

# A Background to Migration



*Migration is the movement of people either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people and economic migrants.*

*Source: International Organization for Migration*

Migration has been a part of human history since the beginning of humankind. In all periods, people have left their homelands for

a variety of reasons. Many migrants who arrive in Britain and Ireland do so after difficult journeys from their countries of origin. Some have fled from hunger, war and persecution; some have been driven away by environmental changes or trafficked against their will. Others migrate, either temporarily or permanently, in search of greater opportunities or to widen their horizons.

Those who migrate are not a homogeneous group. Generally speaking, a **migrant** can be defined as **a person who has left his/her**



***country of origin or residence and has moved to another country to take up temporary or permanent residence in that country.*** In very broad terms, 'migrant' includes immigrants, emigrants, refugees, people under subsidiary forms of protection, sanctuary seekers (asylum seekers), those seeking other forms of protection, undocumented migrants and repatriates.

Our Christian faith teaches us that the goods of the earth belong to all people. All people should therefore have the right to migrate in order to support themselves and their families if they cannot do so in their own countries. Sovereign nations have a moral responsibility to accommodate this right within the limits of their resources. While many individuals and families are successful in their migration journeys, for many others it is characterized by exploitation, insecurity, injustice and poverty.

What does it mean for us as Christians to welcome the migrant, the newcomer in our midst?

Migrants have contributed to shaping the fabric of almost every society throughout the world. Those who have made Britain and Ireland their home - both settled communities and newly arrived migrants - have enriched our societies through a variety of valuable contributions. In spite of this, we still do not live in a land where strangers are welcomed, where differences are celebrated and where all people are valued. Migrants continue to challenge our ability to live peacefully with one another. The presence of migrants

forces us to become more aware of our own social and cultural prejudices and preconceptions.

How best can we listen to the issues and concerns, as well as the hopes and dreams, which migrants bring with them?

The Church puts the sacredness of human life at the forefront of the migration debate. As Christians, the dignity and equality of all human beings is fundamental to our belief. We are all created in the image of God and are loved by God as part of one human family. The Scriptures challenge our preconceptions about each other and call upon us to speak out about injustice where we find it. Jesus was never afraid to cross social, cultural, geographic and religious boundaries. **Racial Justice Sunday** provides us with an opportunity to work together to create a society where the hatred, which breeds violence and division, is unacceptable and where everyone in our society, including all migrants, are allowed to realize their full potential and their human dignity.

How can a diverse society – and a diverse and multicultural church – share a sense of belonging with migrants?

**Immigrant/Emigrant:** A person who leaves his/her country or region to settle in another. The person leaves as an immigrant and becomes an emigrant once they have settled.

**Migrant worker:** A person admitted to a country for the specific purpose of exercising an economic activity which is remunerated from within that country. The length of stay is usually restricted as is the type of employment that s/he can hold.

**Refugee:** Any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social or political group, is outside of the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to fear, unwilling to return to it.

**Repatriate:** A person who has returned (either voluntarily or forcibly) to his/her place of origin or citizenship.

**Sanctuary seeker (asylum seeker):** A person who files an application for asylum in a country other than his/her own. He/she retains the status of a sanctuary seeker until his/her application is considered and adjudicated.

**Trafficked person:** A person who is illegally recruited, coerced and/or forcibly moved within or across national borders.

**Undocumented migrant:** A person who is not able to validate their residence or work in a country in accordance with the legal rules, including refused asylum seekers and visa overstayers.