



BECOMING CULTURALLY COMPETENT

GUIDELINES FOR
INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS,
WORKING WITH VULNERABLE
MIGRANTS

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**The publication contains case studies on experiences of migrants
living in Ireland (North and South)**

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TERMINOLOGY

ASYLUM SEEKERS

An asylum-seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is defined as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds which exists, existed, may exist in the future or is imputed to the person concerned.

BIASES

Inclination of prejudice and discrimination for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unjust or unfair. Research has shown that biases exist and impact honest and dedicated examiners, professionals and service providers. It is the duty of everyone in power to provide services that ensure equality and justice to all.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Thoughts or feelings that you are not aware of, that influence your judgement. These biases are rooted in your preference for or against something.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults (e.g. -Your English is so good, "When I look at you, I don't see colour." "I'm not a racist. I have several minority friends")

TERMINOLOGY

RACISM

A System of dominance, power and privilege based on racial group designations.... where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behaviour that have the intent or effect of leaving non-dominant group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status and or equal access to societal resources. (Harrell, 2000)

INDIVIDUAL RACISM

Occurs when individuals discriminate against persons of other ethnic groups in society.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

occurs when the institutions of society (economic, political, educational, and cultural) discriminate against specific ethnic groups and where these institutions allow individual racism to occur unchecked and reinforce negative racist stereotypes. Also includes all the laws, policies, ideologies and barriers that prevent people from experiencing justice, dignity and equity because of their racial identity.

REFUGEES

Refers to anyone who fled war, violence conflict or persecution and crossed an international border to find safety in another country. In other words, refugees are the people who are not unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

TERMINOLOGY

MIGRANTS

Migrant (International Migrant) refers to “any person who is outside a State of which they are a citizen or national. For AkiDwA the term ‘Migrant’ includes not only recent immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, but also migrant workers, students, the trafficked and undocumented. It also includes those who have acquired Irish citizenship but who still consider themselves to be outside the mainstream society in terms of their linguistic, racial or cultural backgrounds, and who therefore still define themselves as migrants.

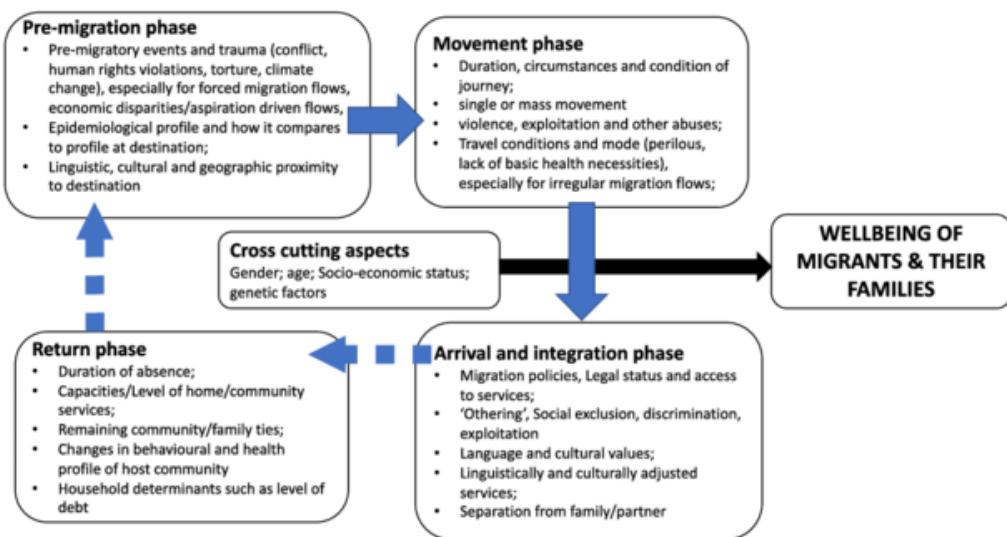
DIRECT PROVISION CENTRES OR ACCOMMODATION CENTRES

In Ireland, asylum seekers usually live in direct provision centres, also called accommodation centres. These are usually communal institutional centres, former hotel or mobile homes style settings, intended to provide for the basic needs of people who are awaiting decisions on their applications for international protection. A direct provision and dispersal policy was unofficially introduced by the Irish government in November 1999, without consultation of the Irish communities hosting the accommodation centres or the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) supporting individuals seeking asylum. On 10 April 2000, direct provision and dispersal became official Irish government policy. The system has been criticised by human rights organisations as being illegal, inhumane, and degrading. In Northern Ireland, asylum seekers are accommodated in hostels, mainly in Belfast. Asylum seekers live in these accommodation centres until their applications are processed—this could be from 3 years to 10 years for some applicants of international protection.

