

# North West Migrants Forum Newsletter

April 1 to June 30 2026



Derry and Strabane Council's PEACE Programme Manager Sue Divin between our CEO Lilian Seenoi Barr and Mayor Grace Uí Niallais at the unveiling of The People's Café plaque on what was a momentous day for our organisation.

## Celebrations at launch of 'The People's Café'

CAFÉ culture is finally being served at North West Migrants Forum – one cup, one conversation, one connection at a time.

Our long-awaited Intercultural Café was officially launched on June 20, with Northern Ireland First Minister Michelle O'Neill among those to send their best wishes.

It has been a long journey to get to this point, but thanks to funding from PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the kettle is finally on.

The People's Café, as we have named it, is designed as a place where refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, international students and those from racially minoritised backgrounds can



come together and engage with with one another and the broader community. As well as a comfortable meeting place, the café boasts a training kitchen designed to equip individuals with the skills to secure employment in the hospitality industry. The People's Café is funded through Derry City and Strabane District Council's PEACEPLUS Local Co-Designed Action Plan. And speaking at the launch, DCSDC's PEACE Programme Manager, Sue Divin, said The People's Café will be a valuable venue for breaking down barriers, promoting inclusion and tackling racism.

"in light of recent events in Northern Ireland, it is more pertinent than ever that a safe and welcoming space is available for those of diverse identities to meet," Ms Divin said. Our Chief Executive, Lilian Seenoi Barr, added that her aim has always been to promote the positive contributions migrants make to society when given the chance to thrive.

"Hopefully The People's Café will showcase how much migrants have to give, economically, socially and culturally. And hopefully it will underscore the value they bring when given the opportunity to prosper."

• We are still fine-tuning things but rest assured, The People's Café will open to the public in the coming months.

# Migrants Forum's response after assault sparks street riots

VIOLENCE returned to the streets of Northern Ireland earlier this month following a brutal assault on a man in Belfast. Stephen Ogilvie suffered terrible injuries during the horrendous attack. A Sudanese man was subsequently arrested and is now before the courts. The incident, which was captured on film and circulated widely on social media, sparked days of violence in which houses, businesses and cars were burnt and families and individuals intimidated out of their homes. The North West Migrants Forum issued a strongly worded statement condemning the attack on Mr Ogilvie. In it we also made the point that entire communities cannot be held responsible for one person's actions. You can read our full statement [here](#). Amid the riots, our allies in United Against Racism organised two rallies, one in Derry and one Belfast. We were overwhelmed to see so many people gather to condemn the violence that was being visited upon men, women and children based on nothing more than their skin colour. Thank you to United Against Racism and to everyone who turned out to say no to violence and no to racism.



Above: Moroccan national Mohcine Mesnaoui making his feelings known. Below: Hala Ahmed and our CEO Lilian Seenoi Barr at the rally.



# Bank of Ireland UK gives NWMF thousands of reasons to smile



*NWMF CEO Lillian Seenoi Barr with Bank of Ireland UK's Head of Consumer Banking William Thompson, BOI's Community Engagement Senior Associate Laura Quigley and NWMF Vice-Chair Dr Imani Strong.*

THROUGH its Community Fund, Bank of Ireland UK has allocated £34,000 towards The People's Café, money NWMF was delighted to receive.

Supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the SEUPB, The People's Café was officially launched on June 20. It is a dedicated safe space designed to enhance quality of life and strengthen community by providing access to everyday essentials and activities such as cooking and laundry facilities. Our Chief Executive, Lillian Seenoi Barr, said NWMF was thrilled to be working with Bank of Ireland UK

through a mutual commitment to creating a more inclusive and supportive community.

Mrs Barr said, "Our project's focus is on reducing loneliness and isolation by providing a safe space where people from all backgrounds have an opportunity to feel welcome and have the opportunity to meet and get to know others. It's about creating a more connected community, where people can feel at home, no matter where they are from." Bank of Ireland UK CEO Gail Goldie added: "I want to wish North West Migrants Forum the very best as they develop The

People's Café.

"Strong communities are founded on inclusion, opportunity and confidence.

