

**Response from the MCW (Movement of Christian Workers) England  
to preparatory questionnaire for the European Seminar 2013**

**"Migration and social rights in Europe today and tomorrow"**

**Situation in the country:** changes in recent years, specific problems, reforms of laws concerning foreigners, emigration, integration etc society & church

**(In England the word Benefit or Welfare Benefit or State Benefit means money given by various government departments to those who are officially registered to receive it and meet a given criteria and for example are unemployed, disabled, older people, not enough income to pay for accommodation, food, etc.)**

**Migrants**

At a time of austerity measures, low growth, fewer fulltime paid jobs, closure of firms, cuts or freezing of wages, people not able to afford to meet bills etc and going into debt by taking out loans they cannot meet because of the high interest, growth in zero-rated hours of employment, high unemployment, closing 'Children's Centres' or cutting services which supported families particularly those in poverty or suffering as lone parents, domestic violence etc. it means that social rights and the gateway to them are needed more than ever.

Many of our Social Rights are being transformed because the criteria to receive them are being changed; the criteria are becoming stricter, more severe and harder to access.

Examples can be found in our health service, education and the welfare benefits paid to those who are unemployed, in social housing or facing hardship. In addition social rights are being amended because of cuts in funding either directly from central government or indirectly because of reductions in finance to local government and therefore the services provided in local areas (authorities).

- Issue:

- o As a consequence a lot of the allegations are being made against migrant workers e.g. "coming to steal our jobs; come to claim benefits; take advantage of the National Health Service"

situation of foreign workers

- Wages should be the same for all legal migrant workers as for all workers, however some are (only) paid the National Minimum Wage (NMW) i.e. £6.19 per hour. However, there are migrant workers earning even less than the NMW. Migrant workers earning wages less than the NMW are too scared to complain for fear of losing their jobs. Many of these workers come from

countries where there is little democracy and therefore poor wages paid i.e. less than what they are getting in the UK. Earning just £5.00 per hour allows them to send money to families back home.

- Particular to London as the Capital City - For those working in companies which have signed agreements between unions and the London Mayor, they could be earning the 2012 London Living Wage (LLW) which is £8.55 per hour. Some of these workers are earning up to £9.00 per hour. There are workers even in some major companies which have not agreed to the LLW and others in smaller companies.
- The concept of a Living Wage has roots in various cultural, religious and philosophical traditions. The modern UK Living Wage Campaign was launched by members of London Citizens in 2001. The founders were parents in the East End of London, who wanted to remain in work, but found that despite working two or more minimum wage jobs they were struggling to make ends meet and were left with no time for family and community life. The Living Wage is an example of communities, business, campaigners and faith groups coming together to find practical, non-statutory means to address working poverty and strengthen families. In 2005, following a series of successful Living Wage campaigns and growing interest from employers, the Greater London Authority established the Living Wage Unit to calculate the London Living Wage.
- Paying the Living Wage is a recognised sign of good practice in employment. An hourly rate set independently and updated annually. The Living Wage is a calculated according to the basic cost of living in the UK. Employers choose to pay the Living Wage on a voluntary basis. The London Living Wage is calculated by the Greater London Authority. Paying the Living Wage is good for business, good for the individual and good for society therefore positive.
- An independent study of the business benefits of implementing a Living Wage policy in London found that more than 80% of employers believe that the Living Wage had enhanced the quality of the work of their staff, while absenteeism had fallen by approximately 25%. Two thirds of employers reported a significant impact on recruitment and retention within their organisation. 70% of employers felt that the Living Wage had increased consumer awareness of their organisation's commitment to be an ethical employer. Following the adoption of the Living Wage turnover of contractors fell from 4% to 1%.

- The Living Wage affords people the opportunity to provide for themselves and their families. 75% of employees reported increases in work quality as a result of receiving the Living Wage. 50% of employees felt that the Living Wage had made them more willing to implement changes in their working practices; enabled them to require fewer concessions to effect change; and made them more likely to adopt changes more quickly. The London Living Wage is currently £8.55 per hour.
- Living Conditions: Approx. 50% of migrant workers are receiving housing benefits. They have no choice in the accommodation offered, and have to accept whatever state the accommodation is in. In 1998 (under New Labour Government), Carlos visited a migrant worker family of six who lived in a flat. The front door had no latch (could not lock). The building was in a state of near collapse. The walls were damp with black fungus all over, and smelling. The only toilet they had access to was an outside one which was also used by the general public.
- Nowadays, migrant workers are usually housed in very crowded estates in areas where drugs and gangs are rife. Stones are thrown through windows. The tenants dare not complain for fear of gang reprisals. The gangs terrorise the communities, especially if they are migrants. Even the police are scared of monitoring the gangs. Children are prone to be influenced by the gangs. Migrant workers residing in council properties experience long delays to have things repaired e.g. electricity failure. Private landlords are increasingly refusing to rent to people on benefits so housing is likely to become more difficult in the future.
- The parents have no choice as to where their children go to school. They just have to accept what is offered. Primary schools are generally OK. The problems are concerning the secondary schools.
- There are also instances where agencies are 'importing' people illegally to work on e.g. farms and house them in horrendous conditions. They could pay up to £40 per week in rent (or taken from their wage). They are transported in vans from the house to the farms and have to pay for transport.
- Health Service: The NHS is very good when you have acute problems. Otherwise the waiting list is long. It is now more frequent that people are asked about their residency in the country before being able to access Hospital treatment.