TERMINOLOGY

MARGINALISATION TERMS

Migrants are often faced with various marginalising practices including being described as newcomers, new communities, non-nationals, non-Irish, foreign nationals, minorities and similar words that enhance the discrimination against them and frame their issues as insignificant. Marginalising practices including stereotyping services that adopt a generalisation approach without meeting the personal demands. For example, the assumption that all migrant women are being abused or all migrant men are lazy and refuse to work, etc. These marginalising terms and practices are considered as human rights violations. Psychologically, it is very hurtful and can result in psychological trauma. Socially, it deepens racism and discrimination against migrants.



Ref. Factors influencing health and wellbeing of migrants and their families along the phases of migration
(source: Wickramage Kolitha 2018)

INTRODUCTION

MIGRATION

People continue to move around the world consistently. The right to freedom of movement is enshrined in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country. There were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates to 3.6 per cent of the global population. Migration erodes traditional boundaries between cultures, ethnic groups and languages, and adds to diversity, Cultural and economic richness. While migration can be an empowering process, it's also a challenging experience for some people leaving familiar surroundings (Home) for the unfamiliar (Homeless) can be devastating. Majority move with hope for a better life, some are traumatised before migrating, trafficked and those coming from conflict zones are among the most vulnerable, often dependent on their own networks, feeling dislocated with challenge to relocate, they are hampered with isolation and with challenge to belong. Quite often inadequately prepared for cultural shock with difficulty in adjustment and integration, depend on their own networks for survival if they are lucky to identify any in their country of destination.

While fleeing to safety or in the process of migration in search of a better life, women and girls are often confronted with trafficking, forced marriage, sexual and gender-based violence, and gender based or racist discrimination. Women and girls may also be reluctant to speak about their experiences in front of male interviewers or male interpreters and procedures may not take proper account of children's perspectives and experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Culture may affect how individuals cope with problems and interact with each other. What is assessed as behaviourally appropriate in one culture may be assessed as problematic in another. An accepted practice in one culture may be prohibited in another. To fully understand and appreciate these differences, individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants must be familiar with varying cultural traditions and norms. Clients' cultural backgrounds may affect their help-seeking behaviours. The ways in which social services are planned and implemented must be culturally sensitive and responsive to client needs to be effective. Cultural competence builds on the profession's ethics and values relative to self-determination and individual dignity and worth and embraces the practices of inclusion.

MIGRATION DEMOGRAPHIC IN NORTH AND SOUTH OF IRELAND

According to the CSO press statement in 2021, there were 645,500 non-Irish nationals' resident in Ireland, about one in eight (12.9%) of the total population. Report also shows over 50% of migrants have attained a third level qualification. According to the Northern Ireland Official Publications archive, the migrant population in Northern Ireland in 2011 comprised almost 120,000 people representing just over 6.5% of the population. This number excludes those who were born in the rest of the UK. Northern Ireland experienced net inward migration between 2001 and 2016, with the most common reasons for international immigrants moving to Northern Ireland been work, family and education

BACKGROUND

AKINA DADA WA AFRICA-AKIDWA

Akina Dada wa Africa-AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. Established in 2001, AkiDwA's mission is to promote equality and justice for migrant women living in Ireland with the vision of a just society where there is equal opportunity and equal access to resources in all aspects of society, social, cultural, economic, civic and political. AkiDwA promotes the equality of migrant women in Irish society, free of gender and racial stereotyping.

