



**NATIONAL
CONVERSATION**

**DUNGANNON
REPORT
JUNE 2017**

CONTEXT

The National Conversation on Immigration visited Dungannon, a small town of around 16,000 people that falls within the Mid-Ulster district council area. The town has experienced some of the highest levels of migration in Northern Ireland, with the immigrant population of Dungannon increasing tenfold between 2001 and 2011. Those born outside the UK or Ireland are now estimated to make up about 11% of the town's population. The first arrivals in the early 2000s came from Portugal, including a number of Portuguese citizens of East Timorese, Brazilian or African origin, and more recently from Poland and Lithuania, recruited through agencies to work in the town's meat processing factory.

The area's economy has evolved from agriculture to an expanded food production industry. Many of the new arrivals are employed on poultry units and in the town's meat processing factory, where many jobs are low-skilled and low waged. Compared with comparable small towns in England, housing for these new migrants has not emerged as such a divisive and problematic issue in Dungannon. The South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP), set up in the Troubles to bridge sectarian divides, now runs Migrant Worker Support Project in the town, providing advice and information.

Community relations in Northern Ireland are complicated by sectarian politics. New arrivals are often settling into already divided communities which add another dimension to processes of integration. Comprising about 58% of the population, those who identify themselves as Roman Catholic are in a majority in Dungannon and its immediate environs. However, there is less segregation by religious and political tradition in this area compared to many other parts of Northern Ireland, with the graffiti and emblems that mark out sectarian divides largely not visible.

WHAT WE DID

A stakeholder meeting was held with representatives from local organisations in Belfast and the surrounding area, including some working in Dungannon. A list of these is available in the appendix of this report. We also met with a representative from a local integration and community relations organisation based in Dungannon, STEP. We asked questions about attitudes to migration in the local area, and the future policy approaches they wanted to see in relation to EU migration and non-EU migration. Questions also probed the changes that would be needed to achieve a consensus on immigration. The stakeholder group was also asked about the impact of migration in the local area, about integration issues that had arisen, and about policy changes that would better address issues that had arisen in the area.

Later, a citizens' panel was held with eleven members of the public recruited to represent a range of views on immigration, with the very hostile and very pro-migration filtered out through a pre-interview screening question. All panel members came from Dungannon and its immediate environs. As with other panels in Northern Ireland, participants reflected the range of Northern Ireland's political traditions and faith communities. Further demographic information about the group is given at the end of this report.

Basing our conversation on a discussion guide, the panel was asked questions about their views on the impact of immigration on the UK, Northern Ireland and their local area, EU and non-EU migration flows, and on their opinions about integration. The citizens' panel also looked at securing a consensus, with participants asked about what needs to change in order to gain their trust and broad support for how the Government handles immigration and integration.

This citizens' panel was also questioned about differences in attitudes to immigration between Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK.

KEY FINDINGS

Attitudes to immigration

The citizens' panel were asked 'on a scale of 1-10 do you feel that immigration has had a positive or negative impact on the UK, nationally and in your local community'. Their average score was 5.9, with a range of 3 to 10. Most people in the group were 'balancers', describing the benefits of migration, while at the same time suggesting that there are some negative impacts.

Our first panel in Northern Ireland largely felt that migrants had a positive economic impact on Dungannon and Northern Ireland as a whole. In particular, the arrival of migrants had helped the town's meat packing factory to stay afloat. There was an acceptance of migrants who had come to work and to improve their lives, with participants making reference to the Irish experience of emigration. At the same time, there was a resentment of those migrants that participants saw as taking advantage of welfare benefits.

"I'm leaning towards a positive side because of the diversity that's brought into Northern Ireland which hopefully will broaden people's minds, not narrow it as were. These are human beings coming into this country, I have no problem with them coming in to the country to work. I don't like the idea of anybody coming in to not do any work. They shouldn't get any benefits. But to me, if you work. No problem. This is what people in Ireland, Northern Ireland have done for years, you move to America to find yourself a better life. That's just what these people are doing coming here to better themselves" (Citizens' panel participant).

