

Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel (MRAP)

14 June 2023

11.00 – 13.00

Microsoft Teams meeting

Chair

Laila Aziz, GLA Migration Team

Attendees

Renae Mann, Refugee Council

Yvonne Bizayi, ELATT

Anna Yassin, Glass Door

Lydia Martin, New Europeans UK

Kahiye Alim, Council of Somali Organisations

Peter Wieltchnig, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)

Dolores Modern, Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

Sugi Gobiratnam, Middlesex Tamil Academy

Renata Plachetkova, Roma Support Group

Mihai Bica, Roma Support Group

Geraldine Blake, London Funders

Lorie Halliday, Kanlungan

Niamh O'Reilly, AdviceUK

Mulat Haregot, Evelyn Oldfield

Helen Plant, Learning and Work Institute

Jack Bradstreet, Learning and Work Institute

Greater London Authority (GLA) staff

Hannah Boylan, Migration Team

George Hanoun, Migration Team

Susan Cueva, Migration Team

Mark Winterburn, Migration Team

Rukshan Rajamanthri, Migration Team

Siobhan Gosrani, Migration Team

Khadijah Amani, Migration Team

Phil Baker, Migration Team

Eduardo Lopes, Migration Team

Muhammad Abushiri, Migration Team

Maysa Ismael, Migration Team

Louise Yu, Migration Team

Yin Lam, Migration Team

Healah Riazi, Migration and Rough Sleeping Team

Ramiye Thavabalasingam, Migration and Rough Sleeping Team

Elizabeth Kirk, Migration and Rough Sleeping Team

Lauren Evans, Skills & Employment

Shiryn Sayani, External Relations

Agenda

1. Welcome & Minutes

1.1. Laila Aziz welcomed attendees and invited members to observe a minute's silence marking the sixth anniversary of the Grenfell Tower fire, in remembrance of the 72 people who lost their lives.

1.2. The minutes from the last meeting were approved.

2. Feedback from LSMP

2.1. Laila Aziz gave a summary of topics discussed at the most recent London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) Board meeting on 28 March, noting that these meetings are informed by discussions held at MRAP.

The previous LSMP covered a number of topics, including: the immigration needs of Grenfell families, far-right activities and mapping of hate crimes across London, the London Regional Asylum Plan, streamlined asylum processing, the Refugee Housing Programme, and items around health, preventing infectious disease, safeguarding and modern slavery.

2.2. Mark Winterburn expanded on the discussions held at LSMP around hate crimes against people seeking asylum, welcoming the contributions of the Metropolitan Police on this issue and noting that the Met and MOPAC took away an action to look into options for mapping hate crimes against people seeking asylum in London.

3. Developments in policy and legislation

3.1. Illegal Migration Bill and emergency summit

3.1.1. Phil Baker gave an overview of the Illegal Migration Bill emergency summit that was convened by the GLA on Thursday 25 May, with the goal of providing a forum for the sector to raise concerns and questions around the Bill and ensure all partners are aware of the seriousness of its potential impacts. Phil thanked colleagues who took part in the summit, noting that more than 200 stakeholders attended in total across local authorities and civil society.

At the summit, colleagues highlighted the need for improved partnership working, further convening and greater training and guidance. There were also discussions around rethinking the way the sector works, such as by increasing engagement with grassroots organisations, mapping out the full range of services available in a community, learning from models in other cities and countries where similar legislation has been introduced, and considering the needs of people in rural areas as well as cities.

Phil noted that he and colleagues are now looking at the steps the GLA can take to support London's response to the Bill, particularly around further convening and promoting working in partnership, and welcomed members' thoughts on both the summit and what the role of the GLA should be going forward.

3.1.2. Colleagues expressed their appreciation for the summit and thanked the GLA for organising and hosting it.

3.1.3. Renae Mann noted that Refugee Council has commissioned an impact assessment of the Bill for individuals and organisations, the findings of which will be shared in mid-July followed by a final report in September. Refugee Council is also coordinating work around scenario

planning and how organisations will respond to the Bill, with Renae noting that many organisations are recognising they will need to make significant changes to their service models, and so a crucial question for partners will be how to support these organisations that will be most affected once the Bill is enacted.

