



**Annual Report  
2014/2015**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

The Belfast Migrant Centre (BMC) was established as a vital support centre for people from ethnic minority communities in Belfast and Northern Ireland. Originally established through a consortium of UNISON, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Polish Association and NICEM under the welcome house project it became an independent charity in March 2012. The overall objective of the organisation is to tackle racism and eliminate barriers against new and settled migrant communities in Northern Ireland. In 2014 we changed our name to Migrant Centre NI to reflect the range of our work. We are still the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland providing a one-stop shop service with bi-lingual staff to eliminate language barriers.

### **The environment**

According to the report on migration published by the Northern Ireland Research and Statistics agency (NISRA) in 2010, the period since 2004 has seen a sharp increase in immigration as compared to the periods during the troubles, with the 1970s and 80s having more people leave than come to northern Ireland and the 90s having a balanced net of people leaving and coming to northern Ireland. Between mid 2011 and mid 2012 alone, NISRA estimates that 12,900 people came to live in Northern Ireland. These figures are conservative since they are based on the UN definition for migration, which stipulates a 12-month residency rule. The number is also based on limited sources, that is, only recorded sources, including the census, National Insurance (NI) registration etc. There are however unrecorded migrants are either in the process of asylum or other processes, children being born from migrants, and those migrants who stay for less than a year - all of which will require services in Northern Ireland. The labour Force survey estimated that in 2010 around 80 000 people born outside the UK and Ireland were living in Northern Ireland, while NISRA estimated that between 2000 and 2010 122,000 immigrants arrived in Northern Ireland not including dependents and those born from migrants and ethnic minorities. All this points to an environment where there is an increase in migrants and ethnic minorities living in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is becoming more and more cosmopolitan.

## **Our Role**

With the increase in the numbers of migrants and ethnic minorities, the current organizations, which service citizens and should have adapted or should adapt to servicing migrants as well, have not done so satisfactorily or quickly enough to meet the demand. There are a number of organizations for ethnic minorities and migrants but the Migrant Centre NI (MCNI) remains the only one with the mandate of being a one stop shop for providing advice to migrants and ethnic minorities in a language and manner that is accessible. The many organizations that have developed are specific to servicing certain groups in migrant and ethnic communities, unlike MCNI, however they are do not specialize in providing advice.

In the same manner the mainstream services that should be available to give the same advice that MCNI provides, are not able to provide the advise in a language, context and manner that is accessible to migrants and ethnic minorities. The same advice regarding housing, immigration, employment, hate crime etc that they offer citizens who are not migrants or ethnic minorities, is indeed the very same advice provided to migrants and ethnic minorities by the Migrant Centre NI, albeit in a fully accessible way. This situation has led to mainstream services referring migrants and ethnic minorities to MCNI as a specialist organization for migrants and ethnic minorities. While we endeavor and will indeed provide services for all that we can, MCNI continues to have no core funding and limited resources.

## **The Past Year**

Our record in providing services speaks for itself, even with limited resources. In the past year 2014 - 2015, we provided advice on over 500 cases and supported 430 people. The highest areas of demand were Welfare Benefits and Hate Crime. We are currently only able to provide one part time advisor for general advice services despite it being one of the highest areas of need.

Our good relations work through the Belonging Project continues to grow and develop. We have now completed work on our Workshop Toolkit and have begun our training for trainers. We hope to expand capacity within the ethnic minority individuals to deliver Belonging Project workshops in the communities within which they live. To date we have trained 10 trainers. We have also updated our website in order to make it a useful and accessible tool to those who wish to engage with the Belonging Project.

Our training and development work through the EU funded Good Practice Plus Project continues to be successful. We worked with 20 officers from the PSNI plus representatives from the PPS and DOJ.

Our role and place in the sector cannot to be overstated. The continued presence of migrants and ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland is not going to change. In fact the ever-changing dynamics of Northern Ireland has meant an increase in demand for the services we offer and the resources to offer the services will continue to be required. Unfortunately those resources have not been forthcoming. We have done extremely well with limited resources, however the continued lack of core funding means we remain limited in our capacity to deliver holistic advice services.

