

Where to now? The current context for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers

Monday, 5 December at CCLA

Mubin Haq, Director of Policy and Grants, Trust for London (chair of the meeting) welcomed everyone to this event held to update funders on policy and practice in relation to migrants and refugees in London and the implications for funding of frontline services and support organisations. He was particularly pleased to see a good mix of funders in the room. He thanked CCLA for the meeting room and hospitality.

Context, policy and public attitudes

Jill Rutter, Policy and Research Officer, Day Care Trust

Matt Cavanagh, Associate Director for UK Migration Policy, Institute for Public Policy Research

Jill Rutter started with migration statistics for London, where trends show some stability since a peak in 2005-6. Her informative slides ([here](#) or see www.londonfunders.org.uk) cover migration flows in and out of the UK, work visa migration and asylum (including data on appeals), irregular migration and policy trends in housing, funding and issues for children and young people. She argued that the experience of irregular migrants (where almost 90% of that group is estimated to be in London) remains a profound moral and political issue and reminded the audience of the effort put in by the Mayor in recent years to lobby for the regularisation of London's irregular migrants, many long-established in the UK with unresolved asylum claims, and in general experiencing intense poverty. Up to 6% of London's children may be in this category (most born in the UK to parents who are undocumented). Numbers of unaccompanied children coming to the UK have dropped.

Intense stories of poverty lie behind the statistics

Policy trends are of real concern, including government changes in visa types and allocation, and the loss of capacity for asylum and migration cases in the legal aid system: in future migration cases will fall outside legal aid. Public sector funding cuts are having a disproportionate impact on refugees and migrants, exemplified by reductions in ESOL classes and changes to housing benefit. London's population will be hard hit by the latter, not only because of the high cost of housing in London but because migrant populations rely heavily on private renting. Jill concluded her presentation with a poignant example to remind the audience of the human stories that lie behind the statistics and incoherent policy.

Matt Cavanagh focused on the way public attitudes and wider debate are shaped. He agreed that trends in immigration and asylum have been very stable over the last five years and that while immigration is not currently a front-page issue, it remains visible in media stories linking migrants with low skills, crime and welfare dependency that imply immigration affects the country adversely at a time of continuing economic uncertainty: current polling data indicate the long-term effects of negative media coverage of migrants, showing that the general population still views immigration as a big issue and agrees with the current policy of cutting the number of immigrants. More in-depth studies suggest people's views are more complex, and in many areas, based on incorrect information, for example the tendency to equate immigrants and refugees, while actually refugees and asylum seekers make up around 5% of immigration. On the more positive side there has recent been coverage, especially in London through the Evening Standard, of the economic contribution of migrants to London's economy.

Discussion topics

Points from audience questions and comments included:

- the gap between people's generalisations on migration and reactions to individual stories where people are able to empathise with real-life experience
- Londoners tend to be least negative about migrants, probably because there is more day-to-day contact and interaction: this perhaps strengthens the case for more liberal policies in London

- emigration levels have dropped (and tend to in a recession) as a result of less wealth and other countries (Australia cited) operating restrictive policies
- migration from other EU countries to the UK is occurring, with people often moving for the benefit of a flexible labour market, in particular where English is a second language. Specific clusters are noticed, e.g. Spanish migrants concentrated on Southwark
- it can be difficult to understand underachievement in education for some groups. Somalis might be an example of a group experiencing long, complicated journeys to reach the UK and therefore interrupted education (and our system is not conducive to catching up). Poor housing and parents working long hours or awkward shifts are also a factor
- other lack of achievement in immigrant groups is often associated with new arrivals: over time, migrants are more likely to be self-employed and prepared to take risks that can help them do better than the overall population
- young people are typically more positive in their views of migrants, but recent polls suggest increasing negativity as a result of remaining economic uncertainty
- irregular migrants: agreement that regularisation would be important in London and should be kept on the agenda but non-one seems currently to be championing this policy
- CLG's integration strategy is not thought to hold much weight. Matt summarised this as 'gimmick heavy, substance light'.

The work of migrant and refugee community organisations (MRCOs) was presented by **Luljeta Nuzi** from Shpresa programme and **Esme Madill**, a consultant working with Shpresa (see their presentation [here](#) or see www.londonfunders.org.uk).

As part of their preparation for this meeting Luljeta and Esme had consulted other MRCOs - front-line organisations and second tier, along with some fundraisers and academics - in order to hear current experience of organisations working with specific migrant groups. Luljeta briefly described Shpresa's service to the Albanian community in London.