- 3.1.4. Anna Yassin echoed Renae's point about supporting organisations to adapt in response to the Bill and colleagues' appreciation of the emergency summit, and added two reflections on the summit: firstly, that the flow of conversations was disrupted by colleagues staying within their comfort zones and repeating themselves in panel discussions, and so it may be more useful next time to split stakeholders up and into spaces outside of their policy areas, and secondly, that there was a concerning lack of engagement by local authorities on the potential modern slavery impact of the Bill on their services. Anna suggested that this may be down to boroughs still firefighting the implications of the Nationality and Borders Act, thus reducing their capacity to plan for the future, and called on colleagues to encourage boroughs to carry out impact assessments of the Bill.
- 3.1.5. Peter Wieltchnig noted that FLEX is working with partners across the sector to coordinate their response to the Bill and make parliamentary submissions, including putting forward amendments that will have the greatest impact and are most likely to pass. Peter highlighted the severity of the Bill's potential impact on modern slavery and asylum, and underlined that while both a national and local level response is required, there is a lack of clarity at the local level about what statutory and civil society partners can do to mitigate the impacts of the Bill on healthcare and destitution in particular.
- 3.1.6. Hannah Boylan thanked colleagues for helping to shape and inform the GLA's work in response to the Bill and for their feedback on the summit. Hannah noted that a key part of the GLA's thinking going forward will be how it works with local authorities, with positive examples from previous work around rough sleeping to build on. Hannah's key takeaway from the summit was that there are things the sector can do to support people to access their rights and entitlements and create a resilient city.

Action: Laila Aziz to circulate the summary notes from the GLA's emergency summit once these are ready.

3.2. Asylum support and Streamlined Asylum Process

- 3.2.1. Ruksan Rajamanthri gave an update on streamlined asylum processing (SAP). Key points included:
 - The SAP cohort has now been expanded to include those from Iraq and Iran.
 - The deadline for submitting questionnaires has been extended from 20 working days to 30 working days and they are also now accompanied by a short interview.
 - LSMP officers are seeking more data on the number of people affected in London and nationally, and greater clarity on updates to the move-on process. There is no data currently on the number of further questionnaires being sent out in London, but they should already be with people seeking asylum.
- 3.2.2. Laila Aziz noted that questions were also raised at the most recent meeting of the Homeless Migrants Advisory Panel (HMAP) around information sharing with local authorities and the variation in general grant rates between different nationalities.

- 3.2.3. Hannah Boylan noted that the Mayor has [spoken out](#) in opposition to plans to house people seeking asylum on a barge in the Royal Docks. This comes amidst wider concerns across the sector around the high density of people in hotels and safeguarding, with colleagues calling for sustainable community-based accommodation instead of contingency accommodation.
- 3.2.4. Rukshan Rajamanthri gave an update on the Home Office's latest maximisation policy to increase capacity within the current contingency hotel estate. Key points included:
- The aim of the policy is to increase the number of people within hotels by increasing the number of those sharing a room, and changing room layouts in order to do this.
 - In terms of engagement on this policy, the Home Office will contact local authorities directly and multi-agency forums will possibly be introduced.
 - LSMP officers are starting to hear of hotels being affected by this policy, and are seeking to understand timescales and the number of people that will be affected.
 - People seeking asylum held a protest outside their hotel in Pimlico earlier this month, after they were asked to share four people to a room.
- 3.2.5. Renae Mann outlined a number of concerns that colleagues across London and the UK are raising about the maximisation policy, particularly around the maximum number of people that can share a room, the distance between beds, provisions for people to lock valuables such as documents, and guidance for allocating shared rooms. Renae noted that public health concerns caused by cramped conditions in hotels led to a reduction, not increase in room-sharing during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the policy is also impacting on mental health which could lead to people opting to leave hotels and go to vulnerable settings. Renae called for the Home Office to provide urgent clarity on how it is instructing accommodation providers to allocate shared rooms.