(dangerous conditions)

- Cleaning Industry: Normally there is no induction given. The supervisor ensures they speed up the work to save money for the boss. Workers are not educated regarding the use of chemicals and not supplied with masks. Workers often work two to three jobs for different employers and some start working at 3 a.m. These workers are mainly African or Latin American.
- Carlos gave his own example of when he worked for a company providing services for Royal Mail. They had to use chemicals without gloves. If the vacuum cleaner wires were worn i.e. the insulation was worn thin and potentially dangerous, workers were too scared to report these things for fear of losing their jobs.
- A large number of migrant workers work in the hotel industry. Workers can be exposed to dangerous conditions e.g. a dishwasher giving off vapors which they inhale, in a confined, hot space, with little or no air conditioning or ventilation.
- Agriculture: Workers work long hours, do not eat well and sleep in crowded conditions. Health & Safety regulations are not observed e.g. lighting. Workers cannot read the Health & Safety regulations because of a lack of English and here again would not complain for fear of losing their jobs. They are also reluctant to join trade unions for the same reason and then being deported.
- Construction: It is difficult to recruit migrant workers into trade unions due to them moving from site to site. Bosses in the construction industry 'boycott' militant trade union members with other employers. The majority of migrant workers are employed by agencies and as a result they do not have as much protection under the law, as locals have.
- Overview A big reason for migrant workers coming to the UK is because of multinationals' quest for bio-fuels e.g. huge landlords are cultivating large tracts of land for sugar for the bio-fuel industry in their homelands. The farming is machine-intensive, thus employing few workers. Lots of workers seek employment in countries like the UK.
  - o Government fines for organisations trafficking people illegally is not much of a deterrent e.g. approx. £5,000 and these fines are rarely imposed.
  - o Businesses thrive on the fear of the threat for losing their jobs that migrant workers live and work under. This along with the language problem gives employers much more control over their workforce.

- New migrants will be subject to the new rules under the new Immigration Bill being introduced.
  - o The Coalition government's Immigration Bill intends to clamp down on immigration, by making it more difficult for migrant workers to enter the UK. This bill is being criticised by the business community itself because it contradicts Britain's 'Open for business' policy, which of course means 'it's bad for businesses.
- A lot of the allegations made against migrant workers are untrue e.g. 'coming to steal our jobs; come to claim benefits; take advantage of the NHS
  - o Main political parties 'moving' to the Right to counteract 'popular' and populist rhetoric of other right-wing parties so migrants, immigration become more of a focus
  - o Language
- Austerity measures are being taken but the blame rather than being identified with the banking crisis some years ago and the risks taken through the sub-prime lending catastrophe and the global downturn is being associated with a simplified version that the last Labour Government over-spent and has left the country in debt. This last argument is the one that the majority of the population believe.
- This has meant that the current Coalition Government led by the Conservative Party has been able to justify the measures taken. However, the need and extent of the austerity is being used as a 'cover', an excuse, to hide their particular agenda to 'roll back the state'. The protecting of welfare and social rights and thus the people who depend on them are being attacked whilst those who have the financial means are being both protected and encouraged.
- It is important to note that with the Government sub-contracting out services that when things go wrong or the service is not adequate the anger is then directed at the organisation or agency contracted to deliver the service and therefore the Government can remain at a distance rather than seen to be responsible. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Cited Radio/Newspapers 14/05/13)
- In addition anger is directed at 'the other', each other, individuals who are deemed to be undeserving, those who are unemployed. Research/report recently identified "general trend" that 'the population accepts individual characteristics rather than societal issues causes poverty. The percentage of people voicing these views is much higher in this recession than previous two recessions. There seems to be a marked increase in the numbers holding this view by those who support the Labour Party (the supposed more left leaning of the 3 major political parties).
- The language of National Government in presenting their austerity changes and policy legislation is having a large impact and is being followed almost

unquestionably by the majority of the mass media. This language seeks and does divide and separate groups by scapegoating. The unemployed, the poor are unjustly blamed for the socio-economic situation that exists. Groups themselves then start justifying their situation in relation to others and the foundation of obstacles to a just society and evoking of solidarity is laid.

