

**Working Notes Issue 33:
Wanted: An Immigration Policy**

Wanted: An Immigration Policy

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December 1998

Introduction

A couple of years ago the London-based Independent on Sunday published a feature about the attractiveness of Ireland to many retired English couples. It seems that many retired English people have discovered that in their old age they are better off in Ireland than in England. Free travel is a considerable attraction and many of them are entitled to medical cards, which provides them with a better service than they would get from the N.H.S. They have the same entitlement to non-contributory pensions as Irish citizens.

Although the Independent on Sunday is quite widely read in Ireland, there was no outcry about this disclosure, no letters to the paper concerned about the drain on public funds, no television programmes about the threat to Irish culture posed by an influx of English nationals. Many people who read the article were probably quite pleased that the Irish social welfare system was comparing well with the much-vaunted services on the other side of the border.

Around the same time, the Evening Herald published an article suggesting that large numbers of work-shy people from other countries, in Eastern Europe and beyond, were trawling the Internet to see which European country had the best social welfare systems, and were targeting Ireland as a place to seek 'refugee' status. This story triggered an explosion of public concern in Ireland, the setting up of an anti-immigration lobby group, and a general panic about a 'tidal wave' of foreigners descending on our shores.

The contrast between the reaction/lack of reaction to the two pieces would lead one to suspect that there is an underlying racism in our attitude to immigration, and that British people are welcomed here because they are white and English-speaking. It may of course be pointed out that England and Ireland form a common travel area, almost unique in the world, and that this would naturally affect the way Irish people perceive people coming from England, many of whom are returned emigrants.

But a perusal of recent research on prejudice in Ireland by Micheal Mac Greil S.J. (Note 1) would not lead one to such a charitable conclusion. Whereas 94% of people questioned (in 1989) were happy to have an English person living next door to them, the figure dropped to 63% in the case of 'blacks'. When it came to Americans, 92% were happy to have them next door if they were white, but only 59% if they were black. Evidence of racism is there to see on the ground as well, as shown by several incidents of racially motivated attacks, and much anecdotal evidence of abuse and harassment. A recent article in the Guardian entitled 'Fortress Ireland' showed that our racism is even receiving attention overseas (Note 2).

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Working Notes was recently given a copy of a typed notice headed 'BLACKS' put through the letter-box of a black immigrant in Dublin 1, whose windows are broken every other night of the week. Some of it reads:

"Black men are here in Ireland now. The worthless scum of the British Empire - traitors to their own countries in Africa who cowardly joined the British, enslaved suckers who wanted to befriend them rather than fight them. Now they are hated in their adopted slavelands - England and America - and have fled to Ireland to take advantage of our easy-going Irish nature, and live like leeches off our hard-earned freedom and independence... Blacks always keep 5 to 10 snakes in their houses, so they can drink their blood as all blacks believe that to drink snakes blood is healthy. A female snake can have up to one hundred young, three times every year. What if one should escape...?"



The document ends, 'Keep Ireland Green and White'.

Although it is sometimes expressed overtly, most Irish racism is latent and passive. It is particularly manifest in the begrudging way we have responded to those that come here to seek asylum. This type of racism evokes only a minimal response to the real needs of refugees. And, whatever their intention, it can be shown easily enough that current government immigration policies have the effect of favouring white people rather than those of other races.

No Immigrants Wanted?

The official line taken by the Department of Justice in regard to the reception of people from foreign parts is that "Ireland is not an immigrant country". In their view a policy of discouraging immigration is necessary to protect the labour market here, particularly the lower end of the market. They point to the fact that there are still over 200,000 people on the Live Register.

But in fact there are now quite a large number of immigrants into Ireland, of whom only a small proportion are asylum seekers. In the six years from 1992 through 1997 there were 220,000 immigrants (as well as 197,000 emigrants). (Note 3)

In 1997 immigration reached a high point of 44,000, with a net inflow of 15,000. The figures that are available do not specify who these 44,000 people were or why they came. We know only that 20,000 came from the U.K., 8,100 from other countries in the European Union, 6,600 from the U.S.A., and 9,300 from the rest of the world. It can be presumed that many of them were Irish people returning from overseas after some time abroad.

Whatever the origins of these immigrants, it does not now ring true to say that Ireland is not an 'immigrant country'. It may be more accurate to say that Ireland's immigration level is determined not by any policy but by chance. It depends on the numbers of:

- Irish people returning from abroad;
- British people who wish to work or live in Ireland (person born in the U.K. are exempt from Irish Aliens Controls);

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- EU nationals who wish to work or live in Ireland; they are entitled to apply for a residence permit, valid for up to five years, if they can support themselves without State assistance, whether through working or otherwise;
- Non-EU nationals who are able to obtain a work permit because they are doing work which, it is considered, cannot be done by an EU national; these would include people working for multi-nationals, and also people setting up a business here.
- People who come from outside the EU seeking refugee status.



The state does not impose any limit on the number of people arriving under the first three headings. Their numbers are determined by a number of things, such as job prospects in Ireland, lack of job prospects in other countries, the comparative attractiveness of the social welfare system in Ireland and so on.

There has not been any public expression of concern regarding the numbers arriving under these headings. Obviously, returning emigrants would be welcomed at any time, though one might expect it to be commented on if an influx was contributing to economic problems. But no such concern has been expressed.

About 4,500 new applicants from outside the EC are given work permits every year, but many of these will not become long-term residents. About 18,000 student visas are also issued per annum.

The last group in the list above, those seeking refugee status, currently amount to about 4,000 a year (3883 in 1997; 3,471 up to end of August 1998) (Note 4). While this is not an insignificant figure, it amounted to only about 9% of total immigration in 1997. A great deal of the efforts of the Department of Justice to curb immigration is directed at this 9%.

