcare and transport. Suggestions were made for outreach English teachers being employed.

Recent useful reading:

Leong, F C (2002) *ESOL: Interpreting the Way Forward Provision* (Belfast: DEL/EGSA)

Hansson, U; Morgan, V, and Dunn, S (pending 2002) *Experiences and Expectations of English Language Support in Educational Settings* (working title)

Equality Commission for NI (2001), *'Racial Equality in Education. A Good Practice Guide'* (Belfast: Equality Commission).

Equality Commission for NI and Department for Education (2002), *'Racial Equality in Education. Conference Report'* (Belfast: Equality Commission).

Housing: There was only a brief discussion on housing. All focus group participants lived in private houses. There was concern about government policy of selling off social housing, as this would reduce stocks.

Bilingualism: Confusion over benefits

A major issue raised by the participants were widespread misconceptions of the benefits of bilingualism. There was a general perception in the broader society that bringing a child up in more than one language would 'confuse' them or place them at a disadvantage. The attitudes came largely from family members in mixed and other marriages but also came from practitioners such as crèche staff, health visitors, and teachers. Parents were often urged to 'only speak English' to their children. There were also cases of bilingualism being mistaken as a speech problem with referrals to therapists. It was felt that that bilingualism needed to be valued and to be encouraged and supported by the system.

Information on Bilingualism*

Studies have demonstrated that children brought up with more than one language considerably benefit from this. English as an additional language pupils, should therefore be considered an advantage in the classroom rather than a problem. The evidence shows that such children will make greater progress in English if they know their mother tongue is valued and it is recognised that their experience of language is likely to be greater than of their monolingual peers (NCC, 1989).

It is also important that bilingual pupils mother tongue is maintained and developed. First language development forms a solid foundation upon which to develop proficiency in English. Proficiency in two or more languages may facilitate divergent thinking and listening skills. When a pupil is able to maintain and develop the ability to use his/her mother tongue improved general motivation and greater self-esteem will take place.

Bilingualism is not a learning difficulty. Where there is doubt about the educational progress of a pupil, factors, which may be causing difficulty for a bilingual pupil, should be investigated before assumptions are made. 'Lack of competence in the language used in schools must not be equated with, or allowed to mask learning difficulties. The pupil's needs should be considered in the context of his/her home language, culture and community' (DENI, 1998).

In the long term, there are greater vocational opportunities open to a pupil with knowledge of more than one language. Pupils learning English as an Additional Language bring with them a broad knowledge cultural, practical, and intellectual which can facilitate learning in the difficult areas of the Curriculum (SCAA, 96:12).

There should be awareness by all that focus on mother tongue is a valuable channel to support teaching and is NOT a hindrance. Teachers should not advocate the use of English only either at school or at home (Hall, 1995). In short bilingualism should be encouraged in all pupils.

*Many thanks to Susan Good of the South Eastern Education and Library Board for preparing the above information. Bibliography are as follows:

DENI (1998) Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs in Northern Ireland (Belfast: DENI)

Hall, Deryn (1995) Assessing the Needs of Bilingual Pupils Living in Two Languages (London: David Fulton)

National Curriculum (1989) English for Ages 5-16 (London: Department of Education & Science/Welsh Office)

SEELB (1994) Board Policy and Support for All EAL Pupils (SEELB)

School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1996) Teaching and Learning English as an Additional Language (SCAA)

Employment:

From the questionnaire data there were indications that the vast majority of working age respondents were economically active. Most were in jobs with irregular hours or night and weekend work. In addition, of the first generation who had worked in professions in their countries of origin considerably fewer did so in NI. Barriers faced by settled minority ethnic communities and migrant workers were discussed.

Settled minority ethnic communities:

There were strong indications of additional barriers to employment for rural ethnic minorities. The lack of childcare provision (coupled with inflexible work arrangements) and public transport outlined earlier were considered to be major barriers.

Language issues

Issues around language were considered very important. For those without English the language barrier coupled with the scarcity of ESOL provision meant understandably there were many jobs they were unable to undertake. However, those from other linguistic backgrounds who had learned good English still saw language as a crucial issue as there was a general feeling that their skills were often undervalued. This was at times due to prejudiced perceptions, a subtle form of racism, that if you were not a native English speaker you were sometimes looked on as if you were 'stupid'. The largely monolingual culture of many people in NI was felt to be a determinant factor in this.

Monitoring forms

An additional issue was the process of application and monitoring in NI due to fair employment legislation. For first generation migrants the process was often confusing due to differing norms, it was at times felt that information was being requested in order to discriminate. The provision of information on the role of monitoring in combating discrimination could alleviate this.