Examples of this are:

- Lack of fulltime jobs available yet blaming the unemployed or treating them as if they need a (stick) incentive to get them to find a job
  - Language used to divide the employed and unemployed has been 'workers and shirkers' a shirkers are 'idlers' they are lazy and prefer to stay in bed rather than work
  - People are referred to as either taxpayers or welfare recipients (they of course can be both but this rarely acknowledged) and it is only the taxpayer who has the right of option on how their public money is (mis)spent.
  - Some disabled people on popular/populist radio programme say we are deserving and cannot work whilst other are able bodied and can work so less deserving (despite the new assessments by private companies which have quotas and so many being found able for work when they are not)
  - Retired people same popular/populist radio programme say our pensions are not 'welfare benefits' as we paid our National Insurance so we are deserving etc etc. Within this kind of atmosphere it does not take too long to get to the migrants and their portion of blame for all our ills!
- The language, the creating of myths and maintaining these myths about migrants by all major political parties to a greater or lesser degree creates further and deeper divisions. Thus solidarity is weakened considerably and to some degree torn asunder between indigenous poor and migrants. Indeed well establish migrants with the right to be in the country also find fault with new migrants on the basis that the Country is too small and there are too many people arriving.
- Legal aid funds available to those who cannot afford their own representation has been cut. Justice may now not be part of access to our legal aid system. The firms covering legal aid will be chosen through contract bidding. It is likely to create a two-tier legal system. Organisations with the lowest bids will win the work but the pressure to get the case 'over and done' will be greater. The rich will continue to pay for good quality lawyers available whilst others may well get one where justice may not be the first or only criteria or none at all.
- Legal aid cuts will directly affect migrants The Migrants Network states that accessing legal aid remains vital for migrants and asylum seekers and for those who support them in ensuring that they can access justice. The current proposals include: withdrawing funding from a wide variety of legal issues, including most

- immigration cases; making the eligibility criteria for funding more stringent; and centralising access to legal aid through a telephone helpline. As a result more people will be expected to resolve their issues out of court or to represent themselves at court. For groups supporting migrants the changes could mean an increase in demand for their services, often on issues that require specialised knowledge and which they cannot provide.
- This extract taken from Guardian Newspaper – April 2013 The cut amounts to £350 million. Although the cuts formally come into force April 2013, their impact is already being felt. Some law centres have started charging clients' fees or turning them away.
  - New proposed Bill on Immigration includes new curbs on access for recent migrants to public services.
    - A duty on all private landlords to make sure tenants are in the UK legally – have to check papers.
    - new statutory guidance will be given to local authorities to ensure that people must have lived in the same area for between two and five years before they can be allowed on to a waiting list for social housing. At present local authorities are allowed to set their own qualification criteria but ministers say many choose not to do so.
    - Exemptions will be made for UK nationals who have to move for work reasons, or because of family breakdown, in addition to the protections that exist for members of the armed forces.
    - The Observer Newspaper quoted 95% of immigrants living in private rented accommodation, often of low quality. The greater problem was that employers often lured immigrants to this country by offering them places in low-grade houses, charging them extortionate rent, and then paying them unreasonably low wages that undercut the rate for local workers.
    - Prime Minister said in speech that 'New migrants should not expect to be given a home on arrival.' A 2 to 5 year residency test for new council and housing association tenants is being put in place.
      - Ironically reducing the entitlement of migrant households is unlikely to make much difference to the numbers on house waiting lists because almost anywhere in the country, the chances of a new migrant or anyone else presenting themselves at a housing office and immediately being offered a house are negligible. Second, new migrants are much more likely to be single or childless couples, who are unlikely to qualify either for an offer of a house or for homelessness provision. Third, migrants have to satisfy tests before they can get any sort of state help. Broadly, if they are from the European Union, they need to show they are 'habitually resident'. If they are from elsewhere, almost certainly they will have entered the UK on the basis that they will have 'no recourse to public funds', which means they

[www.rightsnet.org](http://www.rightsnet.org))