Dungannon is a small town whose population was, until recently, mostly white British and white Irish. As already noted, over the last 15 years it has seen rapid immigration and is now the town with the largest proportion of overseas-born residents in the UK. There were few concerns about cultural change, but some participants felt that this rapid migration had put additional pressures on the health service. A number of participants also felt that there was greater competition for places in popular schools, although this was countered a view that the arrival of migrants had prevented under-subscribed schools from closing.

"I feel that health wise and schooling wise there's an awful lot more strain on both those sectors, particularly health. I find going to A and E with a sick child and there's someone in front of you. There's a language barrier sometimes and they need an interpreter and that takes up more time and added wait in the likes of A and E. It's put a strain on the health service big time" (Citizen' panel participant).

Generally, the group agreed that migration was not something that they spoke about often, but instead had now become part of

everyday life in Dungannon.

“I think because we’re living in this area we just don’t notice it. But it’s if you go elsewhere they’re like ‘Oh Dungannon! That’s like Lithuania.’ But if we didn’t have the immigrant population that we have here, we wouldn’t have Dungannon meats, all the major industry that we have here which does support the town. And keeps shops in the town, keeps restaurants, keeps things going” (Citizens’ panel participant).

During this visit, we wanted to compare attitudes to immigration in Northern Ireland to those in mainland Britain. This is an issue that has not been explored in great detail, partly because there is little or no polling data from Ireland. Both the Dungannon panel and the stakeholders we met in Belfast felt there were some significant differences between the two places. They felt that there was often a little more sympathy to EU migrants in Northern Ireland, because many Irish people could relate to their own family and community experiences of emigration.

At the same time, stakeholders recounted incidents of physical violence against migrants in Dungannon, for example, stone-throwing and damage to their property. Some on the citizen’ panel, and local stakeholders felt that this took place because migrants were sometimes stranded between sectarian divides. The above social fractures were evident in Dungannon, where even within the citizens’ panel, the group dynamics were influenced by sectarian lines, causing some conflict between participants throughout the discussion.

EU migration

The panel was asked about the changes they would like to see the Government make after the UK leaves the EU, which promoted a lively discussion about Brexit, with Leave-supporting (and Unionist) participants disagreeing with those who had voted Remain. Some participants felt that solutions would eventually be found to deal with the UK-EU land border. Other panel members were anxious about Brexit, both from the perspective of the economy and the peace process. The arrangements that might be put in place to police the land border could inconvenience those who frequently travel between the North and the South and might jeopardise the peace process. Participants were also worried that Northern Ireland’s fragile economy would suffer damage and that investment in infrastructure would decrease after the UK left the EU.

- *“It’s breaking the Good Friday Agreement which so many had to die for. And it shouldn’t be broken. I feel like everyone just agreed on it and it, they’re just going ahead and breaking it.”*

- *“There’s plenty of things that have been agreed on but broken in Northern Ireland.”*

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- *“Oh, now were bringing politics into it no?”*
 - *“They’re talking about the border and I’m just saying that the border shouldn’t be there.”*
 - *“At the end of the day we are two separate countries, regardless. So at the end of the day we have to go with what Westminster thinks is suitable. What’s the difference in Switzerland and the countries round them? They’re not in the EU. And Norway and Sweden, there has to be an agreement there. So they can make an agreement for here as well. Everybody thinks that Northern Ireland is a special case. I think Northern Ireland has moved on from being a special case.”*

(Conversation between two Citizens’ panel participants)

Participants were very clear that EU nationals who live in Dungannon must be allowed to stay and should have their status guaranteed as soon as possible.

Half of the citizens’ panel stated that they would like to retain freedom of movement rules for EU citizens. The proximity of the Irish land border and the greater propensity for those from Ireland to emigrate compared with other parts of the UK influenced participants’ choice. Retaining freedom of movement keeps future migration options open for UK nationals who might want to live in the EU. The remainder of the panel wanted to see the same restrictions for EU as non-EU migrants. Participants generally had little knowledge of what these restrictions entail, although there was a clear consensus that migrants should be allowed into the UK so long as they are contributing economically and that background criminal record checks screened out those whose presence was undesirable. Worries about crime and security were raised at times in the discussion explicitly in relation to recent terror attacks on London and Manchester.

