

DIVERSITY CONFERENCE
Thursday 29th September 2005
Millennium Forum, Derry/Londonderry

Introduction

Helen Lewis, Co-ordinator of INCORE's Local International Learning Project opened the conference by extending a warm welcome to all attendees. She pointed out that this event was scheduled in recognition of the fact that Northern Ireland is composed of more than two communities and that we need to reach out and work with them so that they are fully included in society. Furthermore, as peace takes hold in Northern Ireland, it accelerates the pace at which Northern Ireland is becoming a more diverse and multicultural place. With these points in mind, this Diversity Conference focused particularly on minority ethnic communities in Northern Ireland and some of the issues that currently affect them.

Panel Discussion: Migrant Workers
Chaired by Gillian Robinson, Director, INCORE

Dr. Katie Radford, Institute for Conflict Research (ICR)

Dr. Radford introduced the ICR as a participatory, action-orientated research centre. She explained that Northern Ireland, contrary to popular belief, has had a longstanding migrant population. For example, the 2001 census identified 14,279 ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland and 31,500 National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) have been issued since April 2003. This represents approximately 2% of the population.

Dr. Radford explained that there is a strong demand for labour in Northern Ireland. One in 30 UK immigrants comes to Northern Ireland to find work. Recently, A8 nationals (those from the Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004 and who have a right to travel, live and work in the UK) have been filling the employment void in Northern Ireland, working predominantly in the food processing, manufacturing and construction industries. However, they are required to register on the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS), which involves a one-off cost of £50.00. This cost is due to rise on 01/10/05 to £70.00. Between May 2004 and June 2005 7,755 A8 migrants have registered on the WRS.

The long-term impact of this scheme is that it only maps the inward flow of migrant workers. Therefore, the government has little knowledge of how long these migrants stay in the country and consequently cannot accurately gauge their service needs.

Dr. Radford then highlighted several issues of concern for migrant workers: (1) recruitment processes and employment issues such as membership in Unions and overtime, (2) health and medical issues such as dealing with women who have experienced female genital mutilation and whether migrants should be subject to mandatory screening or not, and (3) anti-discrimination training which should be provided across the board.

Dr. Radford concluded by promoting the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.

Katrina Kordula, Polish Welfare Association

Katrina introduced the Polish Welfare Association as an organisation that offers a 24-hour answer service to link members of the Polish community with the emergency services. They also provide advice and assistance on issues such as employment, housing, and access to benefits and services.

She identified three main areas of improvement in the provision of services to the Polish community in Northern Ireland.

- (1) Katrina explained that statutory agencies are under obligation to provide interpretation services when needed. However, interpreters are charging up to £60 per hour for this service! Katrina suggested increased regulation and better training for interpreters in providing this service. She also motioned for the vetting of interpreters.
- (2) Katrina explained to the group the position migrant workers face in relation to housing. She proposed the provision of emergency housing benefit until migrant workers are able to find their feet on the employment ladder. Furthermore, with increasing numbers of migrant workers living in privately rented accommodation, landlords are increasingly exploiting their situations and unnecessarily charging obscene prices for rent - driving the rental market and house prices in general sky high.
- (3) It is inevitable that children migrating to Northern Ireland from abroad will suffer in the classroom. More often than not, they lack the English language skills necessary to successfully complete their education. The Polish Community Group is currently in the process of setting up a Saturday school, which aims to help children adapt to a new school environment and to develop English language skills.

Daniel Holder, ANIMATE

ANIMATE is an organisation with a strategic role in that it aims to impact policymakers.

In the context of migration, Daniel began by discussing the terminology. In his view, a migrant worker is a technical term for someone who migrates for the primary reason of gaining employment.

So why are migrant workers coming to Northern Ireland?

Despite the widespread belief that migrant workers come and 'take our jobs', Northern Ireland has huge skills and labour shortages. It is in these spaces that migrant workers tend to be concentrated. The truth of the matter, according to Daniel, is that these migrant workers safeguard and create jobs in Northern Ireland and without them, factories and businesses would be forced to close.

