

The Vincentian
Partnership for
Social Justice

Working for social
and economic
change tackling
poverty and
exclusion

Members:

The Society of
Saint Vincent de
Paul,
The Vincentian
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The Daughters of
Charity and
The Sisters of the
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Welcoming The Stranger

Christmas is a special time for welcoming the stranger. Who are the "strangers" in Ireland to-day? They are the 80,000 people who come each year in search of work, peace and security. Paul Surlis (*The Furrow, 2000*) reminds us that *"people deprived of familiar rootedness in family, culture, tradition and geography, deserve the next best thing which is welcome, hospitality, and compassionate concern in their new environment"*.

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ among us this Christmas the challenge for us is to do what we can to help our migrant workers , asylum seekers and refugees to feel welcome and respected.

This edition of JustNow focuses on some of the "strangers" in Ireland today.

Asylum-Seekers, Refugees and Migrant Workers

Emerchi's Story

Emerchi comes from Nigeria. She is a lone parent with four young children. The eldest child is fourteen and is attending secondary school. Two other children aged ten and seven attend primary school and the youngest is almost two. Emerchi came to Ireland eighteen months ago to escape inter-tribal feuding which put the lives of the family at risk and which caused the death of her husband. She is not allowed to work and is dependent on social welfare. She lives in rented accommodation. Some of her neighbours are friendly while others simply ignore her. "I feel so lonely away from my family and friends in my village in Nigeria. I have only a few friends here and they live on the other side of Dublin", she says. What will this Christmas be like for Emerchi? "I hope I won't be as lonely as I was last Christmas. I missed my family and friends in Nigeria very much". When she continued to speak about last Christmas, Emerchi remembers with pain having the door shut in her face when she called to wish a neighbour a "Happy Christmas". She also recalled the family across the street who saw what had happened and invited her and her family into their home for tea and Christmas cake.

Some General Points

1. According to the census of 2006, 420,000 foreign nationals, about 10% of the population, now reside in Ireland.
2. In 2006 work permits were issued to 48,000 migrant workers.
3. While migrant workers have added greatly to our economic prosperity, the task which the government now faces is how to best integrate them and their families into Irish society.

4. An important step towards this integration process was the election of Rotimi Adebare, a Nigerian national, as mayor of Portlaoise. "By allowing immigrants to participate in society, Ireland has accepted the first generation of immigrants. I think my election is a model that can be showcased throughout the world. What Ireland has done is very unique", he says.
5. The Irish government has recently appointed Conor Lenihan as Minister of State for Integration, the first ministry of its kind in Ireland. With 40% of immigrants claiming that they plan to settle permanently in Ireland, his role is to ensure that they are shown understanding and acceptance.

Asylum Seekers (4,314 in 2006)

Asylum seekers are people who are in the asylum process but have not yet been granted refugee status. They are people who have come to Ireland, applied to the Irish government for refugee status, and are waiting for a determination on their asylum application. 4,314 people sought asylum in Ireland in 2006. Some of these will either have been granted Refugee Status, others Temporary Leave to remain and some will have left the country.



Direct Provision: Asylum-Seekers living in hostel accommodation receive 'food and board' from the State and are given a weekly stipend of €19.10 for adults and €9.60 for children. Common problems facing these asylum-seekers are low income, isolation/boredom and difficulties accessing transport and services.

Refugees (627 in 2006)

Although the word "refugee" can be used as an umbrella term for all sorts of people who flee their home countries, Ireland's "refugees" are people who have been GRANTED refugee status, after going through the asylum process successfully. A refugee is a person, who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. Approximately 9,000 people have been granted refugee status in Ireland since 1996.

Family Reunification: Refugees can apply to the Government to be allowed bring their spouse and children into the country. The application process is difficult and long. It can also be financially demanding as applicants must secure papers (e.g. passports) for their family members and also pay an application fee (€60). It is usually up to the family to pay for flights also.