## Advice and Advocacy Services

Over the past year we had 430 clients walk through our doors and opened 504 cases. While the numbers are lower due to the cessation of our immigration advice services and severe reduction in the generalist advice the demand continues. Over the past funding year we have achieved a benefit maximization of **£79,098**. The following is a breakdown of cases that we have dealt with over the past year:

| Matter Category               | Number of Cases | Number of Clients |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Careers Advice                | 1               | 1                 |
| Counselling and Psychotherapy | 1               | 1                 |
| Debt                          | 2               | 2                 |
| Discrimination                | 2               | 2                 |
| Domestic Violence             | 2               | 2                 |
| Education                     | 11              | 11                |
| Employment                    | 38              | 36                |
| Family                        | 5               | 5                 |
| FSS - Planning Ahead          | 1               | 1                 |
| General                       | 20              | 20                |
| Hate Crime                    | 146             | 139               |
| Housing                       | 21              | 19                |
| Immigration - Asylum          | 11              | 11                |
| Mental Health                 | 1               | 1                 |
| Miscellaneous                 | 77              | 57                |
| Personal Injury               | 1               | 1                 |
| Signposting                   | 1               | 1                 |
| Welfare Benefits              | 163             | 120               |

This is impressive as we only have one part time advisor to provide generalist advice. Many of the issues in this area continue to stem from

delayed benefits and tax credit appeals. In May 2014, we produced a policy analysis of these issues and are using this to advocate for minority rights in these crucial advice areas.

Our work supporting victims of hate crime continues to develop into a comprehensive support service to victims to ensure that they are supported and are empowered to make decisions after a traumatic experience. We now have three part time bilingual advocates to cover Northern Ireland thanks to the generosity of our funders the PSNI and the EU Commission.

Over the past year we provided advocacy for 146 cases and supported 139 individuals. We continue to endeavour the provision of high quality and holistic services that are based on a client centred approach. We work closely with the other advocates to ensure that all of the clients needs are addressed. We are also working hard to coordinate services among community and statutory agencies to ensure that no one falls through the cracks.

Part of our work over the past year was developing services in communities to support victims and witnesses of racist hate crime and incidents. A primary example of this is the work we did in East Belfast in partnership with the East Belfast Community Development Association. We partnered with community, voluntary and private organisations in East Belfast and were funded by the East Belfast District Policing Partnership to develop a response plan to racist hate crime and incidents. It was a prime example of the community taking ownership of their area and working to coordinate services to support victims as well as communities that are impacted by hate crime.

## **Volunteering**

Unfortunately due to the funding situation we were no longer able to continue our volunteer activities.

We would like to extend our gratitude to those that volunteered with us over the past four years. Without the willingness of our volunteers to give of their time we would not have been able to help those who are in such need.

We hope to resume our volunteer programmes in the future as we truly feel that volunteers are of great benefit to our organisation and the community.

## **Good Relations and Integration**

The Belonging Project continues to be a shining example of using arts and culture to promote integration and good relations. With the help of our long-term intern placements from Northeastern University and our summer interns from Hong Kong, we have seen this project grow from strength to strength.

This project is delivered in partnership with photographer Laurence Gibson. He works with our intern to set up photo shoots with ethnic minority individuals around Northern Ireland wherein they bring an object that reminds them of their migration journey and they give an interview telling their story. The photos are then exhibited at different locations as well as audio recordings of each person's story. This allows the viewers to have a multimedia experience that enhances their understanding of migration and diversity.

We continue to work in partnership with LibrariesNI who have allowed us exhibition space in Whiterock, Colin Glen and Belfast Central. We will also be exhibiting again in Derry/Londonderry. We have also enjoyed working with youth clubs in North and East Belfast and with schools in Crossmaglen.

Our biggest goal was to develop and design a workshop toolkit to move the Belonging Project to its next stage. We received funding from the Arts Council NI in April 2015 that facilitated this for us. We worked with our interns from Northeastern and Queens University to modify, develop and finalise a toolkit that uses the stories from the Belonging Project to teach communities about identity, diversity and living together in harmony. The funding has also made it possible to run training for trainers for individuals from the Black and Minority Ethnic community who are interested in delivering workshops and displaying Belonging Project exhibitions in their communities. Thus far we have trained 10 individuals and will continue to do this until December 2015.

We believe that by taking this step in developing the project we are promoting and ensuring its sustainability. We feel that this is vital work as we now have over 100 voices from the migrant community in Northern Ireland sharing their experience of living here, by expanding the reach of the workshops we are enabling those voices to be heard.