- This kind of misinformation makes good headlines is believed and poor indigenous families therefore see that they have not got a house (not because of a housing shortage but) because the new migrants are getting them instead!
- Cut in unemployment benefits for EU Nationals if not found paid work within a 6 month period and not able to prove they have been looking for work. These kinds of sanctions are taken already if they feel people are not genuinely looking for work.
- Ask people in the UK how many immigrants there are and they think around a 3<sup>rd</sup> (33%) of the population, which is “too many”. In fact it is more like 11.3% of the population were foreign born.
- Political and media language ‘infer’ that migrants are only coming here to (a) take our jobs (and notice the contradiction) (b) not work and take our benefits, they come for our free health service which they haven’t paid into and take our homes.
- Political parties are leaning more to the ‘right’ because they say that is what the people want, we need to listen to the voters – but there is also the responsibility to inform the voters not just react to their view.
- Liberal Democrats Political Party in England for many years supported an amnesty for undocumented workers – they are now part of the coalition Government and have suffered at the local elections – now saying they will no longer call for amnesty because they are listening to what the people say!
- Some newspaper headlines have been about the drop in migration numbers coming to Britain over the last 12 months. However there is concern, which gets much less publicity, that this drop is actually due in quite a significant way to foreign students not coming to British institutions.

## **Emigration**

- Home Office Report Nov 2012 – stats refer to varying years from 2010 onwards
  - Of those emigrating in 2011 43% were British Citizens whilst 57% were EU or non-EU citizens returning to their own country
  - The majority 72% left for work related reasons
  - About 33% left to take up definite jobs whilst 18% of the British Citizens, 34% of EU and 42% of non-EU left to look for work
  - The majority of British emigrating are of working age (89%)
  - A growing number of the British who left (48%) had held professional or managerial posts



- Majority are single and more likely to be male
- An estimated 4.7 million people born in UK live abroad, mostly in Australia, USA, Canada, Spain & Ireland
- 'The UK ranks 8<sup>th</sup> highest in the world in terms of the numbers of its nationals living abroad' (World Bank 2011)
- 'In comparison with other 'high income' OECD countries the UK had the largest 'stocks' living abroad (in terms of absolute numbers but not in terms of proportion of population).
- There appears to be an inverse association between British emigration and unemployment in the UK. .. as UK unemployment falls more British emigrate but when unemployment is high fewer British emigrate.
  - This may be about having fewer resources to fund move or an economic downturn in UK means there are also downturns in the places they tend to emigrate.

Church & (Society see language etc. above)

An Anglican cleric (Bishop of Dudley, David Walker) attacked the handling of crackdown on access to social housing as 'disproportionate' and exaggerating the negative impact of immigration, which he says is "wholly disproportionate" to the real threat. His remarks were on radio and TV with an article in one leading newspaper.

The bishop, who served on the board of the National Housing Federation and is a former chairman of South Yorkshire Housing Association, said: "The tone of the current debate suggests that it is better for 10 people with a legitimate reason for coming to this country to be refused entry than for one person to get in who has no good cause.' "Studies show that the vast majority of new arrivals to the UK enhance and enrich our society, both economically and culturally. The true threats to our national wellbeing lie not with those who come to visit or make their lives here but with the increasing gap between the rich and poor among us."

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby spoke out about changes to the benefit system. He said society had a duty to support the "vulnerable and in need".

His comments backed a letter in a Sunday Newspaper from 43 Church of England bishops criticising plans to limit rises in working-age benefits and some tax credits to 1% for three years. The letter called on politicians to "protect" children and families. The archbishop said a "civilised society" had a duty to support the vulnerable. "When times are hard, that duty should be felt more than ever, not disappear or diminish," he said. "These changes will mean it is children and families who will pay the price for high inflation, rather than the government," he said.

Catholic Archbishop spoke at mass for migrants (Feast of St Joseph the Worker). As far as is known this did not get any publicity or noted in most local parishes. He expressed concern for non-EU families as the migration policies put a strain on families and that policies should be more sensitively shaped.

Some parishes (may be more so in London) have welcomes organized so that new comers and new families into parishes. Schools would also play a vital part in integrating migrant families and children. Obviously this is harder within a political context that appears to be spreading negative messages.