He identified 3 quality issues in relation to migrant workers that need to be addressed:

- (1) The need to build infrastructures that meet the needs of all people, including migrant workers, to complement the information services that we currently have in place.
- (2) The need to ensure access to basic civil rights. Currently, public service restrictions prevent migrant workers from integrating into society.
- (3) Finally, the biggest problem that underpins all the others is negative attitudes, which are often informed by the untruths and stereotypes mentioned above, and can manifest themselves in racist attacks.

Question and Answer

- It was suggested that there may be a vested interest in society that permits racial attacks rather than addressing the particular problems and concerns that fuel such attacks.
- The panel was questioned about the Workers Registration Scheme. They agreed that other indicators such as National Insurance Numbers give an idea of what and how many services need to be provided. But for the most part, the government is too focused on quantitative figures. These figures should be complemented by qualitative stories and details.
- A participant highlighted the problems they encountered in dealing with migrant workers on a cross border basis and the need to reconcile the different legislations. Daniel explained that the Home Office is currently working on a consultation; 'Monitoring Migration' in order to devise evidence based legislation. Daniel encouraged the attendees to contribute before the closing date, 8 November 2005. He also highlighted the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) cross-border project, Synergy; a three year programme focusing on building an intercultural focus into service provision in the border region and Northern Ireland.
- The panel was asked about research into child prostitution and the sex trade industry. To date, no work or research has been carried out in this area.

Steve Wessler, Executive Director of the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence, University of Southern Maine.

Steve began his presentation by showing the audience an illustration drawn by a 12-year-old schoolboy of a KKK member with a 'black' man hanging from a noose in the background. He then proceeded to show the group a transcript of a message left on the answer machine of a young 'black' man in a predominantly 'white' university in the States. The degree of hate portrayed by the image drawn by the 12-year-old and the language used in the telephone message was both chilling and shocking.

Steve believes that violence, or the threat of it, is not the beginning of a process, but actually the end of a process of escalation. The routine use of stereotypes escalates because no one challenges it, thereby creating the impression that use of these stereotypes is acceptable.

In Steve's experience in the US, most hate crimes are carried out by those that fall into a narrow profile; young (12-18 year old), white males. Therefore, there is a real need to focus on schools when trying to combat racism.

Steve got the group to read out various statements and comments written by school children in both the US and Derry/Londonderry. The group were shocked at the degree of prejudice, hate and injustice portrayed.

So where do school children learn these attitudes and stereotypes? Steve suggested from:

- Home
- Media and popular culture
- Peers. This source is particularly critical in terms of preventing racism.

Steve explained that the recent rise in racism in the US is directly related to 9/11 and to the Bush administration that has racialised terrorism and anti-immigration policy. This situation is probably similar to that in the UK.

Steve explained two approaches to prevention of racism:

- (1) By turning the bystander into an activist - beginning with the teachers and filtering this through to the students.
- (2) Encouraging students to talk about their stereotypes and to understand that these are often based on false facts and myths. Contact and discussion can facilitate understanding and give students a forum in which they can voice their stories and discover, first hand, the negative impact of stereotypes. Reaching across divides can foster positive and real change.

Steve was asked about the most appropriate age to talk to children about racist issues?

Steve believes that children as young as 4 years old are able to understand the consequences of their actions if you explain to them in their own language that what they have said or did is wrong and why.

Panel Discussion: Attitudes / Prejudice

Chaired by Dr. Lis Porter, Research Director, INCORE

Paula Devine / Dirk Schubotz, ARK

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2002 questioned 1800 adults aged 18 and over to gauge the level of attitudes and prejudices in Northern Ireland. Some of the results pertaining to migrants are detailed below:

- In order to get an idea of the level of racial and ethnic difference in Northern Ireland, the respondents were asked to which group they belonged to from a list. 'White' constituted the majority of respondents. The low numbers in other groups such as 'Chinese' and 'Irish Traveller' meant that analysis on this aspect was limited.

- There was an overwhelming consensus (70%) that ‘it would be better for society if groups adapt and blend into the larger society.’
- However, on a more positive front, 59% believe ‘immigrants make Northern Ireland open to new ideas and cultures.’
- Negatively, 48% believe ‘immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in Northern Ireland.’