The EU as a whole is host to about 8 million non-EU nationals, equivalent to about 2.3% of the population of the EU. A disproportionately small number of these are in Ireland: the total non-national population of Ireland is about 50,000 (1.4% of the population), but this figure includes EU nationals other than British.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Most of the concern expressed about immigration into Ireland has been directed at asylum-seekers and refugees. Concern has been expressed in different ways, such as phone-ins, letters to the editor, ordinary conversation, and so on. There has rarely been any direct attack on refugee seekers by the newspapers, but the manner of reporting of some newspapers suggests an anti-refugee slant. Emotive language, usually evoking an image of a deluge, is often employed. For instance an article by Tom Brady in the Irish Independent spoke of "a public outcry over the numbers flooding the country", "a danger that genuine refugees will be swamped by the illegals", the "continuing wave of applications"; all under the heading "Holding Back the Tide". In a recent paper delivered at a Dublin conference Jason King contrasted the 'deluge' language used by the media regarding immigrants, with the 'haemorrhage' and 'draining of lifeblood' language used regarding Irish emigrants to other countries (Note 5).

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There is no doubt that the number of asylum seekers coming to Ireland has increased in the last couple of years, because:

- There are more refugees in the world than ever before. Today at least fifty million people world-wide suffer forced displacement. (Note 6).
- The Irish economy is doing well and there are perceived opportunities for work;
- The international profile of Ireland is higher than it was;
- The social welfare regime in Britain is less generous towards refugees than it used to be;
- Asylum seekers in some EU countries have even fewer rights than in Ireland, and there have been curbs on immigration in some of these countries in recent years;
- The appointment of Mary Robinson as U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has led to the perception that Ireland has a generous policy towards refugees.
- The Irish Refugee Act of 1996 was perceived as generous, particularly the inclusion, as grounds for seeking asylum, of persecution for "membership of a particular social group".
- The growth of the Internet has increased access to information about Ireland's refugee policy;
- Once a few refugees come into a country, more are likely to follow

Ireland has always had a very restrictive policy towards immigrants, except perhaps those coming from Britain. The main explanation for this is that Ireland was for many years quite poor in European terms, with massive emigration acting as a safety valve to keep high unemployment at bay. Another important reason is that Ireland does not have the historical 'baggage' of overseas colonies that has given rise to immigration into other European countries. Up to recently most of the refugees who came to Ireland were 'programme' refugees, that is, they came in groups as part of a government programme responding to war, persecution or mass expulsions in other countries. For instance about 800 Bosnians have come since 1992. Up to a few years ago, refugees that came to Ireland did not fare particularly well. Most of the 530 Hungarians who arrived in 1956 left within a few years, most of them going to Canada.

Since it is difficult for most would-be immigrants from outside the EC to get a work permit, the only practical way for them to come to Ireland is to turn up at a port or airport here and seek asylum. If this is granted they then have refugee status and are allowed to stay.

The Geneva Convention on Refugees

The basic definition of 'refugee' used in Ireland derives largely from the Geneva Convention of 1951, and is as follows:

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 or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country...

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The definition is noteworthy as much for what it omits as for what it includes. Most of the people who would be referred to in ordinary discourse as 'refugees' are not strictly refugees according to this definition. People fleeing from famine, civil breakdown, plague, or even war, might not be considered 'refugees' unless it can be established that they are being 'persecuted'. So-called 'economic refugees' may not come within the strict definition. As the Convention was drawn up in the context of post-war Europe, it had political rather than economic refugees in mind.

In practice, the definitions of the Geneva Convention are not as hard and fast as they first appear. UN guidelines accept that foreign invasion can result in persecution, or at least "a well-founded fear" of it. Although the UN distinguishes between 'economic migrants' and refugees, it accepts that the distinction is sometimes blurred. For instance, famine is rarely due solely to crop failure, but is also due to failure to distribute food from non-affected areas. Famine often coincides with civil war, and may then become a weapon to be used against a section of the population. However, the UN guidelines state that if a person "is moved exclusively by economic considerations, he is an economic migrant, and not a refugee".

It is no great weight for Ireland to grant asylum to refugees under the strict definition, because there are relatively few of them. If we take the year 1994, where nearly all the cases have now been processed, we find that there were 362 applications for asylum. Of these, 34 were recognised as 'true' refugees, one following an appeal. Another 67 were given temporary leave to remain. Of the remaining applications, 222 were withdrawn, mainly because a large number of Cuban asylum seekers left the country. 'Temporary leave to remain' is often given where applicants do not meet the strict criteria for refugee status, but might be in physical danger from war etc. if they returned home.

The stated policy, or some might say 'strategy', of the Department of Justice is to be scrupulously correct in its observance of the Geneva Convention on refugees. Thus they maintain that anyone who establishes a case that they are true 'refugees' will be granted asylum status. They insist that they do not make any assessment of an applicant's skills, or their possible contribution to the economy, because this is irrelevant to refugee status. At the Department's expense a liaison officer of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees is accommodated in the Department offices, and he is given sight of every adjudication made by the Department.

But the question must be asked, Is the Department hiding behind the strict terms of the Geneva Convention in order to maintain a very ungenerous immigration policy towards people from outside the EU? A spokesperson for the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) would not accept that this is so. For their own part, the main concern of the UNHCR is to see that the 1951 Convention is upheld and is not compromised. They are concerned that if governments found the Convention on Refugees impossible to administer and control they might abandon it altogether, and people facing very explicit persecution for political or religious beliefs could then find no asylum. For this reason UNHCR are concerned that the status of genuine asylum seekers might be undermined by a large number of 'manifestly unfounded' applications and they are supportive of departmental decisions to turn down such applications.

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UNHCR would say that they have not detected any trend towards legalism in the Department's interpretation of the Convention, nor a preference to exclude rather than include asylum applicants. They would regard the general stance of the Department as normal in the international context. But UNHCR believes that Ireland does not want to operate a policy that acts as a 'pull factor' for non-EC immigrants, particularly in the context of its open border with Britain. UNHCR does not itself have any policy in regard to this.