Non-EU Migration

Generally panel members had few concerns about migration from outside the EU, but there was also little understanding of restrictions currently in place for this group.

Asylum seekers and refugees

Generally, participants showed sympathy towards asylum-seekers and refugees. However, there was a lively discussion around the spontaneous arrival of asylum-seekers in the UK. Some participants felt that asylum-seekers were attracted to the UK because of the generosity of its benefits, although this was disputed by other panel members.

“Why do they want to come to the UK? They’re fleeing war, like. Their house has been blown up. There’s nothing left, they have to go somewhere.”

“If you get to Greece then why travel all that with your children again?” (Citizens’ panel participants).

Border control

Attitudes towards border control are complicated in Dungannon given the land border shared between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Some were confused as to what ‘border control’ actually entailed for Northern Ireland.

“Do you mean borders as in UK borders? As in the Republic’s borders? Or the general European borders?” (Citizens’ panel participant).

As a politicised issue, discussions about the Irish border caused some friction, as indicted above. There were clearly anxieties in the group about the future of the peace process should there be a ‘hard’ border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Generally, participants felt that controls at airports were good, but the UK’s land and sea borders were porous, allowing in clandestine entrants and refugees. Panel members debated whether there could be better systems to manage the large-scale movement of refugees and migrants, as has been seen across Europe. One panel member suggested *“designated crossing points”* at borders, where asylum applications could be processed. Images of the migration flows across Europe during the Refugee Crisis shared on news and social media had clearly impacted how some participants perceived border controls.

“The people that are coming from the EU, from Eastern Europe, are flying into this country – trying to do the thing right, so they are. The people that are coming from the Middle East are barging their way in to every country, so they are. And that’s what’s happened on TV because we’ve seen it. We’ve seen Slovenia, we’ve seen Hungary having to put border controls right around their country because these people are barging through” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Participants were asked if they would be willing to pay a little more through taxation to improve border control. Almost everyone was unwilling to do this, as it was felt that the Government already wasted money.

Numbers

The panel voted on whether they wanted different types of migration to be increased, reduced or remain about the same. The panel were generally comfortable with current rates of migration and the majority of the group wanted to increase rates of high-skilled migration from the EU and of seasonal migrant workers employed in farms, food factories and hotels. In rural areas and towns that depend on tourism we have often found that there is support for increasing the number of seasonal workers.

Impact of migration

Immigration to Dungannon was seen to have a positive impact on the local economy, with the money that migrant workers brought to the town having a trickle-down effect, keeping local businesses going.

“What would this town be? What would this town have if we didn’t have the people coming to work here? You’d have no-one. You’d probably have no employment” (Citizen’s panel participant).

The impact of immigration on school places has been a point of tension in many areas visited by the National Conversation. In Dungannon there was a different discussion on schools. As noted above, some participants felt migration had led to shortages of school places in Dungannon, but others feeling that the arrival of migrants had halted the closure of rural schools.

Participants were also questioned about the impact of migration on the local housing market. In contrast to March in the Cambridgeshire Fens, an area we had previously visited with similar experiences of rapid migration, the Dungannon panel had few concerns about the impact of migration on housing. In March, over-crowded and neglected housing rented to migrants was fuelling some of the tensions in that town. But there was sufficient accommodation to house new arrivals in Dungannon, who had not clustered in specific parts of the town. The private rental sector appeared to be better regulated than in England, and anecdotes about over-crowding were not raised by this panel. Overall, private rental housing had not become an issue of conflict in Dungannon.

Integration

Most people on the citizens’ panel felt that community relations were good in Dungannon and people from different backgrounds generally got on. However, we were also told about incidents of hate crime against migrants, for example, stone-throwing and damage to their property.

There were some worries on the citizens’ panel that language barriers prevented some migrants from integrating, although participants also told us about neighbours and work colleagues who had learned English and were well integrated into the life of the town.

“They’re even playing Gaelic, our sport. They’re mixing and wanting to be in the community” (Citizens’ panel participant).