"Through the Community Fund, we are delighted to support organisations that are playing a vital role in building a stronger, more resilient society. "Since its introduction in 2019, the Fund has provided vital backing to a range of organisations delivering tangible local impact. "This year's funding reflects a focus on ensuring more people feel included, supported and confident about their financial futures," Ms Goldie said.

# Beverly accepts senior PCSP role

OUR long time colleague and friend Beverly Simpson has been appointed to the role of Vice-Chair of Derry and Strabane's Policing and Community Safety Partnership.

A nurse and well known Unison activist, Ms Simpson will work alongside PSCP Chair Darren Guy.

Speaking about the landmark appointment, Ms Simpson said, "My hope is to create positive role models for our young people, to create spaces where they can see themselves in the near future. If we want integrated communities, we must represent everyone in our society."

PCSP Manager Vanessa Russell said Beverly Simpson and Alderman Guy will bring "real energy and commitment to the roles" they have been appointed to. "We couldn't be happier to have them leading the PCSP this year. Their experience will be a huge asset as we push forward on our priorities."



*From left: Derry Strabane PCSP Manager Vanessa Russell with PCSP Chair Alderman Darren Guy and PCSP Vice-Chair Beverly Simpson.*

# Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw 'talks back' at the Guildhall

DERRY'S Guildhall was packed to capacity for a visit by eminent American civil rights scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. Professor Crenshaw added the city to her European book tour following an invitation by our Chief Executive Lilian Seeno Barr. The two women struck up a friendship during a visit in 2024 by Councillor Barr to the USA as part of her year as Mayor of Derry and Strabane.

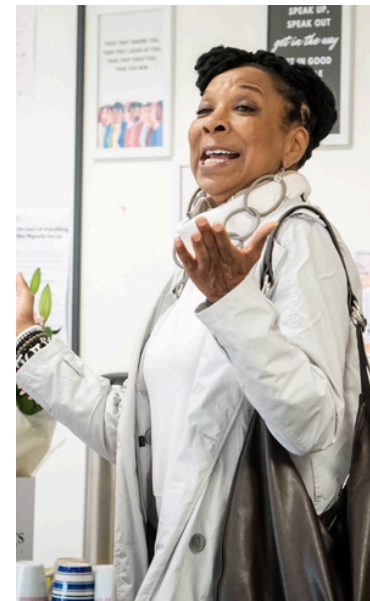
Kimberlé Crenshaw, a distinguished professor of law at both UCLA School of Law in California and Columbia Law School in New York, is one of the most influential thinkers in America.

Responsible for naming two highly contested ideas in US politics – intersectionality and critical race theory – her life has been shaped by a natural instinct to question power and to challenge what others were prepared to accept as fair.

Professor Crenshaw recently released her hotly anticipated memoir, *Backtalker*, which traces her early years in Canton, Ohio, to becoming a leading voice on law and equity and an outspoken opponent of the Trump administration. Following the publication of *Backtalker*, Ms Crenshaw embarked on an American and then European tour with engagements in France, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Derry before the focus shifted to Dublin where she was co-hosted by the Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies and The Unforgettable Womens' Network in collaboration with the North West Migrants Forum.



*Left: Takura Makoni and our CEO Lilian with Professor Crenshaw in the Guildhall. And below, Professor Crenshaw enjoying a lighthearted moment in North West Migrants Forum.*



In Derry's Guildhall there was standing room only as people packed in to hear Professor Crenshaw talk about how, as a five-year-old in Ohio during the civil rights era, she was the only girl denied a lead role in her nursery play.

Puzzled by her teacher's behaviour she talked back and has continued to do so since. Host for the evening was African and Caribbean Support Organisation (ACSONI) Policy Officer Takura Makoni while Migrants Forum CEO Lilian Seeno Barr led the 'In Conversation With...', part of the North West Migrants Forum's **Intercultural Cross Border Inclusion Programme (ICIP)** and its **Black Heritage in NI: The Hidden History Project**. An element of the ICI Programme puts a focus on civic, public, political, social and cultural

participation while The Hidden History Project aims to educate the public on the contributions made by Black people to NI. Mrs Barr described Professor Crenshaw's insights and candour as "inspirational". "This was a conversation on race, gender and the power of speaking truth to injustice. "At the heart of Professor Crenshaw's memoir, *Backtalker*, is a simple but powerful message – voice matters. It is about truth-telling, challenging injustice and refusing to accept the world as it is when we know it can be better. "For communities working every day to challenge racism, sectarianism, inequality and gender-based violence, that message could not be more relevant." You can read the full press release [here](#).