Other agencies also referred to this issue. It is accepted that Europe as a whole is really not interested in taking refugees, and although there is no EU bar on it, it is thought that the government is afraid that Ireland will be considered too 'soft' in relation to refugees. In fact, the Department of Justice has now commissioned a comparative study in relation to Ireland's procedural treatment of asylum seekers. On the basis of this it may well be proposed that the 1996 Refugee Act, only part of which has been implemented, be amended if it appears that it is creating a 'pull' factor.

But crucially, UNHCR maintains that it is not healthy for the asylum system to have only one channel (the asylum-seeking route) whereby immigrants from outside the EC can get into Ireland. UNHCR would welcome another system alongside the refugee route, such as immigration quotas, whereby immigrants from certain countries could get visas to come to Ireland to seek work. They feel that if such a route existed, many of the existing asylum seekers would choose it in preference to the current one. In their view, the current policy, whereby every would-be immigrant has to claim to be an asylum seeker, puts great pressure on the asylum-granting process.

A Multi-Ethnic Society?

The location of an 'immigration policy' totally within the context of asylum seeking, has tended to inhibit the development of any coherent strategy relating to immigration and to the whole question of the kind of society we wish to create, in ethnic terms.

In the context of our current fast economic growth we can gain many advantages from immigration. Many immigrants are skilled, or have good business acumen. Immigrants are now filling many important roles in our society. For instance even now our health services in Ireland would almost grind to a halt if non-EU medical staff were repatriated. Many refugees also have good language skills.

Immigration brings the richness of many cultures to Ireland, in the same way that Ireland has brought its culture to many countries. But there is clearly a lot of resistance to this way of looking at things. Throughout most of our recent history the emphasis has been on the value of our homogeneity and distinctiveness, and of a Gaelic, Catholic Ireland. The Irish are deeply conservative in relation to culture, and our comparative poverty and isolation has 'protected' us from having to make decisions about multi-ethnicity. It is impossible to point to any one country, and say for certain that it has been better or worse off for being multi-ethnic. Yet there is no doubt that some of the most vibrant countries of the modern world, the United States, Canada, Australia, have successfully integrated scores of different cultures. Where problems have occurred it is because the

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cultures have not integrated, or have been prevented from integrating, and have remained isolated 'globes', indifferent or even hostile to one another.

Ireland can benefit enormously from its immigrant population if it has the courage to promote the maximum degree of integration which is compatible with preserving the dignity and self-identity of immigrants and native Irish alike. It has to be recognised that the cultural needs of immigrant peoples change over time. The Normans became 'more Irish than the Irish themselves' though of course the native Irish became more 'Norman' in the process. What is important is that there be no initial antagonism towards immigrants, no creation of ghettos, no exclusion from social networks. Regrettably some of the current policies of the State are in danger of leading to all these things. It is unacceptable, for example, that the Department of Education refuses to provide any special resources in schools for the teaching of English to the children of asylum seekers, even though their formal education may have been completed while their parents were waiting for a decision. The policy of putting asylum seekers into a limbo of several years duration, where they are prohibited from working, and they and their families discouraged from learning English, is souring the whole induction process for immigrants.

The Application Process: Some Issues

The Department of Justice has, after a long delay, greatly improved its facilities for processing applications for asylum, with a new state-of-the-art building in Mount Street, Dublin, devoted entirely to the process. Although it has not been sparing in capital investment, the government still seems unwilling to commit sufficient resources to the day-to-day running of the service. The biggest issue arises in relation to the lack of adequate legal representation by asylum seekers. The complexity of the law makes it imperative that the asylum seeker is represented at the Appeal Stage at least. In a number of countries generous legal aid is provided for this purpose, but not currently in Ireland. The Department keeps a list of solicitors who will represent applicants at the appeal stage, though according to one applicant the 'status' of this list seems uncertain, with Department officials not always providing it, and sometimes denying that it exists at all. The Department will pay £120 towards the legal costs of an appeal, though the actual cost of this representation is reckoned to be at least £360. It is not clear how the Department expects applicants to find the additional £240, since they are not allowed to take up employment, and to do so would actually prejudice their appeal. On the face of it, the policy appears to discriminate against the most needy asylum-seekers.

Although the Department of Justice can be said to behave 'correctly', in legal terms, in investigating applications for asylum, a recurring complaint made by asylum applicants to the Working Notes team was that Department of Justice interviewers appeared to be working on the basis of "guilty until proved innocent", with interviews being conducted in an atmosphere of "disbelief". This is another by-product of the restrictive immigration policy. According to the Department and UNHCR, the main reason stated why so many asylum claims are refused is lack of credibility. The Department of Justice emphasises credibility as a key factor in determining whether a person should be recognised as a refugee. The Department accepts the fact that the main countries of origin of asylum seekers are Nigeria, Romania, Algeria, Libya, Angola, and Democratic Republic of Congo

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(Note 7). Though it is well known that these are all countries where there are repressive regimes or widespread breakdown of civil and economic society, this on its own is not sufficient to make these applications for asylum 'credible'. The fact is that the criteria for granting asylum are too restrictive for the actual situation that obtains. The definition of 'refugee' is simply not adequate to protect vulnerable people in today's world.

There is also some concern among refugee agencies about the working of the 'Dublin Convention', so named because it was agreed during a meeting of EU ministers in Dublin. This convention provides that applications for asylum should generally be heard in the EU country in which the asylum-seeker has first arrived. For instance if an asylum-seeker from Nigeria arrives in Holland and makes his or her way to Ireland, the Convention provides that the asylum seeker may be sent back to Holland to have their application processed there. The Convention also provides that the determination by the country assessing the application is final and that the applicant cannot re-apply in another member state. The Convention implicitly assumes that all EU countries treat asylum-seekers the same way, but there is evidence that this is not so. For instance recent press reports claim that the French Intelligence Service are blackmailing Algerian policemen who have fled to France, by promising asylum only if they become informers against Algerian Islamists. There is fear that the Dublin Convention provides a loophole which the Irish immigration authorities could exploit, given that Ireland does not have direct sea or air routes to those countries from which most asylum-seekers come.