This is a very exciting area of our work and it would not have been possible without the vision and dedication of our interns from Northeastern University. We would like to note a big thanks to Kendall Bousquet, Jasmine McGee and our current interns Sari Foundas and



Kevin Briskin whose term will finish in December 2015. We would also like to particularly thank Ellie Seymour of Queens University for her tireless efforts and work on developing and designing our toolkit.

## **Good Practice Plus**

Good Practice Plus is a project funded by the European Commission until 2016 to promote good practice in the support of hate crime victims by the prosecution and police services across 10 EU member states.

The project is led by NICEM and is delivered in partnership with the Migrant Centre NI, Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Ministry of the Interior Finland. We are very excited to be part of this project and the work thus far has already contributed to better links and innovation with the Criminal Justice System NI.

We have delivered two trainings thus far that included police officers from the PSNI, members of the Public Prosecution Service NI and representatives from the Department of Justice NI as well as police and prosecutors from an additional eight EU countries including Finland, Ireland, Estonia, Greece, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Belgium and Italy. These focused on developing national action plans to support the implementation of improved services in light of the EU Victim's Directive that comes into force this year.

The next activities will focus on a Community Event, Training for Policy Leaders, a Good Practice Seminar in February 2016 and a final conference in September 2016.

We are confident that this project will have a positive impact and development on support services for victims of racist hate crime and hate speech in Northern Ireland. We look forward to the continued work with our partners and the good practice and learning we can spread across the participating EU member states.

## **Future Directions**

The past year has been one of transition and learning. While we had to say goodbye to many of our staff we have been able to remain positive and steadfast in our work. Part of this was firming up our governance structures and rebranding, this resulted in our name changing to Migrant Centre NI. We felt that this better reflected the breadth and scope of our work, as well as, ensuring that migrants from any area of Northern would feel that our service was accessible to them.

We continue to look for funding strands that will allow us to meet the need of migrants who continue to struggle with access to health, welfare, education and housing. While our generalist services are currently available only in the North West area, we continue to recognise this as a priority area of work. We also continue to note that there are still no other providers that have funding to provide interpretation or bilingual staff for this area of advice. We continue to lobby the government to recognise the need for specialised knowledge and resources to deliver the correct and appropriate advice and advocacy for generalist needs of the migrant population.

Our work supporting victims of hate crime and incidents continues to be a foundation and priority in our services and strategic development. Our partnership with the PSNI and Victim Support NI to deliver these services has enabled them to grow from strength to strength. This has been bolstered by the Good Practice Plus project, which will help us plan for the future of these services. We also expect this area will expand under the new EU Victim's Directive requirements and we are playing a key role in how this is structured in Northern Ireland.

We continue to expand the Belonging Project and hope to see an increase in workshops delivered by our newly trained trainers. We are hopeful that over the next year the inspiring message of the Belonging Project will reach new communities and continue to have a positive impact on communities.

We are dedicated to growing the services over the next year and it is our hope that we will continue to serve the migrant communities within Northern Ireland and ensure that no one is denied access to advice and advocacy services when they are in need.

We continue to show appreciation to our management committee who have a bounty of knowledge and provide us with excellent direction.

### **Management Committee**

#### **Nominee**

#### **Organisation**

Arfawn Yasin

Advice NI

Kasia Garbal

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Pamela Dooley

UNISON

Gerard Morgan

East Belfast Independent Advice Centre

Nathalie Donnelly

UNISON Race Group

Patrick Yu

NICEM

#### **Advisory Members**

Gerry Tubritt

Ballynafeigh Community  
Development Association

We also want to thank our hard working staff and volunteers who continue to provide high quality advice and advocacy services to the migrant communities.

**Staff**

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Jolena Flett     | Advice and Advocacy Manager<br>(Part time)  |
| Liz Conor – Kerr | Hate Crime Advice Officer (Part-time)<br>from 1 December 2014                                 |
| Joanna Kubercyzk | Bilingual Support Worker (Part-time)  |
| Agnieszka Luczak | Bilingual Support Worker (Part-time)  |
| Aruna Djalo      | Hate Crime Development Officer (Part-time)<br>(August 2014 – contract ended in March<br>2015) |