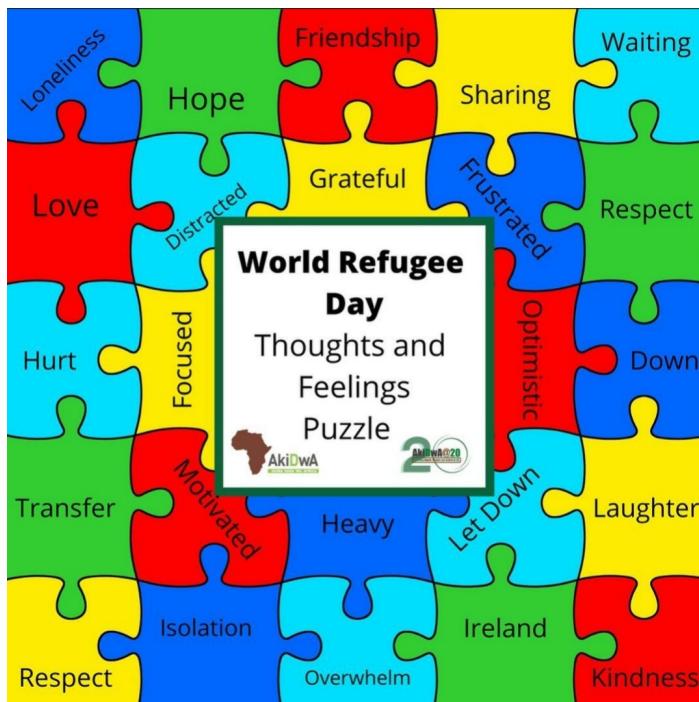
Over the past two decades, the organisation has gained recognition as a leading NGO for highlighting the issues faced by migrant women in Ireland. The organisation applies a holistic approach to integration, promoting a migrant and gender-specific approach to public services as well as encouraging migrant women's access to mainstream services and initiatives. The organisation employs three key strategies to achieve its objectives, networking, research and policy work and capacity building. In order to provide meaningful support to migrant women and to ensure self-reliance, AkiDwA works with migrant women to develop their capacity for participation and representation in their communities, in decision making structures and in accessing services support and through training, psychosocial support, consultation, focus groups and information provision.

Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland (HAPANI) was established in 2011 by a group of dedicated volunteers in response to a clear demand for support for refugees, asylum seekers, individuals and families from the HoA and beyond who are living in North Ireland. HAPANI ethos of social inclusion – empowering those who are socially, financially, or physically vulnerable in order to promote individual well-being and harmonious communities. collaborating with individuals and organisations for the benefit of service users and their communities. Our commitment is to connect, support and empower asylum seekers in North Ireland. We also offer direct support for HAPANI youth who would otherwise be deprived of the right to education, training and personal development.

Toolkit - Becoming Culturally Competent

In August 2021, AkiDwA received funding from the Community Foundation of Ireland to implement a project-Sharing is Caring in partnership with Hapani. This is a partnership project funded under all Island North/South programme with aim to strengthen and build relationships. Sharing is Caring project held four exchange and learning visits in Dublin and Belfast, and an online conference was held at the end of the project. The project while empowering participants with information and training through discussions also produced this toolkit *Becoming Culturally Competent* for individuals and service providers working with vulnerable migrants.

This toolkit aims to provide guidance to serve the best interest of men, women and children from diverse backgrounds. It allows service providers to support diverse clientele enabling them to improve their support and services.



BECOMING CULTURALLY COMPETENT



- Cultural competence
- Self-awareness
- Cultural Knowledge
- Cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs and practices
- Cultural Skills
- Support Systems
- Language and communication



CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Can be described as the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own. It aims to enable service providers and clients to interact with each other. Becoming culturally competent involves understanding one's own culture first to understand another's cultures. The current diversity within our society requires deep understanding and sensitivity that involves positive attitude toward differences, readiness to accept and respect to different cultures and practices. This helps to reduce the risks of misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and unconscious biases.



SELF-AWARENESS

Cultural competence requires individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants to examine their own cultural backgrounds and identities in order to increase awareness of personal assumptions, values, stereotypes, and biases. The individual self-awareness of their own cultural identities is as fundamental to practise as their informed assumptions about clients' cultural backgrounds and experiences. This awareness of personal values, beliefs, stereotypes, and biases informs their practice and influences relationships with clients. Individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants must also be aware of occupying a role of privilege and power by the nature of their professional role and cultural identities and must acknowledge the impact of this privilege and power on oppressed populations. Cultural competence includes knowing and acknowledging how fears, ignorance, and on racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, ageism, xenophobia and class. Individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants need to be able to move from being aware of their own cultural heritage to becoming aware of the cultural heritage of others.



CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants must develop specialized knowledge and understanding that is inclusive of, but not limited to, the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions such as race and ethnicity; immigration and refugee status; ethnic groups; religion and spirituality; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; social class; and mental or physical abilities of various cultural groups. Everyone is part of multiple cultures, therefore the need to understand the impact of culture on behaviour, attitudes, and values. There is a need to possess specific knowledge and understanding of historical experiences, immigration, resettlement patterns, individual and group oppression, adjustment styles, socioeconomic backgrounds, and life process. Cultural education begins with individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants understanding their own roots and cultures, and with such a sense of grounded identity, they can learn and value others. Learning about other cultures helps dispel negative stereotypes and personal biases about different groups.



CULTURAL, SPIRITUAL, AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Migrants come from a diverse range of cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs and practices. Individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants need to expand their understanding of cultural religious traditions, spiritual belief systems. It is important to note that Cultural, spiritual and religious beliefs and practices can impact on many things for individual which include, participation, use of and access to support and services, becoming culturally competent means individual and groups are providing support and services to individuals, that is tailored to their needs and that takes into account the unique cultural, spiritual and religious factors.



CULTURAL SKILLS

Individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants should have skills in cross-cultural practice including the ability to convey and communicate authenticity, genuineness, empathy, and warmth and to engage culturally relevant community resources. They must demonstrate the ability to critique and assess policies and research for cultural appropriateness, sensitivity, relevance, and inclusiveness, to ensure that outcomes benefit client groups or populations. This includes engaging client groups in the design of policy and research.



SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants must effectively use clients' natural support systems in resolving problems, e.g., traditional healers, religious and spiritual leaders, families of choice and other community resources. Organisations representing migrants including migrant led groups and leaders should also be in the forefront working with men, women, and children from migrant communities.



LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION

Language is a source and an extension of personal identity and culture and, therefore, is one way that individuals interact with others in their families and communities and across different cultural groups. Individuals and groups have a right to use their preferred language.

It is important to ensure there is effective communication with clients of all cultural groups, including people of limited English proficiency or low literacy skills, people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people with disabilities. Written communication should be provided in the language and at the literacy level appropriate for the intended audience.

Individuals and groups providing support need to provide services in each client's preferred language or to seek the assistance of professional interpreters they need to communicate respectfully and effectively with clients from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

PRINCIPLES SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE MIGRANTS

Individuals and groups working with vulnerable migrants must work towards ensuring provision of meaningful services, ensuring they are applying key principles, critical to the safeguarding of vulnerable migrants. These includes:

Human Rights: All persons have a fundamental right to dignity and respect. Hence the importance of providing opportunities for individuals that will expand their relationships and promote community inclusion. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights articulates fundamental rights and freedoms for all. The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on 10 December 1948. The declaration declares that human rights are universal, to be enjoyed by all people, no matter who they are or where they live. All universal human rights commonly known as 30 basic human rights must be respected and protected.

Person Centeredness: This principle places the person as an individual at the heart and centre of any exchange concerning the provision or delivery of a service. It is a dynamic approach that places the person in the centre and empowers the person to participate in an informed manner in the exchange. Treat people with respect, dignity, and compassion and enable them to recognise and develop their ability, strengths and abilities for an independent and fulfilling life.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality is about privacy and respecting someone's wishes. It means that individuals and groups providing support and services should not share personal details about someone with others unless that person has said they can or it's necessary. People accessing services must be secure in the knowledge that all information about them is managed appropriately. Individuals and groups providing services and support must retain and ensure high level of confidentiality.

Empowerment: Empowerment can be developed by being respectful and non-judgemental, building a relationship where the person feels comfortable to discuss their feelings and what they want, focussing on strengths and abilities, supporting and encouraging involvement in decision making and respecting the decisions a person makes about their own life. For vulnerable migrants to make better decisions, individuals and groups providing support and services must ensure individuals are given all necessary information in an objective manner. Services should also be tailored to the specific needs of the vulnerable migrants you are working with. You could, for instance, ask them what their desired outcome to a situation would be and plan your response around their wishes.