'Permission to Remain'

What is called 'permission to remain' or 'temporary leave to remain' is the rubric under which asylum seekers are given permission to stay in Ireland both before, and often after, their application for asylum is processed. The terminology is confusing, because there are considerable differences regarding the entitlements of people who are applying for asylum, and those given leave to remain after their application for asylum has been turned down. The term 'humanitarian leave to remain' is best applied to the latter, and these people are entitled to take up employment, and to training.

Though 'leave to remain' while applying for asylum is a necessary administrative device to control immigration into any country, in Ireland it is fast becoming a kind of limbo in which thousands of people now reside. The main reason for this is the very large backlog of applications for asylum, which is not expected to be cleared until well into the year 2000. In Ireland, while people are waiting for their application to be processed, no matter how long it takes, they have no right to take up a job or to get training, or even help to learn English.

This contrasts markedly with most EU countries. Germany, Sweden and the U.K. allow the right to work after three months, four months and six months respectively if the asylum seeker's case is pending. Finland allows it after three months under certain conditions. An asylum seeker in Spain may apply for a provisional work permit. Belgium allows the right to work after the application is considered admissible (Note 8). As the Department of Justice seems anxious to point out, asylum seekers are not allowed the right to work in Denmark, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. But, in

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these countries asylum applications are processed relatively rapidly, with the exception of the appeals procedure in Italy, viz.

First Claim	Appeal	Total	
Netherlands	240 days	120 days	1 year
France	240 days	167 days	1 year, 2 months
Denmark	188 days	288 days	1 year, 4 months
Italy	90 days	5-8 years	5-8 years.

(Source: Legal and Social Conditions for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Western European Countries, Danish Refugee Council 1997. Figures are approximate, but are based on the actual time it took to process applications).

The Department states that giving asylum seekers early access to employment "is treating them as economic migrants, will act as a 'pull factor', and will encourage further abuses of the asylum system...". (Note 9) But it is only because the state restricts immigration to the asylum route that it leads to abuses of the asylum system. Moreover there is no advertence by the Department to the human problems caused by refusing people access to employment and training, such as the creation of a dependency culture, the loss of skills, the poor level of initial welcome and integration (including language-learning), which leaves a lasting negative impression, and the perception created among sections of the population that asylum-seekers are 'spongers'.

The Department of Justice also sees its role as protecting the bottom end of the labour market. In some circumstance this might be a reasonable argument, since the lowest-paid native workers are the most vulnerable. But in fact most of the immigrants coming to Ireland were middle-class in their own countries. In a recent survey covering the period October 1997 to March 1998, Michael Begley (Note 10) found that asylum seekers fell into the following categories of Occupation and Social Class.

A (higher professional)	14
B (lower professional)	30
C (other non-manual)	14
D (skilled manual)	14
E (semi-skilled manual)	7
D (unskilled)	2
OTHER (mainly students)	19
Total	100

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Where asylum-seekers do take poorly-paid back-street jobs, often in restaurants, it is generally because the Department will not allow them to work legally. It is obviously important in this context to bring in minimum wage legislation, sooner rather than later, to prevent abuses in this area, and to prevent resentment against immigrants for taking work at low wages. But it would be simpler still to allow asylum-seekers to work legally in mainstream jobs.

The category of 'leave to remain' after an asylum request has been turned down is also problematic. The main concern is that few people are actually given humanitarian leave to remain. Of the 424 applications for asylum in 1995 (all but 17 of which have been processed; 225 were withdrawn), 94 (22%) were given refugee status, but of the remainder only 22 (5%) were given humanitarian leave to remain. If this policy were to be maintained, it would suggest that thousands of people stand to be deported during the next few years as their cases come up for decision. In fact, relatively few people are being deported at present, but it is not clear how many of those rejected are leaving voluntarily. Some of those rejected may simply go 'underground'.

It is also to be noted too that a large number of applications are 'withdrawn' before first decision. Of the 424 applicants in 1995, 225 "withdrew". In some cases this means that applicants did not show up for scheduled interviews. The Department of Justice comments: "Checks are currently being made to trace these people". Some of these may have left the country, but others may also have gone 'underground'.

The likelihood is that, whatever their intention, current policies are creating a large number of "second-class citizens", living in a twilight zone. There is a failure on the part of the State to face up to the fact that we now have thousands of immigrants who are never going to return to their native lands, and that for humanitarian as well as ordinary administrative reasons it is essential to regularise the situation of most of these people as soon as possible by giving them long-term residence permits and humanitarian leave to remain.

Life in the Twilight Zone

This 'twilight zone' is not a very pleasant place to be, and refugee support groups and immigrants alike are very critical of the slowness of Irish agencies to respond to the needs of newly-arrived immigrants and adapt to the reality of a multi-ethnic society. The Gardai have come in for particular criticism, reportedly asking asylum seekers, for instance, for documents which they have no legal requirement to carry; or for redirecting queries from local Garda Stations which they are supposed to handle themselves. Officials in some agencies seem badly informed about the status and entitlements of the various categories of immigrants. As one asylum-seeker, now with refugee status, said, "It is enough to drive you crazy".

The problems of asylum seekers could be greatly alleviated if there was an adequate network of refugee support agencies working in the area. But there is not. 'Programme' refugees, such as those recently arrived from Bosnia, are well looked after by the state-sponsored Irish Refugee Agency. With regard to asylum seekers, the main voluntary agency providing a service is the Irish Refugee Council. This is a hard-working body, with a large number of volunteers engaged in language

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teaching and other supports, but it has a tiny core staff and cannot cope with the demands made on it, particularly in the legal area. It is currently undergoing an organisational review. Although the Council has received money from the state for particular projects, it receives no core funding, and must rely on voluntary donations to exist. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Britain and most other European countries. Some of the refugees have set up their own support group, but they cannot expect any help from the Department of Justice for this.