# Roll-out of ICI Programme continues to gather speed

**SINCE** its launch in January our Intercultural Cross-border Inclusion Programme has made real progress with workshops, discussions and school visits taking place from Donegal to Dublin and from Derry to Cookstown to Belfast. Supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), the Intercultural Cross-border Inclusion Programme (ICIP) aims to create a more inclusive society within communities on both sides of the border experiencing rapid demographic change. Funding of just under €3 million was allocated following a joint application by five partners – North West Migrants Forum, Donegal Intercultural Platform, Rural Community Network, Multi-ethnic Sports and Cultures NI and Irish Network Against Racism. Between them the five the organisations have employed around 15 staff members in a range of roles, from communications to finance to development workers, project administrators and delivery and co-ordination positions. Thousands of people have already been reached through the ICI Programme which marks one year in existence in September, with a further two years still to run. Anastasiia Shevchenko is the North West Migrants Forum’s ICIP Programme Delivery & Co-Ordination Officer. She said, “One of the key milestones was the preparation for the launch of the Anti-Racism Schools Programme. Between March and May NWMF engaged with teachers at the Building Bridges event and began direct outreach to schools across NI.



*The North West Migrants Forum visited Glendermott Primary School in May as part of the ICI Programme.*



*An MSCNI event held recently in Belfast as part of the ICI Programme.*

“Information packs and Expressions of Interest were developed to support school recruitment and a number of schools expressed an interest in participating. This work laid the foundation for the delivery of anti-racism workshops and cross-border educational activities during the 2026/27 academic year.” Mrs Shevchenko added that celebrating cultural diversity remained a central part of the programme with both Ramadan and Eid marked

through presentations, discussion and shared cultural experiences. North West Migrants Forum also continued to strengthen the Intercultural Cross-border Inclusion Programme’s foundations by expanding partnerships with schools, community organisations and cultural institutions, developing educational resources and preparing future programme activities to be delivered throughout the remainder of 2026.

# All systems go for NWMF Summer Club 2026! 😊

WITH the school holidays upon us, the North West Migrants Forum's fabulous Summer Club is about to kick off one again.

Financed through the **Co-Op Foundation's Future Communities Fund**, this year's programme will run from July 7 to August 13. As in previous years, places were in high demand and registration, which was open to all young people aged from seven years to 15 years, regardless of background, filled up within ten days.

The lucky 60 who managed to secure their spot will enjoy a busy itinerary of fun events which will include days out, art workshops, sports and culinary fun and much more.

Following an open call for applications, five young people have been appointed to help deliver Summer Club 2026. Employed in paid roles, they will work alongside an adult youth worker. Among the five young people appointed to help create the programme of fun events is 20-year-old Abie Sanyang.

She said she was looking forward to helping make it a Summer to remember for participants.

"We want to create events that will allow young people to enhance their skillset as well as have fun during the school holidays. It will definitely be a Summer to remember for myself and everyone involved."

Abie added that the overall aim is to provide a safe and entertaining space for all young people involved, one where they can form connections and develop social skills that will be of use to them as they move through school and eventually into adulthood.

Any questions, you can contact the team at [summerclub@nwmf.org.uk](mailto:summerclub@nwmf.org.uk).



*Some of the fun that was had at Summer Club 2025. We're doing it all again very shortly!*



*And, pictured at a youth training session are some of the young people who will be co-ordinating this year's Summer Club.*



*Maeve Leahy of Songs Without Borders conducting some of the singers who took part in Integration Craic.*

# Fun, food and friendship at Integration Craic

**OVER 100 people gathered in Cultúrlann on May 21 2026 for 'Integration Craic', a family-orientated evening of fun, food and friendship. Integration Craic, funded by Apex Housing, was organised to coincide with World Diversity Day and saw the North West Migrants Forum and Sole Purpose Productions invite members of the public to join them for a unique celebration of culture, music and connection.**