Action: LSMP officers to seek clarity from the Home Office on how it is instructing accommodation providers to allocate shared rooms in hotels.

4. Migrant exploitation report launch and findings

- 4.1. Susan Cueva updated that a [new report into migrant labour exploitation in London](#) was launched with an event at City Hall on Monday 12 June. The report was commissioned by the Mayor of London, supported by FLEX and produced by The Young Foundation. It looks at the prevalence of migrant labour exploitation across London, how the sector is responding in terms of support and advice provision, and sets out policy recommendations. Susan outlined the key findings and recommendations in the report, and noted that these intersect with many of the potential impacts of the Illegal Migration Bill.
- 4.2. Susan Cueva noted that the GLA has also commissioned the Work Rights Centre to provide foundational employment rights advice training for 16 migrant and community organisations which will focus on the intersection between employment and migrant issues.
- 4.3. Sugi Gobiratnam asked how colleagues can influence employers to act on the findings of the report, highlighting that some are not following safety regulations and failing to act on poor working conditions for migrant workers. Susan noted that the GLA has an engagement plan with agencies such as the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), and added that in terms of reporting, there are some enforcement agencies that workers can approach anonymously, while civil society organisations can also report issues on workers' behalf.

- 4.4. Geraldine Blake welcomed this report and highlighted that a key priority for funders is to address the long-term issues around workforce recruitment and retention in the advice sector.
- 4.5. Hannah Boylan thanked Geraldine Blake for her leadership through the Citizenship and Integration Initiative (CII), noting that this has enabled the GLA to benefit from Susan Cueva and Esther McConnell's expertise as secondees and champion the peer-led approach that was used in this report.

5. Events in Sudan

- 5.1. Phil Baker gave an update following the recent events in Sudan. Key points included:
 - The UK Government's evacuation effort for British citizens and their families has ended; this managed to evacuate around 2,500 people. There may also be some Sudanese people who fled to neighbouring countries and will attempt to come to the UK via the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS).
 - As of 5 May, 52 Sudanese families had presented as homeless in London, mostly in areas in the north west and east. GLA officers are continuing to seek up to date data on homelessness presentations and where Sudanese communities in London are based.
 - Issues affecting the Sudanese community are being raised through the [London Communities Emergencies Partnership](#) (LCEP). Currently there are some issues affecting people who were studying in Sudan and are now seeking to restart their studies in the UK.
 - The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is instructing local authorities to exempt eligible Sudanese evacuees from the habitual residence test.
- 5.2. Anna Yassin asked about the type of immigration status being given to family members of British nationals evacuated from Sudan. Phil Baker responded that he is not 100% sure, but would guess that Leave to enter is given initially, and then family members will need to apply for a spousal visa (for example) or go through the asylum process. Anna called for local authority housing departments to be made aware of the confirmed status, so that they don't need to refer people back to frontline services.

Action: Phil Baker to confirm the immigration status that is being given to family members of British nationals evacuated from Sudan.

6. Research – Adult Education Budget

- 6.1. Helen Plant gave an overview of the Learning and Work Institute's research project into how the Mayor's Adult Education Budget (AEB) is supporting London's migrant communities. The research aims to understand: the extent to which AEB-funded skills provision successfully supports migrant communities, how well migrants understand their eligibility for AEB funding, and the complex barriers currently preventing migrant communities from accessing skills training, and there will be a focus on five key funding flexibilities which are likely to have the greatest impact on migrant communities.
- 6.2. Mihai Bica noted that the vast majority of Roma communities in London are not aware of eligible funding and support, raising concerns around the lack of promotion of training and careers advice to young people in particular and adding that there are many Roma people

who are keen to take literacy classes as they have low or no literacy. Mihai also highlighted that missing even one day of work can impact migrant communities heavily financially, and thus suggested food vouchers and reimbursing travel costs as possible solutions to remove barriers to accessing learning.

Action: Laila Aziz to put Mihai Bica and Helen Plant in touch for a separate discussion to help inform the LWI's research on the impact of the AEB on migrant communities.

