

'Illegal' immigrants are people who do not have official permission to live and work in Britain. These could be people who came on student or temporary work visas and have overstayed, or who have made it to Britain without going through the correct procedure. It is estimated that there are between 300,000 and 500,000 such people in the UK today.

## What can the churches do?

By working work together we can create a fairer and more equal society. We are called to combat injustice and offer hospitality and welcome. We have a particular responsibility to care for marginalised and vulnerable people.

Many Christians and church groups already work to support asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Here are some things that you can do:

- Pray for people coming to this country from overseas and those who are trying to make a life here.
- Consider what practical or spiritual support you or your church can give to migrants in your area. There are a number of examples in this leaflet.
- Take action to change public opinion and the political climate. Contact your MP, write to your local paper, or organise an event to demonstrate your views.

### Lincoln Baptist Church

A primary school had an extra intake of 30 Polish pupils. The local Baptist church helped to arrange breakfast and after-school clubs, as the kids' parents were often working very long hours. The church hosts three English language classes for parents as well as children, which is supported by members of the congregation.

### The Avenue Methodist Church

Castlefield, High Wycombe

The small Methodist church is situated in an area with a high proportion of Muslims and people of Pakistani origin. There are two mosques on the same street as the church.

The church membership feels it has a crucial mission to share God's love by working to build a sense of shared community, through breaking down fears of cultural and religious differences.

The church runs the Welcome Café, and has become known as a centre where anyone can come together, have a good time, and know that they are safe and respected.

## Keep Informed

[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/migrationmatters](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/migrationmatters)

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A longer report will be available soon which will include more details about these issues, theological and biblical reflection, and information on what the Churches are doing at a national level. If you would like more information visit our website or contact us.



# Migration Matters

## Facts and Fiction

**Do not ill-treat a foreigner; you know how it feels to be a foreigner, because you were foreigners in Egypt.**

Exodus 23:9

Migration matters to us all. Whether we live in multicultural or homogeneous neighbourhoods, migrants make a significant contribution to our economic, political, social and cultural life.

Migration is a complicated and controversial political issue.

This leaflet challenges some of the common myths about migration and suggests ways in which local Churches can respond

**Find out more about the challenges and opportunities for Churches...**

## Migration Myths

There are legitimate concerns about migration, but there are also lots of myths and false assumptions.

### **Myth: The UK is being flooded by migrants**

In the decade 1997-2006 3.3 million people migrated away from the UK and 4.9 million migrated to the UK, producing net inward migration of 1.6 million – an average of 160,000 people per year over the last ten years, just 0.26% of the total UK population of 60.6 million.

### **Myth: Britain takes in more migrants and refugees than anywhere else**

According to the UNHCR, the UK hosted 301,000 refugees at the start of 2007. This is far smaller than Tanzania (485,000), Germany (605,000), USA (844,000) and Pakistan (1,044,000). In 2005 it was France that had the most asylum applications (49,700, compared to the UK's 30,500). In that year migration to the UK was 473,800, lower than Germany (579,300), Spain (682,700) and USA (1,122,400). Some countries, such as South Africa, have received many millions of refugees and economic migrants from central and southern Africa over the past decade.

### **King's Cross Methodist Church**

The Chinese congregation at King's Cross is growing and diverse. It is made up of students, restaurant workers, educated professionals, asylum seekers, and family groups who have been in the UK for many years. There is a Mandarin and a Cantonese service every week. The work of the church is supported by a lay worker.

The church offers a range of support, from English classes to information and advice on access to medical and other services.

### **Myth: Migrants bring crime**

As migration increases the population in particular areas, Chief Constables have requested more resources. This does not mean that migrants increase the level of crime, just that a larger population requires more money for police services. Fears about migration and **crime** are often sensationalised in news reporting. It is wrong to accuse all migrants of bringing crime.

### **Myth: Migrants are taking British jobs**

The number of unemployed people in the UK has fallen over the last ten years. In February 2008 the unemployment rate was 5.2%. 29.4 million people were in work, and in December 2007 there were 31.62 million jobs – a record high. There is no evidence to suggest that migrants are preventing British born people from getting work.

### **Myth: Migrants only come here to get benefits**

Migrants are not automatically entitled to **benefits**. Asylum seekers receive very little support and migrant workers from the EU have to work for two years before being entitled to benefits and welfare. **Housing** is not normally provided to migrants upon arrival in the UK. Asylum seekers have limited access to health services. Most migrants live in private housing.

### **Myth: Britain is too crowded already**

The UK's **population** is growing due to a rising birth rate. Even without immigration, the population is predicted to increase by around ¼ million each year. Some people are concerned that this will put **pressure** on resources, such as public transport, health services or schools. However, other countries, such as Japan, have greater population densities than the UK.

### **Myth: Migration is diluting British culture**

It is impossible to define a single British culture. **British identity** is shaped by migration as much as which part of the country you live in or which newspaper you read - curry and fish and chips; village cricket and the Notting Hill Carnival.

## Definitions

**Economic Migrants** come to the UK to work or study. Citizens from European Union countries have the right to come to Britain to live and work. People from outside the EU have to meet a number of requirements before being granted permission to come to the UK.

**Asylum seekers** have fled persecution or fear in their home country. The UK has an obligation under international law to consider a person's claim for asylum. If the claim is found to be genuine, they are granted refugee status. If their application is turned down, they are termed refused (or 'failed') asylum seekers, and may be deported. Some refused asylum seekers are put into detention centres before being deported.

### **Oakington Detention Centre Chaplaincy**

Supported by the URC

A close-knit multi-faith chaplaincy team works to support detainees, who are living through an incredibly stressful period of their lives. The diverse worship services in the chapel, the mosque and the prayer room are a frequent source of inspiration and joy for detainees

A major dilemma for the chaplains is how to maintain realism, whilst supporting faith and hope in the face of likely removal to an unsafe or hostile country.

This crucial spiritual ministry is further supported by a small faithful band of volunteers who provide good, warm clothing for those who are destitute, and games and books for everyone, while they await the decision on their future.

**Human trafficking** is a criminal activity which involves the moving of people, who may be asylum seekers or illegal immigrants, across borders. Human trafficking exploits the young and the vulnerable, and some trafficked children and women are forced to work in the sex trade.