LEARNINGS & SUGGESTIONS

VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT

Some of the migrants arriving in Ireland (North and South) are survivors of wars and conflicts and may have witnessed killing and abuse of loved ones and destruction of properties, women and girls may have experienced gender specific harm such as FGM, sexual violence and other abuses, sadly, these traumatic experiences lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Each victims' PTSD differs in type and severity. Migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers need psychosocial support and counselling services. It is important to conduct vulnerability assessments for each person accessing the services at the very early stage preferably not later than two weeks after their arrival and with repeated follow up.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

It is important to be aware that cultural differences and similarities exist, while not judging people based on that. In many African cultures, it is believed that looking a person in the eye is disrespectful therefore, some of the African migrants may not have eye contact with service providers, this sometimes leads to misunderstanding or a belief that the person is not telling the truth, or they are not confident of what they are saying. Some people may also speak with loud tone, this does not mean they are angry, disrespectful, or aggressive, it's their way of communicating, sometimes they continue conversations by shouting when situated at a distance from one another.

CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Many migrants when they arrive at their country of destination struggle with navigating the systems. Cultural Orientation sessions are important and should be provided to newly arrived migrants in order to provide them with the opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need in order to resettle and adjust to a new life in Ireland. Cultural orientation helps newly arrived migrants to acquire the information and skills necessary to gradually adapt to a new society and culture and helps to incorporate elements of new culture into their own system of values and beliefs.

CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1

Nawal and her two children are asylum seekers who have been living in Ireland for the last 5 years. Nawal is a special needs teacher. She has a master's degree and 10 years' experience in her field of expertise. She lives in a Direct Provision Centre in a remote area in rural Ireland which makes accessibility very difficult, however she has undertaken many courses and she wants to work as a special needs teacher, but she is unable to get a job. If she wants to travel to Dublin to look for work, she will have to leave the accommodation centre at 5:30 am with her two children since there are no childcare facilities nearby. Despite the lack of Special Needs teachers and assistants in Ireland North and South, her job applications have been rejected countless times.

CASE STUDY 2

Noah has been in Direct Provision for 10 years. He has a law degree. He is eligible to work. He used to apply for intern jobs in law for years. Now he is a taxi driver. His children have been living all their childhood years in Direct Provision Centres. All they - and will - remember is the lack of dignity, autonomy and the limited access to literally everything. They struggle with their basic needs such as education and health.

CASE STUDY 3

Ditta came to Ireland 6 years ago to seek asylum. Her son who was born in Mayo is 4 years old and has been going to a school in a local school. Recently they were moved to a DP in Cork. The child does not want to leave his community and friends. Everything he knows, all his life is Co Mayo. This is having a negative mental health impact on Ditta who does not know what to do. She has tried to appeal this decision to no avail.

CASE STUDY 4

Lara is pregnant, and her date of delivery is in early autumn. She has been craving certain foods which she is more than happy to prepare for herself in the way it is made in her native country. Where she is currently residing in one of the accommodation centres but has nobody to confide her need to. She is worried about her health and is worried of what will happen when she gets her new baby as she feels she would like to wean her baby, when the time comes, with solids which she has prepared herself. With what she has seen happening to other women with small children, she is worried that she may not be able to cook and her child may end up being unhealthy. Currently, Lara has no control over what she eats and the thought that her baby is going to experience the same fate is depressing her.

CASE STUDY 5

In Northern Ireland Asylum seeking families with children residing in hotels for over a year, yet the children have not been enrolled in schools, and are only attending “welcome club”. Which means that these children are missing out already on their basic right to education. Families sometimes have to move from their homes into either homeless hostels or become homelessness due to lack of accessing housing. The children therefore go through multiple interruptions, change of schools, unsettled status, having to move house from one temporary accommodation to another. This precarious way of living denies many children an opportunity to grow. During lockdown, the digital divide was huge and most of these children were exposed to extreme digital poverty due to lack of access to the internet or computer for their education.

CASE STUDY 6

In Northern Ireland, Lack of access to subjects such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects for migrant children in high schools is high. Many of the migrant children who are currently in mainstream schools, are being denied access to STEM subjects, due to stigma or assumptions that these children will struggle studying GCSE. They are therefore given access to only Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) subjects which already caps their potential or shapes their future paths. Schools need to understand the potential of the young individuals and should give them the chance to shape their own paths, rather than deciding or forcing them to take paths they do not want based on assumptions. All sciences, English, maths, and computing courses and programmes should be equally available to the children as these are subjects that they might have had some background on.

A young girl from Eritrea, who already has the basic education to GCSE -a qualification in a specific subject typically taken by school students aged 14-16-has been denied access to any further education until she obtains immigration status. And as this girl already has the basic education currently to GCSE, she does not need English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).She therefore has no access to further education.

