Following the success of the Launch of Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership hosted by Junior Ministers from OFMDFM in October, NISMP began work on establishing sub-groups and responding to relevant consultations.

The third board meeting—the final of 2011—was held on the 18th of November. After the meeting, Board Members met with managers of strategic migration partnership managers from other regions. The presentations provided insight into the workings of SMPs in other regions, sharing best practice and warning of potential pitfalls.

In December, the four sub-groups of the NISMP began their work. The groups include Integration and Social Cohesion, Economy, Skills and the Labour Market, Welfare and Public Services, and Partnership Opportunities. Each group has begun devising work plans for the coming year as well as agreeing terms of reference and membership.

The Partnership submitted evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee on the impact of Tier 2 migration and associated policies. Key issues covered in the response were the need for specialists in certain sectors in Northern Ireland, and the importance of recognising areas where regional need might not be consistent with overall policy. Emphasis was placed on the particular sectors in which recruitment of non-EEA nationals has had a positive impact on the local economy.

There have been some significant changes from UKBA in the past few months. The COMPASS process has moved into another phase, and evidence collection has begun on the impact of the first round of changes to immigration policy. Some of the key issues which will potentially impact Northern Ireland are outlined here.

**A2 Restrictions:**

The restrictions on A2 Nationals (those from Bulgaria and Romania) have been extended until January 2014 after UKBA made the case that there is significant unrest to the labour market. This will be the final period of extension for this group of EU migrants.

**COMPASS:**

The preferred bidders have been selected and the process for transition of housing and transport arrangements for Asylum Seekers...
UKBA Update (cont’d)

Strategic Migration Partnerships have been identified as having a role in hosting consultations events with preferred bidders during the transition period. Key messages on the COMPASS transition have been identified by UKBA. They include minimising impact on service users, maintaining working relationships with local service providers, and early consultation on key issues.

Biometric Residence Permits
In an effort to streamline documents issued to foreign nationals for evidence of immigration status, biometric residence permits (BRPs) are being incrementally rolled out across the UK. This is subject to UK Parliamentary approval of draft regulations and will apply to all applicants from within the UK applying for permission to stay for more than 6 months from 29 February 2012. These permits will be issued by specified post offices, of which there will be two in Northern Ireland—in Belfast and Ballymena.

Policy in Northern Ireland

There have been a number of relevant policy areas being raised or directly addressed at an Assembly level in recent months. In October the OFMDFM committee heard feedback from consultants on the consultation responses to the draft Cohesion, Sharing and Integration document. Work is currently underway for a ministerially-led group on the strategy and its implementation. CSI will be linked with the new Racial Equality Strategy, which is being drafted at present with the support of the Racial Equality Panel. NISMP is represented on the Racial Equality Panel by several Board Members.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is undergoing a policy review in the New Year, including revised guidance on providing social services to those individuals subject to immigration control. The Welfare Subgroup of NISMP will be feeding in to these consultations. Parties interested in this contribution should contact Bethany Bradley for more information.

Work will begin in the New Year on a new Community Safety Strategy, and NISMP will be working with DoJ on the role of the Partnership in Community Policing Partnerships.

Policy in Northern Ireland (cont’d)

The Department of Finance and Personnel has recently released draft statutory guidance on Forced Marriage, part of which has been issued as a result of the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007. The guidance is aimed at statutory service providers and those involved in child protection in Northern Ireland. A copy of the guidance can be found on the DFP website.

The Policing Board held a special public meeting in November dedicated to the issue of human trafficking. Superintendent Philip Marshall presented evidence to the Policing Board and highlighted the need to prioritise tackling of human trafficking in Northern Ireland within the PSNI. Supt. Marshall also placed an emphasis on public attitude change towards the issue of human trafficking, particularly for the purposes of the sex trade.
Local Government

NISMP has local government representation through 5 Council Members who sit on the Board. The Partnership is supported by the lead Partner Agency, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, which also provides Secretariat to the Partnership through the NISMP Policy Officer (Bethany Bradley) and management support through the Head of Strategic Partnerships, Ken Bishop. The Partnership also benefits from the involvement of a group of Good Relations Officers from councils across Northern Ireland. These GROs attend board meetings as informal observers, and contribute to relevant sub-groups.

NISMP has recently been involved in the establishment of issue specific training through UKBA and the GRO to support registrars in dealing with the issue of 'sham marriages.' The secretariat has also given presentations to the NILGA Mayors and Chairs meeting on the importance of the Partnership in planning and community development on a local government level, and will continue to engage with local government on relevant issues throughout the process of local government reform.

European Policy

The EU has highlighted a number of migration-related issues as priorities in their recent workplan. Improvements of access to freedom of movement for migrant workers within the EU, and discussion of the 2012 enlargement package prior to the accession of Croatia were at the top of the list. Some of the most pertinent issues to the UK and Northern Ireland are outlined here:

Statistics
Plans are underway for an improved, standardized method for the collection, collation and dissemination of migration statistics and vital events.

Borders
There is to be a review of external border checks, changes to the IT systems involved in the Registered Traveller Programme, and review of the Schengen Borders Code

Advancing Roma Integration
The first annual report of the European Commission will assess the national Roma integration strategies that member states must have submitted by the end of 2011.
Further detail is available on all of these issues through the NISMP Secretariat.

Activities and Events

NISMP Board Meeting—January 27th, North Down

The next meeting of the Northern Ireland Strategic Migration Partnership will be held on the 27th of January in North Down.

NILGA Conference and Local Gov Awards—February 23rd, Hilton Templepatrick

The conference and local government awards, “Positively Local” will include VIP addresses from OFMDFM, DoENI. For info contact Mark Maher at m.mahar@nilga.org.

NISMP Community Engagement Event—March

This one day event will provide a space for discussing the importance of communities in the integration of migrants. Guest speakers from both community and public sectors will talk about cross-sector partnership working.
NISMP works across the spheres of government in Northern Ireland and with other key stakeholders to ensure that Northern Ireland is a welcoming place for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and to support the retention and integration of people in a way that helps meet skills and labour needs to support future economic growth.

Follow us on Twitter @MigrationNI
Like us on Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/pages/Northern-Ireland-Strategic-Migration-Partnership/321959754497538

For More information contact
Bethany Bradley b.bradley@nilga.org

We’re on the Web!
www.migrationni.org

Community Feature: Embrace

EMBRACE is an inter-church organisation which began as a support group for refugee and asylum seekers in 2001. The organisation now provides a substantial amount of information on issues related to migration and ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland, provides guidance on inclusion of these communities to churches in the region and helps support faith communities in making churches more welcoming places for new migrant communities.

Embrace publishes an annual update on migration issues. This comprehensive report outlines the key issues facing migrant, asylum and refugee communities in Northern Ireland, policy and legislative developments, and data on migration in Northern Ireland.

For more information about Embrace, see their website at www.embraceni.org or contact Jill Mars at info@embraceni.org

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