**Performers from a number of countries tuned up to take part in 'Integration Craic - Connecting Cultures, Creating Community' which aimed to bring people**

**together and open them up to a deeper understanding of the value of cultural diversity. World Day for Cultural Diversity encourages individuals, institutions and organisations to take action in support of diversity, inclusion and intercultural dialogue.**

**North West Migrants Forum's Welfare and Integration Officer Gaëlle Gormley said the aim of the event was to build relations between NI's two traditional communities and those from overseas who have made the north west their home in recent times. Mrs Gormley added that the 2026 event was of added importance, given the levels of hostility being directed at**

**migrants across Northern Ireland and beyond.**

**"At a time when the atmosphere in the UK, Ireland and other European countries is becoming increasingly hostile towards migrants, it is more important than ever to bring local people and minoritised communities together for a friendly, welcoming and fun event.**

**"Refugees are often demonised and many false narratives are spread on social media. We aim to debunk these stereotypes by showing that we can live together in peace, create bonds, connect cultures and build a unified community."**

# More photo coverage of our evening of Integration Craic



Above: Yvonne, Joi and Doaa enjoying an evening of Integration Craic. Elsewhere is a selection of images from what was a great evening.





Our Vice-Chair Dr Imani Strong was among the panellists at the NEU conference held in Derry. And right, Dr Strong with some of the Migrants Forum literature that was distributed to teachers.



# ‘Help us design this curriculum, test it, strengthen it and embed it’

## NWMF makes plea at annual National Education Union’s NI conference

THE North West Migrants Forum’s bid to make Black history an embedded part of the Northern Ireland school curriculum took a step forward when it was tabled at the National Education Union’s annual conference.

Held in Derry’s Bishop’s Gate Hotel, the assembly brought educators and union representatives together to reflect, challenge and take action on one of the most important issues facing schools - Building inclusive, anti-racist environments for all.

Among the panellists was Vice-Chair of the North West Migrants Forum, Dr Imani Strong, who outlined the importance of making Black History part of everyday learning.

Dr Naomi Green also provided a workshop to teachers on NWMF’s Black Heritage NI: Hidden History Project which is funded by **National Lottery Heritage Fund**. The conference was also an opportunity for teachers to see for the first time a mini-version of our exhibition which has been touring libraries since July and which has been viewed thousands of times. Dr Strong used her address to encourage schools to engage with NWMF’s Black Heritage Project and Intercultural Cross-border Inclusion Programme. She also emphasised that the North West Migrants Forum is on hand to support teachers in any way necessary.

“If we are serious about safer and more inclusive schools, then we

have to be serious about anti-racism, about belonging and about what children see reflected in the curriculum,” Dr Strong said. “We invite schools across Northern Ireland to join our ICIP programme and to work with us through the Black Heritage Hidden History Programme. Help us design this curriculum, test it, strengthen it and embed it, so that together we build schools that do not simply react to racism, but actively shape a fairer future.”

**‘If we are serious about safer and more inclusive schools, then we have to be serious about anti-racism’**

# In pictures...Mayor helps cut ribbon on NWMF's Intercultural Café



*Our Chief Executive Lilian Seenoi Barr alongside Mayor of Derry and Strabane Mayor Grace Uí Niallais and many of those who gathered to make the launch of our Intercultural Café a success.*



*A smiling Favour Okpohs who was one of the panellists on the day.*



*Our Board Member Beverly Simpson in conversation with the Chief Executive of Derry City and Strabane District Council, John Kelpie.*



*The fabulous Songs Without Borders who added so much to the day with their renditions of, among others, Bella Ciao.*



*Yi Wang hard at work in the kitchen making authentic Chinese noodles.*



*One of the youngest audience members to attend the launch.*



*First Minister Michelle O'Neill who sent a recorded message, wishing us well on the launch of our café*



*A cake created by Paul Barr specially for the occasion. Darn tasty it was too!*

# Former BBC anchor delivers confidence building workshops

*WE have been in the company of Irish broadcasting royalty of late, in former BBC journalist Donna Traynor and her broadcaster husband Ronan Kelly.*