In many countries NGOs play a crucial role in inducting asylum-seekers. In some countries there are representative of NGOs located at seaports and airports to give them assistance and advice. NGOs can also give advice to governments regarding refugee policy and work with them to solve particular problems. But government policy in Ireland in this area seems to be to keep the NGOs at a distance. The UNHCR identify the lack of NGO support and involvement as a crucial shortcoming of the refugee 'scene' in Ireland, and also question the relative silence and lack of activity of the Churches in relation to the refugee issue.

Accommodation is a big problem for refugees. Although the Eastern Health Board ensures that asylum-seekers do not end up on the street, accommodation is often in inhospitable hostels and guest houses, or in rather 'tough' areas where racist abuse and harassment are common, and where a concentration of refugees creates tension. While it may be accepted that accommodation is now a problem for many people in Ireland, the vulnerability of refugees needs to be taken into account. A view expressed by UNHCR was that "a rich country like Ireland should be able to do it better".

What Is To Be Done?

In the case of some public policy issues, it is difficult to know what is the right thing to do, perhaps because of the complexity of the situation, or because a change that favours one group will adversely affect another group. This is happily not the case in relation to our policy in relation to asylum-seekers and refugees. There are many clear recommendations that can be drawn from the brief analysis above. The first recommendation given - that Ireland should allow increased immigration from non-EC countries - is most important. If it was implemented, some of the other recommendations (though certainly not the second) would be redundant in the longer term. If it was not implemented, all the other recommendations would stand.

At least as long as the current economic growth lasts, Ireland should change its policy on immigration and admit non-EU immigrants on a quota basis, on much the same conditions as EU citizens are currently allowed into Ireland. This would mean that immigrants would have to show that they have good hope of being able to support themselves within a reasonable time. Quotas should be based on current approximate inflows from non-EU countries, but should be reviewed regularly. This would mean that about 4,000 non-EU immigrants, apart from those seeking asylum, would be allowed to enter the country each year.

This would have the following advantages:

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- it would considerably reduce the Department of Justice's work of vetting asylum seekers. While it may also be necessary to interview immigrants, it is less time-consuming, and does not have the same legal complications, as vetting asylum-seekers;
- it would allow us to bring in people with scarce skills (Note 11), be an enrichment of Irish culture, and reduce our insularity of outlook;
- it would eliminate the need for 'economic refugees' to make a complicated case, based on the fear of persecution, to be admitted;
- it would be a humanitarian action to allow some people from impoverished and war-torn countries into Ireland, in the same way that millions of Irish people have been admitted to other countries to escape famine and poverty, and seek a better life;
- it would regularise the position of immigrants who have been forced 'underground' for fear of deportation;
- it would encourage the authorities to provide more facilities for language-teaching and skill training for immigrants, and would allow more coherent integration policies to be drawn up.

Other Recommendations:

- The current policy of scrupulous adherence to the Geneva Convention on Refugees should be maintained, so that all asylum-seekers conforming to the Convention definition should be admitted.
- The government and the Churches should take a more public and active role in creating a greater climate of acceptance for other nationalities, and should be more vocal in condemning racism.
- The current attempt to increase penalties on employers for employing non-nationals should be abandoned.
- Reasonable legal costs should be paid by the state for appeals by asylum-seekers
- Except where there are very good known reasons (such as criminal activities) for excluding a particular person, the current cohort of asylum-seekers should be treated as legal immigrants and encouraged to seek employment or training. This would avoid many thousands of cruel deportations in the next few years. The present attempt to 'clear the backlog' by the year 2000 should be abandoned.
- Steps should be taken to improve the quality of the reception of asylum-seekers. This should include consultation with host communities. There should be no enforced dispersal of asylum-seekers.
- A programme should be launched by the government to improve knowledge in relevant agencies of the entitlements of different categories of clients, and of the correct procedures in relation to them.
- The NGOs already working in the field, especially the Irish Refugee Council, should be given generous state core funding.

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· The issue of suitable accommodation for asylum-seekers needs to be given urgent attention. Immigrants are a particularly vulnerable group, as they often have no family connections in Ireland, little or no capital, and are ready targets for harassment.

Notes

My thanks to those who read various drafts of this article and made helpful comments, especially Attracta Kelly and Frank Sammon S.J. of the Jesuit Refugee Service, and Tony O'Riordan S.J. of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice. Sincere thanks are also due to the many people working in statutory and voluntary agencies, and to a number of asylum seekers, who provided information and gave generously of their time to discuss the issues raised.

B.T

1. Micheal Mac Greil, Prejudice in Ireland Revisited. Survey and Research Unit, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. 1996.
2. Maire Ni Suibhne, 'Fortress Ireland'. The Guardian Weekend. 1 October 1998.
3. Central Statistics Office, 'Population and Migration Estimates', 29 October 1997.
4. Figures on asylum applications are taken from 'Asylum Statistics' issues by the Department of Justice. Figures on 'programme' refugees are provided by the Refugee Agency, Dublin.
5. 'Porous Nation: from Ireland's 'haemorrhage' to immigrant inundation'. Paper given by Jason King, NUI Maynooth, at Conference entitled 'The Expanding Nation: Towards a Multi-Ethnic Ireland', 22-24 September 1998, Trinity College, Dublin .
6. Mark Raper S.J., 'Understanding the Refugee Problem' in Doctrine and Life, Dominican Publications Dublin, September 1998. Mark Raper is international director of the Jesuit Refugee Service.
7. 'Statement to the Joint Committee on Social, Community and Family Affairs', Department of Justice, 22 September 1998, p.5.
8. Do., p.7.
9. Do., p.7.
10. Michael Begley, (Director of Research, Spiritan Asylum Services, Ireland), Back to the Road: a Needs Assessment Study of Asylum Seekers in Ireland. (forthcoming)
11. The E.S.R.I. estimates a need for an additional 285,000 employees between the base year of 1995 and the year 2003. The following are the largest categories:

Clerks	35,000
Business/Finance/Legal professionals	27,400

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Higher Managers	26,500
Sales Assistants	23,500
Catering Occupations	13,000
Proprietors in Service Industries	12,400
Engineering and Science	10,800
Electricians/Electrical fitters	10,600
Education Professionals	10,600
Typists/Telephonists	10,100

(Source: Occupational Employment Forecasts 2003. E.S.R.I. November 1997)

Peter Bacon, also of E.S.R.I., identifies the establishment of Ireland as a multilingual European services hub as part of an overall economic strategy. He reckons this would lead to the creation of a further 40,000 jobs. ('Economic Opportunities for the Twenty-First Century' in Fionan O Muircheartaigh (ed.), Ireland in the Coming Times. Institute of Public Administration, 1997.)

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The Economics of Immigration Policy

Tom Giblin, SJ

December 1998

The possible impact of immigration on the economy of a country is much debated. In continental Europe, up to a decade ago, the impact of immigrant labour was not a matter of much concern. Immigrant workers were widely employed to carry out work for which it was very difficult to recruit native workers. For instance, in Germany large numbers of Turkish people were employed in this way. In recent times however, with unemployment levels high over most of Europe, there has been more concern about the impact of immigration on the economy. Because of increased immigration here, there is now some concern in Ireland about the issue.

A lot of the recent literature on the economics of immigration has been done in the United States. A good survey article of the developments in this area is one by George J. Borjas, who recently addressed a Conference on Refugees at University College Dublin.

It must be borne in mind that the flows of immigrants into the U.S. have been very large. A third of the increase in the U.S. population between 1981 and 1990, or 7.3 million people, were immigrants. This means that economic conclusions drawn from the American experience should be interpreted with care when attempts are made to apply them to Ireland. If immigration into Ireland was of the same scale as in the U.S. it would mean net immigration of about 19,000 per annum. In fact, the net immigration into Ireland for the past five years has averaged only 3,200. However in the past two years this picture has begun to change rapidly, and in 1997 the net immigration amounted to 15,000 (44,000 immigrants and 29,000 emigrants), which would, pro rata, approach current U.S. levels. It is accepted however that most of the immigration into Ireland is made up of returning Irish emigrants, often highly skilled, and this is quite a different situation from the U.S. Immigrants into Ireland seeking refugee status amount to only about 9% of total immigrant numbers.

The economic question is not the only, nor necessarily the most important, question to ask about immigration, though it seems to be the one the Department of Justice focuses on the most. Immigration policy is also shaped by political, ethical and social objectives which may override economic considerations. Economics asks a specific and limited question, namely, what are the economic gains and losses in allowing significant inflows of immigrants,

- to the immigrants coming to a nation?
- to native workers within that nation?
- to the country as a whole?

a) How well do immigrants fare?

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In the early research in the U.S. there was no data which tracked groups of immigrants over time, so this work examined a snapshot of immigrants at one point in time. The research found that while recently arrived immigrants were typically starting off at much lower wages than native workers, immigrants who had been in the U.S. for about fifteen years had wages that were the same as those of native workers, while those who had been in the U.S. for longer than fifteen years had higher wages than native workers. This snapshot led people to believe that immigrants' earnings must overtake those of native workers over time. Theories were elaborated claiming that those with the most initiative tended to immigrate, and that immigrants have more incentive to work hard and end up better off than domestic workers.

This initial snapshot proved to be misleading, however. Borjas has found it results mainly from the fact that the early generation of immigrants to the U.S. were more highly skilled and therefore more highly paid than the average native worker, while the later generations of immigrants tend to be a lot less skilled and less well paid than native workers. So while these early immigrants have done better than the average worker it is because they started with an advantage. Borjas's view is that recent generations of immigrants into the U.S. are unlikely to reach the same wage levels as earlier generations. In short, it seems that the relative education and skills base of immigrants has a strong bearing on how they will succeed after migrating.

b) How does immigration affect the wages and employment of native workers?

Another question that is asked is how the arrival of large numbers of immigrants affects the wages of the domestic labour force. There are difficulties in assessing this. At first glance immigrants appear to have little or no effect. For instance one U.S. city can have 10% more immigrants than another, and yet its wages are only 0.2% lower. There is some evidence in the U.S. that significant numbers of domestic residents leave areas where there is a big influx of immigrants, so instead of the influx adding to the labour force and depressing wages, the actual net change in the local labour force is much smaller.

In a highly significant study of the impact of the Mariel boatlift of 125,000 people from Cuba on the Miami labour market, David Card has shown that wages did not fall even in the year of the inflow, thus before any outflow of domestic residents could occur. A simple explanation for this is that it is hard to undercut local wage rates because contracts at these rates have already been set. Also, at the bottom end of the labour market, 'poverty wages' are by definition hard to reduce simply because there is so little incentive to work for less. A similar study has been done on the influx of persons from Algeria into France in 196. These 'natural experiments' tend to support the overall evidence that immigration has little or no effect on native wage levels.

One segment of the labour market that may be vulnerable are those who drop out of school. Borjas noted that between 1980 and 1995, the average wages of school dropouts, relative to high school graduates, fell by 11%. He estimated that about half was accounted for by the impact of immigration. This estimate however, should be understood as the maximum possible impact of immigration. Firstly because simply adding in unskilled immigrants who are early school leavers to the group of domestic early school leavers, will cause the average relative wage rate of school drop

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outs to fall, and this without any change in the wage levels of domestic early school leavers. Secondly because we can assume that it is harder to substitute immigrants than domestic workers for many jobs because of their additional language and cultural training needs. Therefore the arrival of immigrants will have less impact on domestic wages than an increase of domestic workers.