**What work has your movement done to address this situation?** Political level, union, church, militants, challenges

The MCW's role is to support and sustain activists within political parties, trades unions or their local community. One particular example of an action of a member of the MCW to consolidate social rights is through his voluntary work with a trade union – Unite

- Marcus is volunteering to a project sponsored by the Unite trade union. UMWEP (United Migrant Workers Education Project) is a non-profit organisation aiming to implement an alternative education model to meet the true education needs of learners. Learners include Spanish speakers from Colombia and Ecuador and Portuguese speakers from Angola, Brazil and Portugal. They mostly work in the cleaning industry, some of whom work 2 hours in the morning cleaning offices and maybe another 2 hours in the evening. The majority received the national minimum wage of £7.08 per hour. These workers struggle to make ends meet on these wages. Their inability to speak English has an impact on their lives with regard to regulations in the workplace whether about Health & Safety or employment legislation to protect them. They are terrified of complaining about poor working conditions for fear of losing their jobs. They live precarious lives, ignorant of educational or health facilities that may be available to them and their children. They are exploited by greedy landlords. The project holds seminars on employment rights, regulations and possible alternative economic systems. Marcus teaches them English and also encourages them to take part in general protests and demonstrations against the cuts. Marcus explains his involvement by saying “ I .. see it as a real site of activism giving direct expression of my faith.”

The MCW try to raise awareness of societal issues and the need for solidarity through articles in newsletters, action of members, reviewing our lives together, using celebrations of May Day, Christ the King and National Meetings

The MCW can provide the forum to raise awareness of the need for or the work of these activists. With regard to migrants some individual members of the MCW

are part of groups, local and national, who work with or support migrants in various ways. These individuals are supported by their MCW Review of Life group.

Through the MCW Movement others can become aware of the work of these organisations for example a Birmingham Celebration of May Day 2013 gave the opportunity of one local organisation to give details of their work in trying to support via accommodation undocumented migrants trying to get permission to remain in the country.

- A booklet 'Facts & Fibs (lies) & Mayhem' (Refugee Action Charity) was circulated which was a simple guide to facts and figures about asylum seekers. It presented some of the sensational stories that had been given in the media or just passed around verbally as truths alongside the real situation of the asylum seekers' circumstances. It can help to allay fears and debunk myths.
- BIRCH (Birmingham Community Hosting Network) was invited to attend to speak about their work. One of the members acts as a volunteer host and provides short term accommodation to those who have found themselves destitute in their journey through the asylum process.
  - o Example to show that all is not easy even when process has seemingly finished. One woman who had accommodation in a comfortable house (a local woman put her up in her home) until she got her leave to stay and official papers then had to leave. She was told by the authorities that she had to have her own official address. Now although legal she lives in a privately rent flat on an estate that is run down, full of criminal activity and she is scared to go out. This feels like her one big step forward has become two big steps back. It illustrates the contradictory points made above about how, where and when migrants get housing accommodation.
- This is the kind of raising awareness action that can be replicated across and beyond Movements and organisations, in parishes, local areas etc so as to spread the word.
- Review of Life in groups. The NHS example of getting involved to fight against closure or cutting of jobs initiated by a review of life, and awareness raising and then a member going along to the union to get involved. Protests and demonstrations are also a way to express our voices. E.g. one group in England is currently involved in trying to fight the closure of a local hospital. It is a good example of action from members of the movement and involves churches together, faith groups, union involvement and individual MCW members.
- Not-for-profit ethos in its various forms and currently e.g. public service & provision like parts of the current NHS, some local government provision, mutual financial institutions like some 'Building Societies', credit unions etc., Co-operatives and some truly Social Enterprises
- Review of Life in groups. The NHS example of getting involved to fight against closure or cutting of jobs initiated by a review of life, and

- awareness raising and then a member going along to the union to get involved.
- Supporting activists or 'would be' activists to sustain them
  - Encourage, support their life engagement & inspiration of faith.

### **Challenges:**

Pressures on health, housing, school and local communities

Pressures on sharing scant resources and particularly at times of austerity and economic downturn

Pressures on families being split by migration

Understanding these issues and finding a way of sharing the burdens so that migrants can be welcomed and cared for

Taking from the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster homily - Understanding the challenges of those who come here, the challenges faced by those left behind and the challenges for the communities who have to find the resources to host them – complex but need to find the right way for all to gain with courage and generosity whilst opposing fear and pessimism

Challenge to find the right policies which do not 'pick on' or expect the most vulnerable or poor to carry the burden.

### **Bratislava declaration**

A common action on a set day with all MMTC Movements could be difficult. We are a small movement with limited resources. Individual groups do try and celebrate May Day / St Joseph the Worker as well as taking part in their network/contacts May Day Celebrations e.g. trades union movement marches. A couple of groups also come together to observe the Feast of Christ the King (moveable feast last Sunday before Advent e.g. 24 November 2013). Therefore some serious thought and discussion would have to be given as to how we could be involved with another 'set day' like the World Day for Decent Work on 7<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Presentation during the opening session**

3 illustrations sent

See: UK Border

Judge: Short passage from bible

Act: Action of MCW member