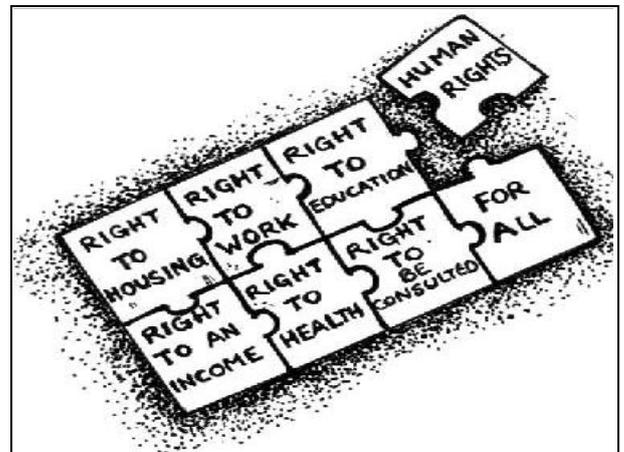
MIGRANT WORKERS

EU Citizens (130,000 PPS numbers issued in 2006)

EU Citizens may travel to Ireland without visas and may seek work here. This includes the 15 pre-enlargement States and the 10 accession states. Citizens of the recent EU member states - Romania and Bulgaria - may travel to Ireland without visas but may NOT work.

Access to Social Welfare: Prior to the enlargement of the EU the Government decided that while they would not prevent EU citizens from seeking work, they did place restrictions on access to social welfare.

In order to access social welfare migrant workers must be living in the State for two years. This is called the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC). The SVP and others lobbied the Government on the severity of this condition and there have been some small changes to ease the situation for those in most need. However, in order to receive some level of assistance the individual must have worked in Ireland. Otherwise the only possible assistance is a once off exceptional needs payment and assistance to return home.



What can we Do?

- Extend the hand of friendship to any foreign national that we know. Encourage our parishes to reach out to parishioners who are foreign nationals
- Make a financial contribution to any of the following: Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Vincentian Refugee Centre, Irish Refugee Council, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
- Contact the foregoing with a view to adding your voice to theirs.
- Remember migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in our prayers this Christmas.

Prayer and Reflection

Scripture Texts

You are no longer exiles or foreigners: you are citizens like all the saints and part of God's household
(Ephesians 2:19)

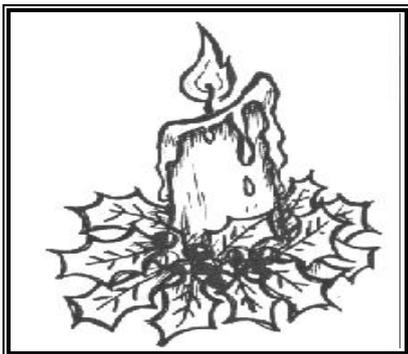
Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's house and line, in order to be registered with Mary his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.
(Luke 2:3-8)

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said
"Get up, take the child and his mother with you and escape into Egypt and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him". So Joseph got up and taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead.
(Matt.2:13-14)

Refugee Crisis

By holding up in caves,
Squeezing water from the rock
To stop their baby's thirst
By reading the stars
At night
They escaped
The massacre of innocents.
It doesn't say how they crossed the border into Egypt
If they were given entry as political refugees
Or if they had to bribe the customs men
Or climb a fence of thorns
That ripped their hands to shreds
Or if they had good neighbours where they lived
Or if they could make themselves understood.
And we know nothing of the stories Mary told her child
Of those months running from Herod's soldiers
Of the way she must have told him
About the milk and honey
Of their lost home
How to become invisible
Till a voice calls
You to return.

Eilish Martin



Happy Christmas to All Our Readers

Prayers for Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Lord Jesus, we come before you as we strive to walk with our dispossessed sisters and brothers in this, their time of agony and helplessness. You once sojourned among the homeless and rootless people of Israel. We come seeking you among the rootless people of today in the world's migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Enliven us with your Spirit that we may know how to respond to their great yearning to belong and to be accepted. Amen

Mary, as part of a refugee family going to Egypt, you knew flight. You knew fear. You knew loss and suffering. In your arms, hold close to your heart all displaced persons the world over. Help us to recognise their plight and support the work of providing them with safety, shelter, food, health care, education and respect for their human rights. Give us insight into the unjust systems and structures that are the root causes of the violence and suffering in their lives. In this way, may we join you in your compassionate embrace. Amen

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