Friedberg and Hunt conclude "that a 10% increase in the fraction of immigrants in the population reduces the native wage by at most 1%. But again, this is in the context of large- scale low-skilled U.S. immigration patterns. The evidence suggests therefore that the impact of immigration on native wages will be small, even for the most vulnerable groups.

c) How does a country as a whole benefit from immigration?

At least theoretically, national income should be increased most by inflows of immigrants into areas of skill shortage in the native labour force. This could be either low-skilled or high-skilled workers.

It is obvious that if immigrants are in employment they will generate tax revenue for the State rather than imposing a welfare cost. If immigrants correspond to skill shortage areas, they are more likely to be employed. One might also expect skilled immigrants to be less likely to be living on social welfare. It must be remembered however that the skill criterion for admitting immigrants is a narrow economic one which does not take into account the political and social concerns that should motivate an immigration policy as a response to the human need of immigrants.

Attempts to calculate the benefit or cost of immigrants in the U.S. economy have been fraught with difficulty. On the one hand, it is easy to calculate the taxes paid and the welfare benefits received by immigrants. On the other hand, it is very difficult, to cost the services other than welfare benefits, such as education, that immigrants use. The studies have been done, even those which assume that native wages fall because of immigration, still suggest that the US economy benefits from immigration by about \$8 billion annually.

Furthermore, calculating the impact of increased immigration on government spending does not consider the potential benefits of immigration to an economy over a longer period. There are grounds for arguing that an increase in the labour force allows an economy to grow at a higher rate while avoiding inflation. Indeed in Ireland today it is arguable that immigrants from Europe and returned emigrants have a significant impact in avoiding excessive wage inflation caused by a shortage of particular skills. Immigration then is equivalent to free imports of human capital particularly of younger people. Fitzgerald and Kearney , for example, argue that now that the fertility rate in Ireland has fallen below natural replacement, an argument could be made for immigration in promoting long-term balance between the young and old in the population.

So there are economic grounds for suggesting that a modest policy of immigration even for less skilled workers will have little or no effect on native Irish wages or employment prospects, and may even help the Irish economy to continue to grow. Fitzgerald and Kearney argue that the mobility of labour both into and out of Ireland had had an important impact on the performance of the economy in recent years. It has made the supply of labour in Ireland significantly more elastic (i.e. expanding and contracting according to demand) than it would be in a closed economy. At times when the

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economy is growing rapidly, such as today, it has helped to relax capacity constraints allowing more rapid growth than would otherwise have been possible. In June, a report from National City Brokers predicted that the Irish economy will be capable of absorbing labour force increases of about 40,000 per annum for the foreseeable future.

Writing in the Irish Times Oliver O'Connor suggests that with such growth there will be a demand for both higher and lower skilled workers. In fact, he states, the more success we have at generating high-skilled jobs, the more demand there will be for services that are lower skilled, and demand for these jobs may exceed the level the Irish workforce will supply, as has happened in Germany and elsewhere. He warns however against the creation of an immigrant underclass, stressing the importance of increasing social mobility in our society, and giving the children of low-skilled immigrants the chance to move up socially and economically. The fact is however, that most of the asylum-seekers coming to Ireland at present tend to be middle-class and thus not in the low skilled group. Of course many cannot use their qualifications because they find it difficult to have them recognised.

In the article quoted earlier, Borjas makes the point that the permitted level of immigration need not be an immutable constant, but should be linked to the business cycle. More immigrants can be admitted when the economy is strong, and fewer when it is weak.

Fitzgerald and Kearney also make the point that the current net immigration is having an indirect effect on the economy through increasing pressure on the physical infrastructure. This is especially true of the housing market. While those emigrating are mostly leaving from their parents' homes, most of the immigrants, whether Irish or foreign, need independent accommodation. Fitzgerald and Kearney estimate that net immigration has added almost 6,000 to the annual demand for additional dwellings. It is unlikely that asylum-seekers are contributing very significantly to this demand, since many of them are being accommodated in guest houses. In the longer term, at current levels of inflow, and if almost all were granted refugee status, they might contribute to about 10% of the increase in demand for housing. The impact of this on house prices would very much depend on where these refugees were to live i.e. in an area like Dublin or Galway where housing is in short supply, or elsewhere.

Conclusion

In conclusion then, from a purely economic point of view it is clear that Ireland is at present benefiting from returned emigrants and also immigration from other EU countries. Moreover, there is a credible economic case that allowing a modest inflow of non-EU immigrants would also be beneficial economically. There would be some costs of course perhaps in some welfare payments or increased housing demand. However the benefits of increased tax revenue and increased labour supply by non-EU immigrants would in all likelihood outweigh any such costs. Economic studies also suggest that fears about the impact of such an inflow on domestic wages are exaggerated.?

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Drugs: The Current State of Play

Frank Brady, SJ

December 1998

Introduction

In October 1996 and May 1997 the Ministerial Task Force on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs published its first and second reports. The first report deals mainly with heroin and the problem of opiate misuse in the Greater Dublin area. The second deals with the non-opiate problem nation-wide, with drugs in prisons, and, briefly, with therapeutic communities and rehabilitation.

The Task Force identifies heroin as a largely Dublin problem, with sporadic use in Cork, and estimates the number of heroin users as 8,000, of whom upwards of 2,500 could be willing to go on methadone maintenance programmes. There are in fact many other areas throughout the country which are ripe breeding grounds for a serious drug problem. A good number are now at the stage that inner-city Dublin was at prior to the drug explosion of the 1980s. The problem is confined to a small number of users there, including 'transients', but is well enough rooted that people can get heroin in these areas if they want it. If these areas follow the European pattern they will without any doubt develop a serious problem, unless the underlying socio-economic conditions are addressed.

The first Task Force report stresses the fact that "drug misuse is closely associated with social and economic disadvantage, characterised by unemployment, poor living conditions, low educational attainment, high levels of family breakdown, and a lack of recreational facilities and other supports". The report identifies several blackspot target areas in Dublin.