*Now working as media consultants, Donna and Ronan agreed to come on board to deliver a series of public speaking workshops as part of our 'Voices For Change: Building Power; Shaping Policy' project, funded by **St Stephen's Green Trust**.*

*It is the second time Donna Traynor has worked with the North West Migrants Forum, having hosted its Black History Summit in Belfast in 2024.*

*The latest collaboration began in May when Donna and Ronan addressed over 40 NWMF members across two sessions about public speaking and the importance of being able to represent themselves confidently in formal spaces and in more general society.*

*The initial session, which is designed as a forerunner to a more comprehensive training programme, was aimed specifically at those whose voices are often under-represented in public and civic spaces. The goal is to strengthen communication skills, thereby building the foundation for leadership development.*

*The public speaking training is part of the North West Migrants Forum's Voices for Change project.*

*Voices For Change was developed following conversations and many years of working with those within racialised minoritised communities, when the organisation realised that building migrant power and influencing policy is most effective when knowledge, tools and experiences are openly shared with others in the wider community.*

*The confidence building sessions are continuing and we are enjoying see our members grow in stature and become more assertive.*

*Who knows, maybe one of them will feel assured enough to follow in the footsteps of our CEO and enter the world of politics.*



*From left: Donna Traynor, Mohcine Mesnaoui and Ronan Kelly.*



*Some of those undertaking the public speaking and confidence building training as part of Voices for Change.*

# A photographic meander through the last three months at the Migrants Forum

*One thing the North West Migrants Forum will never be accused of is being boring. There is always, and we mean ALWAYS, something going on. Here is just a brief snapshot of what we have been up to in recent months.*



*We said goodbye to our intern and student Calvin DeFoster who was with us for almost three months. Calvin was a beacon of energy and laughter and we will miss him greatly. He has now returned to St Olaf College, USA, where no doubt a big future awaits him. He is pictured here with our volunteer and Board Member Hala Ahmed.*



*Sinead Crumlish-McCool delivering a lino printing workshop to our members. This was funded by Developing Healthy Communities through its Civic Dollars initiative.*



*Gearing up for our Integration Craic event which took place on May 21 - World Diversity Day.*



*Left: Staff enjoying another normal day in North West Migrants Forum...*



*Left: Journalist and author Pat McArd signing copies of his book at the NWMF staff residential in the White Horse Hotel.*



*Right: Our Welfare Officer Dominic Nartey and US intern Calvin getting a guided tour of CRAFT Training's Strabane headquarters from tutor Gavin.*



## Presentation of personal safety alarms...

*NWMF Board Member and Independent member of the Derry and Strabane Policing Community Safety Partnership, Beverly Simpson, presenting a box of personal safety alarms to NWMF representatives Anastasiia Shevchenko and Hala Ahmed. The alarms will be distributed to our members. We hope they never have to use them but no doubt they will provide some reassurance.*



## Where possible, we always try to shop local...

These are just some of the stores and businesses we have worked with and supported in recent months

Danske Bank

Holiday Inn

Post Office

Poundland

Centra

Tesco

The Range

Musgrave Market Place

Manor Construction

Doherty's Bakery

Foyle Taxis

Currys

Translink

The Works

Embassy Property Ltd

Hillbilly Chicken

Sports Direct

Medina Supermarket

PNP Solutions Ltd

Milkwood Studios

Ulster Image Photography

iPrint

Walled City Hotel

Visit Derry

Gordon's Chemist

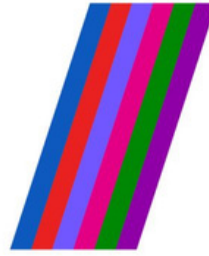
Boots Chemist

McGroarty, McCafferty and Co Ltd

A huge thank you as well to those who made donations directly to our organisation. You know who you are.

We rise by lifting others ❤️

Thank you to our funders and sponsors.  
Without your continued support none of our work would be possible



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North West  
Migrants Forum



We hope you enjoyed our  
Summer newsletter

Remember, you can always  
contact us on 02871 362184 or  
07912295571

Our website is [www.nwmf.org.uk](http://www.nwmf.org.uk)  
and you can keep up to date  
with our work on...



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We'll leave you with this seasonal quote from John Lubbock's The Use of Life:

'Rest is not idleness and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of the water or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.'