Esme identified the main factors, including current policy challenges, that affect MRCOs:

- migrants and refugees are not a cohesive group. There are vastly different needs needing individualised responses. She particularly noted those groups working with people from war zones
- the impact of cuts to legal aid will be huge, with people having to represent themselves. She is worried about children growing up with parents with no access to justice
- government is moving away from policies around integration, which help migrants feel wanted, towards **children growing up with parents with no access to justice**
- lack of equality impact assessment
- public sector cuts, as Jill noted, have a disproportionate impact on BME groups
- the promised protection for funding in education and health masks a lack of commitment to translation services and specialist education
- MRCOs have received a high proportion of funding from the public sector and so are being hard hit by cuts. The smallest are not registered charities and find trust funding hard to access.

The consultation showed issues for MRCOs and the BME sector (mostly small groups) to be:

- an urgent need for funding for language and employability skills training
- public sector funders' fear of funding single nationality or ethnic groups: she described the value that Shpresa offers to its primarily Albanian users, but explained that many of its services now reach into other nationalities and groups
- a sense that certain communities have been here for a while and no longer need funding or resources. In practice, as groups settle new needs emerge: the best MRCOs adapt to these
- fewer donors not accepting unsolicited applications
- shift to funding 'essential' services only. Much of MRCOs' work has been to signpost people to mainstream services, many of which are now being cut
- lack of recognition of the value for money offered by MRCOs and the BME VCS (e.g. helping schools to relate well to new migrants; drawing in many volunteers; seeing half of these

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starting paid work; user-led services with low overheads but a lot of specialised knowledge).
Luljeta sent a clear message to the audience: for these organisations even small investments from funders make a huge difference to the lives of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.

Funders' comments

The rest of the meeting was taken up in small group discussion about constructive ways forward. Main points emerging were:

Recognition of the tougher environment for groups

- big cuts to voluntary sector funding from councils, many of which affect BME groups.
- applications for funding are increasingly in the context of other funders' cuts
- there is increasing competition at local level between groups for the same pots of money
- preventative services are being disproportionately cut and there is consequent reliance on voluntary sector to provide substitutes
- an unpopular area to fund? Some refugee groups are widening their remit to attract funding
- lots of communities are digitally excluded
- some ethnic groups no longer seen as having a specific community need (e.g. Afro-Caribbean population not viewed as a migrant community).

Challenges for funders

- in responding to the cuts, how feasible is it that funders continue to support the same organisations?
- how do we choose between different organisations?
- how can we identify and encourage organisations to adapt and survive? E.g. funding organisations which use digital media - is this a sign of a progressive organisation or a risk (of fraud) for funders?
- issues around representation - local councillors have to balance the needs of different communities
- are funders aware of what good practice looks like?
- legal aid is incredibly complicated for funders to understand and to be able to fund a legal centre.

The way forward

- need for more sustainable engagement between local authorities and voluntary groups
- focus on actual needs
- maximising what we already have, for instance LB Islington's new research into capacity building
- must be careful not to put equality at risk
- income generation is key
- foundations generally do recognise the value for money of small organisations in this field and genuinely want to continue funding them.
- address legal aid issues by identifying cheaper models, e.g. examples of what works in other countries
- recognise the voluntary groups in this field as a source of detailed knowledge unavailable elsewhere.

In feedback forms, individual participants also raised further questions and offered ideas for discussion, which London Funders will follow up through circulating information, strengthened website coverage of these issues and holding occasional meetings to allow funders opportunities to be updated and do some thinking together about these issues.

Attendance

Paul	Birtill	Migration Foundation
Zrinka	Bralo	Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum
Matt	Cavanagh	Institute for Public Policy Research (speaker)
Russell	Darbon	Big Lottery Fund
Caroline	Diehl	Media Trust
Mubin	Haq	Trust for London (meeting chair)
Hugh	Harris	London First
Jerry	Hill	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Rob	Hull	Cripplegate Foundation
Malcolm	John	London Borough of Harrow
Laura	Johnson	London Borough of Redbridge
Hanna	Lee	
Lauren	Lucas	Local Government Information Unit
Esme	Madill	Shpresa Programme (speaker)
Amna	Mahmoud	Greater London Authority
Andrew	Matheson	London Borough of Southwark
Erik	Mesel	John Lyon's Charity
Augusta	Morton	London Borough of Brent
Helen	Morton	BBC Children in Need
Luljeta	Nuzi	Shpresa Programme (speaker)
Minee	Pande	Commonweal Housing
Ciaran	Rafferty	The City Bridge Trust
Samantha	Rennie	Homeless Link
Jill	Rutter	Day Care Trust (speaker)
Henry	St.Clair Miller	London Borough of Islington
Maxine	Quintyne Kolaru	London Council
Andrew	Wright	Cripplegate Foundation

Gaynor Humphreys, Catherine McLoughlin London Funders Secretariat

Apologies for absence

Shila Barber, London Borough of Redbridge; Billy Dove, City of London Corporation; Councillor Penny Shelton, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.