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# Brent Irish advisory service

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## B.I.A.S. - THE IRISH ADVISORY SERVICE IN BRENT

Established in January 1978, Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS) is an anti-racist community development and welfare organisation, which is non-party in politics and religion, and provides a practical essential service to all Irish people in the Brent area of north-west London.

The large and diverse Irish community in Brent forms a substantial proportion of the resident population in Brent, and is the borough's largest national group which originates from any single overseas country in the world.

The most recent Census shows that there are now more than 50,000 people of Irish origin in the Brent area, forming a significant part of the multi-racial communities of Kilburn, Cricklewood, Harlesden, Willesden, Wembley and other districts.

With an ancient cultural heritage, combined with a modern life style Irish people can be seen as a distinct ethnic minority community with its own language, traditions, history, and national aspirations.

For more than a century, Brent has been home to Irish people who emigrated from their own country to find employment and make a new life. Even today, thousands of young migrants still come over to Brent each year to seek work and accommodation.

As foreigners in a strange land, many Irish people, especially those from rural and Irish-speaking backgrounds, may experience culture shock, alienation and racism. Some of them may have problems with housing, jobs, social security and welfare.

Within the Irish community there is a disproportionate number of Irish elderly, mentally ill, handicapped, and single homeless people. And there are groups of Irish people who have particular needs, including women, youth, pensioners, travelling people, and the black Irish.

This is where BIAS comes in. Unlike other agencies, it was set up, and is run by, ordinary Irish women and men- trade unionists and community activists - who have experienced the same kinds of problems as its users. For "they who feel it, know it".

Our Main areas of community work include: INFORMATION, advice, and research; HOUSING for migrant workers, single homeless and youth; WELFARE of pensioners, disabled persons and children in need; and EMPLOYMENT for unemployed, redundant and handicapped workers.

BIAS is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

## THE IRISH COMMUNITY IN BRENT

The large and diverse Irish community in Brent forms a substantial proportion of the resident population, especially in the south of the Borough.

Irish people have long been present in the Brent area, having first come into the Kilburn area in the mid-nineteenth century when starvation in Ireland and the demand for Irish labour in Britain brought many thousands of Irish people to London.

Irish migration into Brent continued through the 1950's up to the mid-1960's, with a doubling in numbers between 1951 and 1966. The 1971 Census shows Irish people established throughout the Borough, with the largest numbers in Cricklewood, Harlesden, Willesden and particularly Kilburn.

The numbers of Irish-born appeared to have decreased during a period of industrial expansion in Ireland during the 1970's when many skilled workers returned and this reflected in the 1981 Census.

### Census

The 1981 Census showed a total of 251,238 people resident in Brent, of whom 28,141 people (11.3%) were recorded as resident in private households whose head was identified as being born in the Irish Republic.

The Census figures used in Brent at present are generally regarded as an under-representation of the total Irish population in the Borough.

Some reasons for under-representation of Irish people in the Census are:

- (i) Irish people born in Northern Ireland are excluded from Irish Republic figures and in order to correspond with the national census average for Irish people an additional 25 per cent should be added to the "Irish Republic" figure.
- (ii) The figures do not record the number of Irish people born in Great Britain (second generation) who have become head of household, and their children (third generation) who now form a high proportion of the Irish community.
- (iii) The figures for private households by definition exclude a significant number of Irish people who have historically been transient or semi-transient, having neither tenanted housing nor employment.
- (iv) The Census figures may exclude a considerable number of Irish people in lodgings or in accommodation with resident landlords who have not included all residents on census returns.
- (v) Since the 1981 Census there has been a rapid increase in the number of younger migrants from Ireland coming into Brent. A small number of them were born in Britain of Irish parents who returned to Ireland in the 1970's during a period of relative economic growth.

In view of the estimated numbers and current patterns of migration, a more realistic estimate of the size of the Irish community in Brent would be at least 40,000 people, that is 16 per cent or one in six of the population.

The Irish community in Brent is made up of people born in Ireland and the children of Irish people who were born in Britain. Over half the Irish in Brent were born in Ireland (15,551) while 45% Irish persons were born in Britain.

The part of the Irish community commonly known as "second generation Irish" or the children of Irish born parents amounted to 12,590 persons in 1981.

The age breakdown for the Irish in Brent shows that in 1981 the vast majority of Irish people over 30 years old in Brent were born in Ireland ie 90%.

The following table shows the age breakdowns and contains both Irish born and second generation Irish.

0-4 years	1,616	5%
5-15 years	5,353	19%
16-29 years	6,723	24%
30-44 years	6,152	22%
45- pensionable age	5,587	20%
of pensionable age	2,710	10%
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	28,141	

#### Employment Patterns

The Irish community in Brent ranges across the socio-economic groups, but is strongest in the skilled and unskilled manual groups, employed mainly in construction, manufacturing and service industries.

The demographic and socio-economic position of Irish-born migrants in relation to career aspirations and employment opportunities is particularly relevant to this report. Further research is needed to establish whether any cultural or social barriers exist.

In the past Irish-born men traditionally worked in building, manufacturing and unskilled manual work, while Irish-born women traditionally worked in nursing and other professions and in personal/domestic service.

Since the early 1960's when secondary education for all was introduced in the Irish Republic, there has been an increase in the number of Irish people with secondary and higher education and a wider range of employment opportunities open to Irish-born people.

Since the 1970's there has been an increasing number of clerical and professional workers especially among the British-born, although such information as is currently available indicates relatively low numbers of Irish people in professional positions.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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