What is the contribution of migrant communities to Scottish culture, society and civic society?

1. Scottish society is greatly enriched by the presence of migrant communities. As individuals or as national or ethnic groups, migrants are a real blessing to many areas of life in Scotland. This includes cuisine, music, art, theatre, fashion, entertainment, literature and many others. Our society benefits from workers from other places, whether as unskilled labour, teachers or nurses as well as leading business people, academics and community leaders.

2. Within the Church we are grateful and deeply appreciative of the contribution of migrant communities. For a variety of reasons, many migrant Christians prefer to maintain their own traditions and their own church structure, but the historic churches rejoice and celebrate that Christians from other parts of the world have come to live amongst us, and we look for opportunities to work collaboratively, to learn from one another and to worship together. Many people in the Church have encountered new forms of spiritual life and enthusiasm and passion in worship, and have been able to worship in new and creative ways thanks to the ideas and traditions that have been brought by migrant Christians. Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) have recently appointed the Rev Francis Alao as the Scottish Churches' Racial Justice Officer. Francis is Senior Pastor of Glasgow International Church in Maryhill, the worshipping community of ‘Heart for the City’, which has links to the Scottish Episcopal Church.

3. We are also exploring dialogue and learning with people of other faiths, which is a cause for celebration. Inter faith relations have helped us develop our own understanding of what it means to be a faith community in 21st century Scotland. This has only been possible by the presence of migrant communities who have brought their beliefs and culture with them.

4. The presence of migrant communities in Scotland helps Scottish society and the Church to begin to understand issues of racism, prejudice and discrimination. We support any initiatives which encourages respect for diversity and equality and which protect people who come from black or minority ethnic groups.
How can positive messages regarding the contribution of migrant populations to Scottish society be effectively disseminated?

5. There are already a great deal of initiatives already taking place. There is no point re-inventing the wheel, but greater publicity and support for existing projects would be very welcome.

6. For example, European churches have dedicated 2010 as a year of responding to migration. The Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe and the Conference of European Churches, both of which the Church of Scotland is a member, have dedicated resources to this project. Information is available at www.migration2010.eu

7. Churches in Britain and Ireland also mark a Racial Justice Sunday every year in the middle of September. Special resource materials are prepared.

8. Schools, FE and HE institutions and community organisations could be encouraged to celebrate the contribution of migrant populations and raise awareness about migrant issues. There are a number of opportunities for this to take place in the year, including Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January), Refugee Week (middle of June), Black History Month (October), EU Anti-Trafficking Day (18 October) and International Migrants Day (18 December). These events are often resourced and supported by campaigners, writers and policy advisers and aim to encourage interest in human rights and intercultural dialogue.

What is the degree of awareness of the rights of migrants?

9. There is a perception that by and large people do not have a good awareness of migrants’ rights. We do not have any empirical evidence for this, but there is a sense that many people do not know the difference between asylum seekers, refugees and legal or undocumented economic migrants. The rights, benefits and entitlements that someone might expect are also different across these groups, and it is not always easy for either an asylum seeker or a British citizen to know exactly how the system works. Politically extreme groups, such as the British National Party, have been known to have deliberately make false statements about migrants and housing policy, for instance, or to present facts in a way which distorts reality for their own ends. This adds to confusion about migration and migrants’ rights.

What is the nature of the problem? Are people trafficked primarily for reasons related to sexual exploitation or with regard to false labour?

10. Trafficking sheds light on two aspects of our world today.

11. The first is that some people are prepared to treat fellow human beings as a commodity. Trafficked people are often vulnerable and easy prey to exploitation by someone who is more powerful. They have no control over
their life or where they are moved to, and they are given over to create wealth for someone else. This is slavery.

12. The second is how a wealthy developed country manages its borders. Having strict border controls means that people overseas will try desperate measures to get here without formal documentation. This may include paying someone in their home country to ensure they are trafficked to the UK where they may have work opportunities already lined up. It has been estimated that a trafficked Chinese labourer working in the UK in the black economy can earn enough to support up to 30 people in rural China. Having easier border controls might encourage more legal migration and less trafficking – however there are associated social, cultural and economic issues which must also be taken into consideration.

13. Our biggest concern is for those women, children and young men who are trafficked for sexual exploitation. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland received a report in 2009 which noted the situation in the Netherlands, which has a relatively liberal approach to prostitution, but which is coming to terms with the reality of sex trafficking. This extract from the report begins with a quote from the Mayor of Amsterdam:

“Often people go to the museums and then to the red light district – it’s part of the image of tolerant Amsterdam” but the easy tolerance that characterised Amsterdam is giving way to growing concern about the organised criminal activity that goes on behind all those lighted windows. “It took some time before we realised the extent of the trafficking and abuse that was going on.” And who is providing the demand that draws trafficking rings to Amsterdam? Tourists from other European countries including Scotland – business men on an away day, lads on a football weekend, or even a stag night.

The debate will go on, and many, including some women and sex workers, will continue to characterise prostitution as a business transaction like any other. But any discussion of trafficking for the sex industry must look beyond the factors of poverty and gender inequality that affect supply and focus equally on the nature of the demand for this “product”; on the responsibility of those who buy women in prostitution and the strategic role they have in the chain of trafficking.

14. We also commend the work of CHASTE – Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking across Europe (www.chaste.org.uk) and The Salvation Army in responding to this challenge. CHASTE produce resource for Not for Sale Sunday every May, which encourages churches to raise awareness of issues of sex trafficking and to take action against it.
What is the scale of the trafficking issue, in terms of the number of people involved and the geographical areas which people trafficked tend to be sourced from?

15. A recent report by a special Task Group established by Action for Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) found that it was very difficult to quantify the scale of human trafficking in Scotland. The issue is big enough for it to quite clearly be a great concern, but ACTS found no hard evidence of statistics, facts or figures. The ACTS report also pointed out that the definitions of Trafficking in the Palermo Protocol and the UK Sexual Offences Act 2003 are not the same. Under this Act, for instance, sex workers who have entered the country illegally but who voluntarily paid to come to the UK would be classified as “trafficked” but not “smuggled”. We would welcome any recommendation or leadership your Committee could offer in this area.

Given the degree of criminality that tends to be involved in human trafficking what problem does this present for public sector agencies seeking to assist the victims of this activity?

16. Perhaps one of the largest difficulties is bringing traffickers to justice, both to prevent them from trafficking in the future and to deter would-be traffickers. There have been no successful prosecutions in Scotland, despite large police operations such as Pentameter 1 and 2. The difficulty of providing evidence sufficient to satisfy the courts is partly responsible for this. One reason for this is that rescued individuals cannot be held in custody and melt away - possibly to avoid deportation, family shame, or threats to themselves or their families. We do not yet have any clear solution, but we do feel that it is something that needs to be addressed.

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9 April 2010