Qualifications gained overseas

A further issue was for those with qualifications from overseas. Around half of first generation members of the group who had been professionals in their countries of origin were not working in these professions in NI, this included a qualified nursery teacher and a legal secretary now undertaking irregular cleaning work. Qualification non-recognition, or non-awareness of mechanisms by employers were seen as a major factor. The existence of comparability databases such as the database held by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Belfast was not always known.

Migrant Workers:

African migrant workers made up around ¼ of the staff in a small local factory. The workers were both very hard working employees, (putting in very long hours) and members of the business community at the factory. They would travel to their countries of origin around twice yearly to arrange sales of the factory's produce. This provided the bulk of the factory's exports keeping the factory afloat and providing a large boost to the local economy. There were no links between the migrant workers and the local business community, which they would welcome.

There are many migrant workers in professions as distinct as nursing, software engineering, agribusiness and textiles in NI. Migrant workers are often in a vulnerable position with employers, with the threat, or perceived threat of permits being curtailed for even raising legitimate concerns with employers.

Summary of key issues raised:

Childcare Provision: There is a possible adverse impact on BME groups in relation to the scarcity of available childcare. The lack of childcare and of accessible information on childcare opportunities and benefits is a major barrier to both employment and further education.

Transport: The lack of public transport has a possible adverse impact on BME groups, and is a barrier to employment and further education; there is confusion and misinformation regarding the right to use an interpreter/dictionaries within a driving test.

Health and Social Services

- Cultural misunderstandings within a health and social service environment can lead to a breakdown in communication and trust. Methods to tackle this include anti-racism and cultural awareness training for staff and provision of bilingual advocates.
- There is a need for targeted information provision in a broad range of minority ethnic languages and accessible formats. This includes information on structures and eligibility. Existing and new resources need to be distributed imaginatively for example, for migrant workers employers or shop stewards are good distribution points.
- The mainstream health service currently does not broadly cater for 'complimentary' and other therapies that reflect the different models of health care required by diverse service users.
- There is a need for the provision of trained professional interpreters in numerous minority ethnic languages in all parts of NI. Current initiatives in this area are welcome.

Immigration

- The Immigration Service is not under the same obligations to promote equality and hence publicly engage as other public bodies in NI as it is not yet designated under Section 75 of the NI Act. The lack of transparency and accountability is a concern that can be addressed by designation. Adequate resourcing is also needed for the service.
- Current immigration policies seem to be based more on placating the demands of racist anti-immigration groups rather than on respecting individual human rights.

Social Security

- Mainstream community advice services can play a role in increasing awareness of entitlements.
- There have been problems obtaining National Insurance numbers. (Moves to streamline the NI applications process are welcome.)

Employment (see also ESOL, Childcare and transport)

- Monitoring forms and the function they can play in tackling discrimination can be misinterpreted without explanatory information.
- There have been difficulties in having qualifications gained overseas recognised.
- The contribution of migrant workers to the economy is often undervalued.
- Migrant workers can be vulnerable to employment rights abuses.

Education

- Experiences and opinions of the II+ are highly negative.
- Racial bullying in schools is a serious concern.
- The mono-cultural or Christian ethos of some schools will not create an environment that respects and welcomes the varied culture and religious backgrounds within their communities. The current system is clearly discriminatory as whilst 'Christian' parents can choose schools with a Protestant or Catholic ethos, this option is not open to parents from minority faiths. As broadening this to all faiths would lead to de facto segregation within schools and be detrimental to integration and the rights of children, a preferential alternative is schools adopting a secular ethos, with religious education classes teaching about all religions.
- There is a current lack of accessible ESOL classes in rural areas.



Local Contacts:

The Mid-Ulster International Group

Paul Bedi; 1 Thornhill Avenue; Magherafelt; BT45 5JA; pipsint@aol.com

Ballymena Community Forum

Eliëen Chan-Hu; Ethnic Minorities Co-ordinator; Ballymena Community Forum; Glendun Drive; Doury Road; Ballymena; Bt43 6SR; 028 25651032

Ballymena Minority Ethnic Community Development Project

Mouloud Alouane; Ballymena Project c/o Multi-Cultural Resource Centre; 9 Lower Crescent; Belfast; BT71NR; 028 90244639 (The Sudanese community is currently organising a community group in Ballymena which can be contacted through this project.)

Mid-Ulster Chinese group

David Chan; Assistant Chairperson; 98 Moneymore Road; Cookstown; BT80 9AA

Antrim Chinese community group

John Chan; 22 Parkgate Road; Parkgate; BT39 ODF

We gratefully acknowledge funding from:

- The Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust
- The Eastern Health and Social Services Board
- The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety