

Event report

Update for funders on asylum and migration issues in London

A London Funders meeting in partnership with:

GREATER**LONDON**AUTHORITY

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HOSTED BY

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VENUE

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London
SE1 2AA

This session brought together funders from across the voluntary, public and private sectors to understand the current context around refugees and migrants in London. It considered 2011 Census data on changes to London's non-UK born residents, English language learning, providing an update on the latest trends and hearing funders' perspectives on good practice and current challenges.

Welcome

James Lee, Senior Policy Officer, Immigration and Asylum Greater London Authority

Overview of migration in London

Wil Tonkiss, Census Analyst and Trainer in the GLA's Intelligence Unit, and James Lee

English language learning update

James Lee

Community-based English language learning

Vaughan Jones, Chief Executive, Praxis

Thompson Kazichi and Elizabeth Goldman

Andy Ruiz Palma, Project Manager, Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants

Edward Vargas Caceres

A funder's perspective

Sheila Rosenberg, Chair, Ruth Hayman Trust

Shabibi Sha

James Lee, Senior Policy Officer, Immigration and Asylum, GLA, meeting host and chair warmly welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how its subject matter sits within the work of the London Strategic Migration Partnership (on which London Funders is represented by Mubin Haq of Trust for London). James also outlined how English language provision is a priority for the Mayor in respect of issues such as integration.

Wil Tonkiss gave an overview of migration in London based on data from the 2011 Census. This is gradually being made available and some of the information available for the first time is proving productive. From the 2011 Census, 37% of Londoners were born outside the UK and while there are some borough concentrations of people born in the same country, there is also a spread of non-UK born people right across London. Out of 2.99 million migrants in London on census day, around 50% had arrived in the UK between 2001 and 2011. The question on year of arrival was new in 2011 as was a question on each person's main language and, where appropriate, their proficiency in English. 78% of Londoners gave English as their main language and of those that did not over four out of five said they spoke it well or very well. However, this question was self-assessed and does not equate to a particular accreditation level. In some London Boroughs, there are a high number of households where English is not spoken as the main language. For example, 40% of households in Tower Hamlets have at least one person over 16 who do not have English as his or her main language.

In discussion with participants, Wil explained that second generation ethnicity information would be available in about a year's time. A speaker from Praxis noted that many recent migrants have spent time in another European country before coming to the UK: arriving with a first European language, they found acquiring a second one relatively easy.

Initial press publicity about the census statistics on country of origin and ethnicity had not all been positive and participants discussed the positive impact on London of generations of migrants. They expressed interest in hearing about comparable data available on other European capitals or world cities.

One participant asked about issues of under-reporting. Wil explained that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) tests against a second sample and compensates for this. Wil stressed that statistics from the census are treated and used as indicative (e.g. people's self-assessment of their competence in English). The GLA have produced projections grounded in census data but also including migration data from the UK Border Agency available at ward level. There is no official information on undocumented migrants though grassroots groups would know about their own communities. Wil explained how the census could help an understanding of migrant poverty.

“The census could help an understanding of migrant poverty”

The Metropolitan Migration Foundation has funded HACT to map housing association property and tenants against census data. It was suggested that a similar mapping exercise against ESOL provision would be very useful. By some point in 2014 there would be some data available about movement in London, based on census questions about current address and address from a year before.

Funder's present suggested briefings with tools would be useful, as information from the census is released. Wil encouraged participants to look at the wealth of information in the GLA's London Datastore (<http://data.london.gov.uk>), including its section on the census (and a timetable on the release of data (<http://data.london.gov.uk/census/>)).

James Lee gave an update on English language learning, explaining that the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) was the main funder of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), though support now focused mostly on employability, so that a migrant who is an active job seeker is eligible for support. Currently learners on “non-job seeking” benefits, (e.g. Income Support, Housing Benefit, etc.) face 50% course fees. The government has, however, allowed discretion on behalf of colleges to allow for a wider range of learners to have their fees covered using a college's existing skills budget. In order to be eligible for discretionary support, the learner has to be taking the course to prepare for work. It therefore excludes a majority of asylum seekers who do not have permission to work and people in low paid work on working tax credit.

GLA research has identified key groups unable to access ESOL, notably lower level learners, including those who are not literate in their main language, people in low paid work and asylum seekers. There has also been a significant drop in those in work accessing ESOL and women (particularly those with children). One participant noted that additional changes to funding will restrict the funded time available for people to reach an acceptable level of English. The GLA research report can be accessed [here](#).

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James noted that The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has recently announced an allocation of money for community-based family learning. The DCLG's English language competition has up to £6 million available across the country for work aimed at achieving progress in language learning and integration. Further details on the competition can be found [here](#).

Community-based English language learning

Vaughan Jones provided an overview of Praxis, a long established, community-based organisation offering open access services for vulnerable migrants including refugees, asylum claimants and unaccompanied child refugees and migrants, i.e. for people who find settling in the UK presents a challenge. Praxis' work focuses both on core advice and case work and

projects to protect human rights, and offers temporary housing, help with employment, language, interpreting and more.

Praxis has also developed an entrepreneurial arm to subsidise its other projects by providing interpreting services in Tower Hamlets. They are building on this experience by creating the Praxis Language Gym, an approach to ESOL which is learner centred and contextual, thus directly related to individuals' lives, needs and aspirations. It is based on state of the art technology and allows each person to progress at their own pace (as in a gym) and aiming at linguistic, digital and social inclusion.

Elizabeth Goldman expressed frustration with the increasing difficulty over funding specialist ESOL for people working in health and social care. She had hoped that the Work Programme would offer English language as part of preparation for work (as the previous scheme did) but Praxis has received no referrals from prime contractors.

She and Vaughan emphasised how limited the SFA is in focusing on employability only, and no other aspects of communication. A former student of Praxis, **Thompson Kazichi**, spoke of his achieving a Health and Social Care qualification on his arrival from Zimbabwe, which he had been able to complete because of Praxis' help in improving his written English. He described the development of his English language skills and confidence, which meant he was now studying for a degree in nursing at Greenwich University.

Andy Ruiz Palma gave an overview of the Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants, developed from St Mary Magdalen Church in Islington which had a congregation predominantly made up of migrant workers. The church opened a drop in centre on a voluntary basis in 1997 with informal provision. In 2000 they began providing ESOL classes but high demand led them to developing better facilities including an ICT suite, for which they obtained funding. They have also developed therapy sessions, music, art and drama. Food parcels and lunch are also offered to learners. Andy stressed that their style of operation breaks down national and political barriers and offers a chance to use the language learned.

The Learning and Skills Council (SFA's predecessor) funded the first ESOL classes but since 2007 ESOL funding has been harder to obtain, with less available overall and more limited criteria. The Centre is trying to maintain services for undocumented migrants. Additional services are offered including information on benefits entitlement. Andy made the point that their overheads are low compared with FE colleges' costs.

Edward Vargas Caceres, a trustee of the Centre and former student, described his experience of arriving in the UK under difficult circumstances and how vital ESOL provision had been in helping him to feel a 'useful' part of society. He now runs a project through the centre to help pupils learn English and achieve their goals.

Sheila Rosenberg offered the funder's perspective on ESOL provision. She described the history of the Ruth Hayman Trust, set up in 1981 to give grants to individuals whose first language is not English and who have come to settle in the UK. The grants cover fees for learning and training, including the acquisition of language skills at an appropriate level for professional practice and technical roles (doctors, pharmacists, bricklayers). In the last year they made 150 grants, half in London and the south east. They also support people studying in prison. Sheila emphasised the importance of

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English language as a means to participate fully in family and community life here, and that we have gone backwards in recent years in terms of provision for language learning.

Sheila knows how many of the students the Trust has supported want to “pay something back” and sees them contributing to society through their jobs and in many other ways. **Shabibi Sha**, now a trustee of the Ruth Hayman Trust, spoke of feeling “a mute” on her arrival in the UK with little English, dependent on her children to translate for her and only attending ESOL classes after many years here. She stressed that migrants are often dealing with complex circumstances such as caring for sick relatives, which dramatically affects their ability to engage with English language provision.

In discussion with the panel funders spoke of a sense of frustration that some learners never seemed to show progress: how could ESOL classes be more useful? Responses questioned how widespread this was, pointed to the limitations of much that is on offer to students, the restrictions on hours covered by the current fee structure, and above all, the need to see English language classes which take a holistic view, relating language to people's circumstances and their varied needs.

Funders were also keen to point out the need for different approaches to address the different migrant communities in London. Understanding the cultural barriers to attendance can be vital in developing effective provision. It was felt by many that some of the most interesting approaches to ESOL are already occurring in community-based contexts.

In conclusion the group confirmed their understanding that good English language provision provides a validating experience for migrants by which they are made to feel accepted, and of ‘use’ to the host society.

In closing the meeting, James thanked all speakers and audience members for their participation and London Funders for helping to arrange this event.

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With thanks to the Greater London Authority for providing excellent meeting facilities.