The survey showed a difference of opinions between gender, age and religion. Furthermore, the social and demographic nature of Northern Ireland has changed since 2002. The 2005 survey is due to go into the field next month.

Dirk identified some of the problems they faced when collating data on attitudes and prejudices in such a large survey:

- Do respondents understand what they are being asked?
- Do the questions reflect the complexity of society?
- Do the respondents answer truthfully or do they answer what they think they should answer?

These problems arose when defining the ‘ethnic identity’ categories for the survey. Dirk noted that he was aware that the categories used in their 2002 survey do not reflect ethnicities accurately. For example, does the category of ‘Chinese’ include Mandarins and Cantonese? The best way to counter this is to offer a self-ascribing, ‘open’ question, which provides an understanding of what respondents themselves think their ethnicity is.

G. Simmel: The Stranger (1908)

“The stranger, like the poor and like sundry "inner enemies," is an element of the group itself. His position as a full-fledged member involves both being outside it and confronting it. (...) In the case of the person who is a stranger to the country, the city, the race, etc., however, this non-common element is once more nothing individual, but merely the strangeness of origin, which is or could be common to many strangers. For this reason, strangers are not really conceived as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type: the element of distance is no less general in regard to them than the element of nearness.”

Winnie O’Grady, Derry Travellers Support Group

Having worked with the Travelling community for more than 20 years, Winnie gave a few examples of their experiences of discrimination – including Travellers being asked to leave a pub for no reason and a young girl leaving her first job in a chemist because of people’s attitudes towards her - demonstrated in small things like them always counting their change in front of her. Winnie expressed her difficulty in imagining the impact of this on the self-esteem and confidence of members of the Travelling community who are

having to deal with this on a daily basis. Such negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviour on a daily basis leads to oppression.

Mark Donahue, An Munia Tober

Mark explained that racism against travellers is the most ingrained and respected form of racism in Northern Ireland. He offered some statistical evidence from a 2002 survey carried out by Connolly and Keenan:

- 40% of those surveyed said that nomadism was not a valid way of life and should not be resourced by the government.
- 57% of respondents would not be willing to accept Travellers as residents in their local area.
- 66% of respondents were not willing to accept a colleague at work who is a Traveller.
- 77% of those surveyed would not accept a Traveller as a member of their family.

He noted that the media has played a significant role in stigmatising travellers and sustaining these attitudes. He gave a notable example:

Mary Ellen Synon, Sunday Independent, January 28 1996.

On Traveller Life;

“It is a life of appetite ungoverned by intellect. It is a life which marauds over private property and disregards public laws. It is a life of money without production, land without cost, damage without compensation, assault without arrest, theft without production, and murder with remorse. It is a life worse than the life of beasts, for beasts at least are guided by wholesome instinct. Traveller life is without the ennobling intellect of man or the steady instinct of animals.

This tinker ‘culture’ is without achievement, discipline, reason or intellectual ambition. It is a morass. And one of the surprising things about it is that not every individual bred in this swamp turns out bad. Some individuals among the tinkers find the will not to become evil.”

Although this article was written almost ten years ago, the same journalist wrote in the wake of the recent slaughter of John Ward in Mayo how she had asked a lawyer friend what he thought the farmer who murdered him in cold blood and was charged with manslaughter (not murder) should ‘get’. Her friend replied, ‘a statue.’ John Ward was unarmed and had done nothing to provoke the assault, which left a father of eleven dead. The farmer in his own words said, ‘he was like a stone or a badger, you couldn’t kill him....’

Question and Answer

Lis Porter thanked the panel for sharing their stories and began the Q&A session by asking why are we so afraid of difference?

- Steve was asked to explain the link between prejudices and racist attacks, as it is not simply a linear process. If racist prejudices are so widespread, then why do more people not carry out racist attacks? Steve acknowledged that not all those who make racist comments and remarks follow along the trajectory to violence. However, it is this trajectory that those who do turn to violence go along. He also noted that the emotional and physiological impact of racist remarks and comments should not be ignored. An audience member added that where you have a racist environment, you are empowering potential ‘racists’ to move along the trajectory to violence.
- Steve was asked whether his work on Hate Prevention has had an impact on public policy in the US? At the institutional level, Steve has been working closely with police officers and training them to prosecute hate crimes more effectively. He has also succeeded in influencing schools to become more focused and aware of the need to combat hate crimes. On an individual level, Steve believes that his programmes offer more places to go and comfort for those affected by hate crimes.
- The group acknowledged the need for educational reform to include social and emotional learning in the curriculum. Teachers also need to be taught specific skills to be able to intervene in situations where the potential for bullying and hate crimes is present.