CASE STUDY 7

In Northern Ireland Access to medical care for disabled individuals is very difficult. A disabled child who was registered with a GP since November 2021 has not been able to allocate an appointment and on all occasions when the child is unwell, the mother will have to go to the emergency department of the main hospital.

The asylum-seeking families are all struggling to access or book appointments as firstly, they will need to call between 8.30-9.30, then they will need to be able to speak English in order to get this appointment, but due to the language barrier, they are not able to do that, leading to lack of access. Also, asylum seekers do not have a GP card or medical card. They have to pay for the GP visits from their weekly remittance of £8.

CASE STUDY 8

Lack of privacy in Direct Provision Centres in Ireland (South) has been a major area of concern to residents, people are made to share rooms up to three or more people while residents' letters are often open and managers and staff of these centres getting into people's rooms unannounced. Some of the accommodation centres have toilets outside rooms which is a huge risk especially for women and children using the facilities at night. The same issues are being experienced by those seeking international protection in the North of Ireland where people are sharing rooms with total strangers in the hostels. This kind of living has compromised mental health for a lot of asylum seekers who feel they are caught up in situations which they are not able to do anything about. Besides, some hostels are in remote areas where they are not able to access services.

CASE STUDY 9

An African migrant man seeking international protection since 2003 in Northern Ireland, his case was rejected and as a result lived in the streets for many years, he passed away after 17 years of waiting. This has been the same to an elderly immigrant woman in her early 70s, who has been in Northern Ireland for a few years, she is frustrated, with no access to any support, residing with different people in different homes, living on food banks and completely left destitute and vulnerable.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Migration Push & Pull Factors

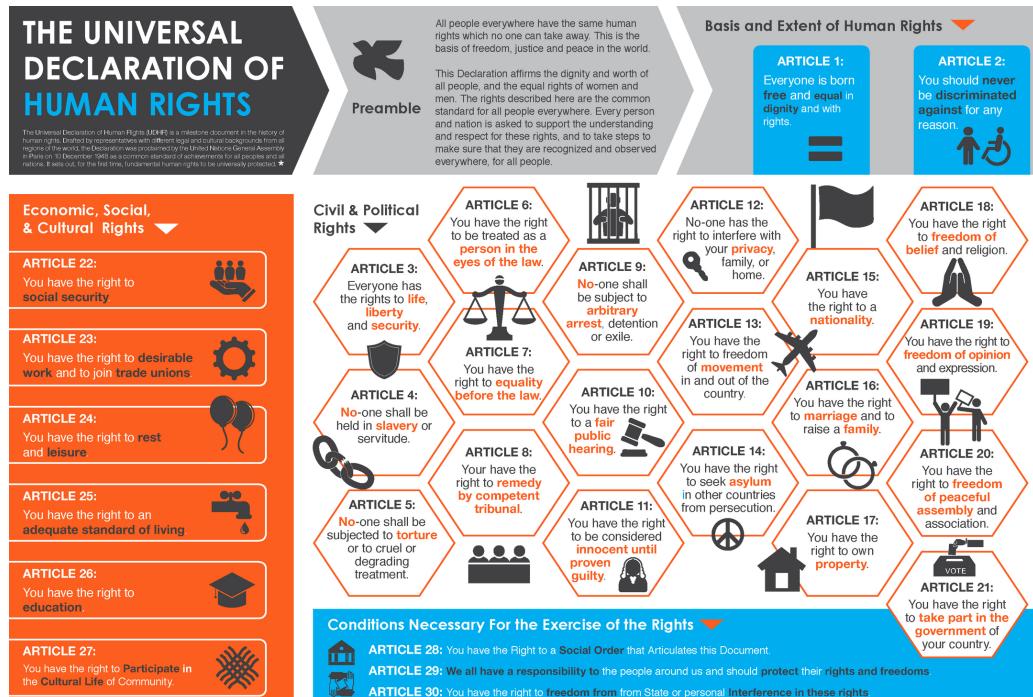
PUSH	PULL
Persecution Violence War	 Safety and Stability Freedom
Poor wages Lack of jobs	 Higher wages Job prospects
Crop failure and famine Pollution Natural disaster	 Food availability Better environment
Limited opportunities Lack of services Family separation	 Family Reunification Better quality of life Availability of services

Ref: Justice for Immigrants Washington, DC

Appendix 2: Understanding Unconscious Bias



Appendix 3: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights



Ref: Human Rights Educators USA



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