Some stakeholders felt that English language provision was not flexible enough to cater for migrants who worked long hours, and wanted more flexible English classes to be made available. Many new arrivals in Dungannon are Roman Catholic and attend local church services, but for the citizens’ panel the religion of

migrants was not seen as having a strong influence on their ability to integrate. At the same time, we were told that sectarian divides can put new arrivals in a difficult position because they lack local cultural knowledge.

Stakeholders from a local integration organisation explained their work in Dungannon, which began in the 1990s before the Good Friday Agreement. It was thought that the efforts made in Northern Ireland to unite a divided local community created a culture that was more receptive to integrating new migrants. Another stakeholder in Belfast told us that she considered international migration to have had a *“genuine levelling effect on identity and conflict in Northern Ireland”* and given a broader context *“beyond orange and green”*.

Public trust in the Government to deliver immigration policy

The citizens' panel was asked about the changes they would like to see brought in to enable greater confidence in the immigration system. Participants wanted systems in place to make sure that migrants who came to the UK were working and paying taxes. Other key demands were criminal record checks and the greater vetting of would-be migrants.

“Anybody who is in the country at the moment, any foreign national who has come in and working, I have no problem with them being here. But anyone who wants to come in after Brexit, they should have had sponsorship and they must be working. No benefits for anyone who is not going to work” (Citizens' panel participants).

CONCLUSIONS

Dungannon has experienced rapid migration, mostly of EU nationals, including many Portuguese citizens of East Timorese, Brazilian and African heritage. Most of these new migrants are working in poultry production and meat processing, and without them, the economic viability of these two industries would be under question.

Although migrants now make up over 11% of Dungannon's population, the town has not experienced some of the tensions of equivalent towns in England and Wales. Local housing conditions may have contributed to better community relations. In Dungannon there is sufficient housing stock to accommodate new migrants who are not clustered in particular areas. Conditions in the private rental sector are better than in similar towns in England and there is evidence of better regulation of this sector. This again highlights the centrality of housing conditions as a factor that influence community relations.

Appendix

List of Stakeholders who we met in Belfast and Dungannon

Ballymena Intercultural Forum

Barnardos

Belfast City Council

Chinese Welfare Association

Gems Northern Ireland

Indian Community Centre

North Ireland Centre for Racial Equality

STEP (South Tyrone Empowerment Project)

Demographics of citizens' panel

Gender	Age	Occupation	Religion	Ethnicity
Male	38 years	Machine Operator -D	Protestant	White British
Female	50 years	Administrative Assistant – C1	Roman Catholic	White Irish
Male	44 years	Retired	Protestant	White British
Male	60 years	Retired	Protestant	White British
Female	32 years	Support Worker – C1	Roman Catholic	Lithuanian
Female	53 years	Clerical Worker – C1	Protestant	White British
Female	42 years	Accountant - B	Protestant	White British
Male	19 years	Student	Roman Catholic	White Irish
Male	42 years	Blind fitter - D	Roman Catholic	White Irish
Male	61 years	Postman	Roman Catholic	White Irish
Female	58 years	Unemployed	Protestant	White British

About

The National Conversation on Immigration is a project run by British future and HOPE not hate.

British Future

British Future is an independent, non-partisan thinktank seeking to involve people in an open conversation which addresses people's hopes and fears about identity and integration, migration and opportunity, so that we feel confident about Britain's Future.

We want to ensure that we engage those who are anxious about cultural identity and economic opportunity in Britain today, as well as those who already feel confident about our society, so that we can together to identify workable solutions to make Britain the country we want to live in.



HOPE not hate

HOPE not hate uses research, education and public engagement to challenge mistrust and racism, and helps to build communities that are inclusive, celebrate shared identities and are resilient to hate.

Hate is often the consequence of a loss of hope and an articulation of despair, but given an alternative, especially one that understands and addresses their anger, most people will choose HOPE over hate.

Our job is to expose and undermine groups that preach hate, intolerance and division whilst uniting communities around what they have in common.

We aim to take a part in building a society that celebrates rather than scapegoats our differences.