Panel Discussion: Harassment / Hate Crime Chaired by Audrey Guichon, INCORE

**Inspector Kerr, Community Safety Coordinator, Foyle District Command, PSNI/
Tim Cooke, Schools Liaison Officer, PSNI**

Racial and hate crimes are serious issues to be addressed by the PSNI in the coming years. To this end, the PSNI have empowered local district commands to develop strategies to suit the areas in which they work.

For example, the Foyle District Command formed a working group with the Rainbow Project in response to the high levels of homophobic attacks in the city. They aim to reduce levels of homophobic attacks, to tackle domestic violence among same sex couples and to address the high levels of suicide among the homosexual population. They are looking to replicate this partnership with ethnic minority groups in recognition of the different traditions and cultures that are at play in the city.

They have identified two immediate issues that need to be addressed:

- (1) Police need to be trained to deal with ethnic minorities

- (2) They need to be able to provide adequate interpretation services (although vetting is not an issue as a police officer will always be present at an interview).

Tim Cooke gave a brief overview of the citizenship program that they offer in schools in an attempt to promote issues of diversity and difference.

Chris Gilligan, University of Ulster

Chris sparked a controversial debate after detailing his opposition in principle to hate crime legislation for three reasons:

- (1) Hate crime legislation is authoritarian – most hate crimes can be prosecuted under already existing laws. The category of ‘hate crimes’ permits laws to be enacted on the basis of the perceived intent of the person carrying out the crime.
- (2) Hate crime legislation undermines equality law – it suggests that we should have different laws for ethnic minorities.
- (3) Hate crime legislation obscures the processes which lead to racist attacks – we should be focusing on the social structures in society rather than attitudes and behaviours. For example, migrant workers do not receive the same benefits in society as the rest of the population. Therefore we should be looking at the structures that prevent them from participating as full members in Northern Ireland society. Another example, most hate crimes are carried out by members of the Protestant community. This is not because Protestants are more prejudiced than Catholics but rather migrants are more likely to get housing in Protestant estates where the price of housing is much cheaper. It is not because of attitudes that migrants are concentrated in Protestant working class areas.

Bobby Rao, Strabane Minority Ethnic Association

Bobby explained that his experience as a professional cricketer gave him the opportunity to travel and experience different cultures and traditions. He spoke of his early experiences in Northern Ireland and the discrimination he faced when trying to teach cricket in the local community. Locals seemed to be afraid and kept him and his family at arms length.

Two years ago he founded the Strabane Community Centre in order to:

- Reduce the sense of isolation among the minority ethnic community
- To organise educational, social and sporting activities for people in these communities
- To host cultural programmes and ethnic minority talk forums for these communities to voice their fears and concerns
- Produce a community magazine to raise awareness among the wider community of the importance of cultural diversity.

Question and Answer

- Chris Gilligan was asked to clarify his argument – is there not a need for a hate crime category? Assault carried out with a racial intent is very different to assault carried out on its own. Chris believes that hate crime legislation encourages us to look at crimes through a racial lens. A person can receive a harsher sentence because of the perceived thought (racial element / motive) behind the crime and not necessarily for the crime itself.
- In response, Steve Wessler justified hate crime legislation on the following basis:
 - (1) It is the *conduct* of the crimes that are being prosecuted.
 - (2) Different levels of intent demand different levels of punishment.
 - (3) In his experience, hate crimes are colour blind.

A hate crime is an attack on an entire community. The legislation to combat such attacks is effective because it represents a community response against this sort of behaviour and a consensus that they will not stand for it.

The argument that hate crime laws racialise society is an easy argument to make if you are from the majority group. Hate crime laws recognise what members of ethnic minorities have to deal with on a daily basis.