- 6.3. Dolores Modern highlighted the fact that many Latin American migrant women in London work in cleaning, hospitality and domestic work, which can have very antisocial hours, and that they also often have caring responsibilities as two key barriers preventing them from accessing learning. Dolores suggested increasing the amount of flexible provision that migrants can access at any time as a solution to these barriers.
- 6.4. Renae Mann highlighted the lack of awareness of eligibility to access learning amongst migrants who are newly arrived in the UK and/or have newly received their grant of status, adding that people move around a lot within our system and so designing provision that can follow them on this journey rather than being vulnerable to disruption would be welcome.
- 6.5. Yin Lam noted that the lack of access to childcare has been highlighted by members of the Hong Kong community in London as a key barrier to accessing adult education and training.

7. MRAP Review

- 7.1. Laila Aziz gave an update on the GLA's MRAP review, noting that the survey and video call slots for members to contribute their thoughts on MRAP that Laila previously circulated are being kept open in recognition of the Illegal Migration Bill's impact on colleagues' capacity to contribute to the review. Laila will also share some recommendations ahead of the next MRAP meeting in September. Key areas that the review will focus on are:
 - **Processes**, including membership (how to become a member/lead member) and actions and feedback
 - **Purpose and remit**, including the need to be strategic versus reactive
 - **Functioning**, including participation, meeting virtually versus in-person, and member responsibilities
 - **Values**, including inclusivity, voices of experience, solidarity and collaboration and support
 - **Migrant Londoner Panel**, including the opportunity to hear from voices directly and the need to consider intersectionality, accessibility and representation.
- 7.2. Niamh O'Reilly floated a suggestion to hold in-person meetings, noting that while these can be great for relationship building, they are also cost-heavy in terms of time and travel costs. Niamh suggested having one in-person meeting a year to enable networking and casual conversations, and also welcomed the Migrant Londoner Panel as an excellent way of bringing voices of lived experience into MRAP.
- 7.3. Sugi Gobiratnam asked if there are opportunities for non-lead members of MRAP to shadow or attend LSMP Board meetings as guests. Laila Aziz noted that she will look into options to expand MRAP attendance at LSMP beyond lead members.

8. GLA updates

- 8.1. Shiryn Sayani gave an update on a Mayoral campaign launching in July to support and celebrate migrant Londoners. The campaign's central ethos is that anyone who chooses to make London their home is a Londoner, and it will highlight support that is available for new arrivals as well as longstanding migrant communities, such as the [Migrant Londoners Hub](#). Shiryn invited members to contribute feedback on the messaging and visuals of the campaign via a survey, to ensure that they reflect and respect London's migrant communities.
- 8.2. Laila Aziz highlighted that the GLA is accepting submissions to include new organisations on the Migrant Londoners Hub's [map of migrant support services](#), and invited colleagues to contribute details of relevant organisations via [this survey](#).
- 8.3. Lauren Evans gave an update on the [Skills for Londoners Community Outreach Programme](#), noting that this is a small grants programme for community organisations with an annual turnover of less than £500,000 to raise awareness of, support outreach activity for and increase participation in adult education opportunities. Lauren encouraged colleagues to share the programme with their networks as applications are open until 7 July.

9. AOB

- 9.1. Sugi Gobiratnam highlighted the plight of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who have been stranded for months on the British territory island Diego Garcia, fearing persecution if they return to Sri Lanka. Laila Aziz offered to meet Sugi separately to discuss advocacy for this group.

Action: Laila Aziz to set up a separate call with Sugi Gobiratnam to discuss advocacy for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees stranded on Diego Garcia.

- 9.2. Niamh O'Reilly highlighted that Trust for London is funding AdviceUK to provide smaller organisations and groups working with minority ethnic and marginalised communities in London with free training and intensive 1-1 support, to improve the quality of the social welfare advice they give. Niamh invited colleagues to share [this response form](#) with their networks and/or find out more by emailing quality@adviceuk.org.uk.