There has been considerable evidence of a lack of political will at government level to tackle the drug abuse problem. For instance one of the first things the present administration did on coming into office was to cut the supplementary budget for youth services, which was integral to the whole strategy, from £20m. to £1.3m. It was only after a concerted campaign at community level that this budget was re-established. It is worth noting in this context that the establishment of the Task Force in the first place coincided with a great rise in public demand for action from the local communities most affected. Similar action in the late 80s and early 90s also resulted in the 1991 Government Strategy to Prevent Drug Misuse. However, much of the 1991 strategy was never implemented, which is one of the reasons why the present crisis is so severe. The obvious conclusion is that public demand by those communities most affected is the only thing that will maintain the required political will.

Indications of Government Policy and Strategy: Harm Reduction

By concentrating on measures to deal with heroin in the target communities, while leaving drugs in prison, and rehabilitation, to the second report, the Task Report appears to be saying that its primary

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concern is managing heroin. This seems to indicate a policy of favouring a public health/harm-reduction approach, over a more individual or group clinical-therapeutic treatment model. This is not to say that the emphasis on harm reduction is wrong, rather that it is only one measure among many. A first indication of the priority being given to harm reduction was the expansion of methadone services, and the provision of clean needles for drug users in response to the spread of AIDS and Hepatitis. The bulk of the recommendations centre around the provision of methadone maintenance, the expansion of the number of local clinics, and the recruitment of GPs and pharmacists, all with the purpose of reducing the numbers awaiting maintenance. This policy was driven by the public demand to provide treatment for large numbers as quickly as possible, and the best known way to do this was through methadone. However maintenance on its own is no solution.

Problems with Maintenance

There are many problems with a policy that relies heavily on maintenance:

- Maintenance without adequate counselling and rehabilitation services does not get drug users stabilised. They tend to use heroin and/or benzodiazepenes (sleeping tablets/ tranquillizers) on top of methadone.
- Clinics are currently being inundated with patients on long-term maintenance. This is putting clinics under great stress and leaving those on waiting lists on a very long finger.
- The average numbers of clients to a counsellor in the present clinics is 40 to 70, - an impossible number to deal with.
- The services provided by the clinics becomes very skewed, drawing them away from full-time rehabilitation work. Each clinic is maintaining well in excess of 150 patients on methadone, of whom only about 10/15 can get places in full-time rehabilitation. The number of places in drug-free rehabilitation in the whole country does not appear to be more than 100.
- There appears to be large-scale prescribing of tranquillisers, sleeping tablets and anti-depressants associated with maintenance.
- Maintenance without adequate provision for becoming drug free or for becoming effectively stabilised is a statement of no hope for drug users.

For many years methadone was dispensed by a number of GPs as well as clinics, and the Task Force noted the lack of definitive quantitative information in this regard. Up to recently, there was no register of drug users, so that it was possible for a drug user to get two doctors to prescribe for them, or to be getting methadone from a doctor as well as a clinic, with the extra medicines often finding their way onto the black market. Some doctors were caring for as many as 200 drug users each, charging £10-£15 per script, or even more.

A new protocol has now been introduced which will restrict each doctor to a maximum of 35 drug user patients, and this maximum can only be reached gradually over time. All heroin users are now

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registered in a central registry and the names of their doctors and prescribing chemists are listed, which makes double scripting much more difficult.

The Most Significant Recommendation of the First Report

The first report underlined the necessity of a co-ordinated approach, given the large number of Departments and supporting agencies involved. They recommended putting in place "administrative structures which will ensure that the strategies proposed are delivered in a coherent, cost-effective and ultimately successful manner". These structures, described as "perhaps the most significant recommendation" consists of :

- A Cabinet Drugs Committee
- A National Drugs Strategy Team; and
- 13 Local Drugs Task Forces.

This structure is to be welcomed in that its purpose is to ensure co-ordination, and involve communities, providing a strategic, locally-based response by the statutory, voluntary, and community sectors. Co-ordination is essential if drug users and their families are not to end up falling through holes in the network of services. Community involvement brings a vital element of both rootedness and knowledge of the local situation.

In practice, difficulties are appearing at various levels:

- Neither officials nor elected representatives have much experience of working with local people as equals on a team. They need training if they are not to fall into the pitfalls of side-stepping local people, not taking them seriously, meeting at times that are impossible for local people, or being unable to take inputs of local people on board when they are receiving their own instructions from above.
- The voluntary commitment required of local people, who often have families to look after, and part- or full-time jobs, can be huge. Many do not have the energy and can 'burn out'. They can and do feel used as cheap labour.
- Local people can lack the kinds of expertise that professionals take for granted. They can lack experience of working as partners with people previously seen as "them", who had power and kept it to themselves. There can be a lack of commitment, financial and otherwise, to training of local people, to providing facilitation when groups get into difficulties, and, for instance, to provision of crèches and other facilities when needed.

Other difficulties arise at the level of implementation:

- Government funding of strategies authorised by them has a limited time span. This makes even medium-term planning impossible.

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- Increased funding is crucial if successful initiatives are to be mainstreamed. There does not appear to be any provision for increased funding being channelled to the Department of Education and the Health Boards in respect of these strategies
- The co-ordinating brief of the Local Drugs Task Force does not extend to the services of the Health Boards or other government departments. Local input into overall co-ordination is limited or non-existent.
- At local level, there is little co-ordination between bodies maintaining health, education and justice services.

The lack of co-ordination at a local level is partly due to our very centralised system of government and thus will not be easy to change.

Finally, in relation to the National Drugs Strategy Team itself:

- While two assistant secretaries deal with policy, the input of the local communities and the voluntary sector is confined to the operational area. This division raises questions about the seriousness with which questions of policy arising from experience on the ground will be dealt with. This suggests that local involvement is valued only up the point where it cannot raise questions about overall structures.

Note:

I wish to thank colleagues in drug work in Dublin for their input into this article. Any feedback would be welcome.

F.B.