- Chris was asked to clarify his position regarding the structures that seemly breed racism. Chris explained with reference to the majority of racist attacks occurring in Protestant areas. This is not due to the fact that Protestants are more ‘racist’, but rather that more ethnic minorities live in Protestant areas to take advantage of cheaper housing prices.
- Inspector Kerr pointed to the importance of perception in the police force. For example, he revealed that out of 11 reported racist attacks in Derry City over the last six months; he, personally, would only classify 5 of these as racist incidents. The PSNI therefore need to focus their training needs to have consensus among the ranks of what should be recorded or not and why.
- Bobby believes that racism has to be dealt with at the grass roots level. This involves educating people about difference to encourage understanding and tolerance.

Ken Fraser, OFM/DFM: Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland

Ken expressed his thanks to INCORE for holding a conference that brought people together to discuss and debate ways of practically tackling racism at both the institutional and more importantly, the individual level.

He noted that the number of racist attacks in Northern Ireland has increased from a total of 453 in 2003/04 to 813 in 2004/05. He quoted Peter Hain in referring to racism as ‘one of the evils above all other evils.’ But he stressed that in order to address racism in all of

its manifestations, we need to move beyond legislation toward an environment that fosters tolerance; a community where we can all live together.

The Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland published earlier this year represents the government vision for Northern Ireland. After consultation with minority groups, voluntary and statutory agencies and the wider civil society in general, this government strategy tries to cover a wide range of issues that affect ethnic minorities on a daily basis. Despite being a framework document for the future, it also seeks to educate the reader.

The publication sets out six strategic aims that will fuel government action in its pursuit of a shared and equal society:

Elimination of Racial Inequality

To eliminate racism, racial inequality and unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in all aspects of life, including public life, for people of different ethnic backgrounds in Northern Ireland.

Equal Protection

To combat racism and provide effective protection and redress against racism and racist crime.

Equality of Service Provision

To ensure quality of opportunity for minority ethnic people in accessing and benefiting from all public services.

Participation

To increase participation and a sense of ‘belonging’ of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in public, political, economic, social and cultural life.

Dialogue

To promote dialogue between, and mutual understanding of, different faiths and cultural backgrounds, both long standing within Northern Ireland and recent arrivals to these shores, guided by overarching human rights norms.

Capacity Building

To build capacity within minority ethnic communities to develop a vibrant and sustainable minority ethnic sector at both local and regional level and to help minority ethnic people to fulfil the Government’s aim of a shared future for Northern Ireland.

Ken acknowledged that government alone does not have the answers to be able to fulfil the above aims. Rather, they require informed, honest and robust debate (like INCORE’s Diversity Conference) to discover what is needed and to pursue ways forward.

At the regional level, the Racial Equality Unit within OFM/DFM will oversee the implementation of the strategy. Furthermore, the Racial Equality Forum has been set up to draw on the work and experiences of both statutory and community/voluntary agencies and to draw up an action plan to implement the strategy and to monitor and review progress.

At the local level, the Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland commits government to 'developing an enhanced, permanent programme for the promotion of good relations through district council.' All district councils are required to formulate a good relations action plan covering employees and local residents, which will be submitted to OFM/DFM for approval.

Ken stressed that accomplishing this strategy will involve a long process (approximately 5-10years) but that they are optimistic that they can make it work.

Pennyburn Youth Club Presentation

Five young people from Pennyburn Youth Club explained how and why they began their anti-racism campaign in November 2003. They began by designing six posters, five of which they amalgamated into a single poster design that has since won numerous awards. It has also gained widespread political support from President Mary McAleese, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Mark Durkan of the SDLP and Sinn Fein's Gerry Adams.

Their initial campaign has since gathered momentum and recently they have designed an educational awareness pack, which provides a training framework for those working to promote diversity and tolerance.

Conclusion

Helen Lewis thanked the young people for presenting their poster campaign. She also thanked all the speakers who invoked debate and discussion through their presentations and all the attendees who participated. She hoped that the conference was useful in generating new ideas and creative ways forward in order to bring diversity issues to the fore in a tolerant and inclusive Northern Ireland society.