

## **Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel (MRAP)**

20 September 2023

15.00 – 17.00

Microsoft Teams meeting

### **Chair**

Laila Aziz, GLA Migration Team

### **Attendees**

Renae Mann, Refugee Council

Marina Davidson, Doctors of the World

Barbara Drozdowicz, East European Resource Centre (EERC)

Phoebe Heneage, East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT)

Yvonne Bizayi, ELATT

Remzije Duli, Kosovar Albanian Youth Against Violence (KAYAV)

Sarah Crowther, Refugees in Effective and Active Partnership (REAP)

Carolina Caicedo, Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)

Anna Yassin, Glass Door

Kahiye Alim, Council of Somali Organisations

Mulat Haregot, Evelyn Oldfield

Maria Iglesias, Praxis

Bethan Lant, Praxis

Lydia Martin, New Europeans UK

Claire Fletcher, Rainbow Migration

Mariam Bafo, We Belong

Julia Tinsley-Kent, Migrants' Rights Network

Sugi Gobiratnam, Middlesex Tamil Academy

Mihai Bica, Roma Support Group

### **Greater London Authority (GLA) staff**

Tamara Smith, Migration

George Hanoun, Migration

Eleonora Paesani, Migration

Susan Cueva, Migration

Muhammad Abushiri, Migration

Maysa Ismael, Migration

Louise Yu, Migration

Yin Lam, Migration

Eduardo Lopes, Migration

Philip Baker, Migration

Siobhan Gosrani, Migration

Mark Winterburn, Migration

Khadijah Amani, Migration

Hannah Boylan, Migration

Ramiye Thavabalasingam, Rough Sleeping

Healah Riazzi, Rough Sleeping

### **Minutes:**

#### **1. Welcome & Minutes**

1.1. Laila Aziz welcomed attendees, and the minutes from the last meeting were approved.

## **2. Feedback from LSMP**

2.1. Laila Aziz gave a summary of the most recent London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) Board meeting on 29 June, noting that these meetings are informed by discussions held at MRAP. The previous LSMP covered a number of topics, including the Sudanese conflict and evacuation, the Home Office's hotel maximisation policy and safeguarding in asylum hotels, the potential impacts of the Illegal Migration Bill, and updates on skills and employment.

2.2. Mark Winterburn highlighted that, as an action from the last LSMP Board meeting, the Home Office has confirmed that, for Sudanese nationals who claim asylum while they have leave to remain, the conditions of their leave (including permission to work) will continue until their asylum claim is decided. The Home Office also committed to providing further clarity on issues raised by colleagues at the meeting around safeguarding and its hotel maximisation policy.

## **3. Illegal Migration Act**

3.1. Eduardo Lopes gave an update on the GLA's work in response to the Illegal Migration Act following the [emergency summit](#) it convened in May. Key points included:

- The GLA has convened an advisory board of 15 experts from across the sector to inform its work implementing recommendations from the emergency summit in May. The board will meet approximately every 6 weeks and will feed into MRAP, incorporating insights and views from MRAP colleagues.
- The board held its first meeting on 15 September, in which colleagues discussed the need for training to increase awareness and understanding of the Act e.g. for social workers and local authorities, an interest in live policy mapping to track the status of individual provisions, the importance of building networks and establishing a unified approach both in mitigating the impacts of the Act and in wider advocacy, the importance of engaging with funders, and the importance of evidence gathering and collecting data on the impacts of the Act, including who is best placed to do this and how to join this work up effectively. The group also discussed a series of regulations which are being enforced on 28 September, including around age assessment practices for children.
- The GLA is also considering a suggestion from the board to convene an additional working group looking at specific issues around health, particularly around access to secondary care and raising awareness of people's entitlements.

3.2. Colleagues highlighted the stress and anxiety caused by not knowing which provisions of the Act will come into force and when (e.g. some aspects are dependent on the Supreme Court's judgement on the Rwanda policy), and that this makes it very difficult to plan ahead and advise service users and partners.

3.3. Lydia Martin highlighted the importance of evidence gathering, reflecting that from her experience working on the EU Settlement Scheme it is vital to be as pre-emptive as possible and ensure consistency across the sector, in order to avoid relying solely on Home Office evidence to build arguments for advocacy.

- 3.4. Hannah Boylan raised her concern that the Act may cause migrants to refrain from accessing services out of fear, leading to them becoming less visible and the full picture of the impacts of the Act not being captured by official data, e.g a potential reduction in referrals into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Renae Mann echoed this and suggested that one way to mitigate this risk would be to engage further with grassroots community organisations providing support to service users who are not engaging with statutory services.
- 3.5. Renae Mann highlighted the lack of capacity in the legal advice sector as a significant issue impacting on colleagues' ability to respond to the Act effectively, and emphasised the need for long-term sustainable investment in the sector.
- 3.6. Anna Yassin expressed interest in finding out more about the response of local authorities to the Act, noting that their input would be extremely important to any strategic litigation if options for this are being considered by partners.
- 3.7. Renae Mann relayed the experiences of Refugee Council staff supporting children and young people since the Act received royal assent in July, noting that young people are fearful about whether they will be detained or removed and the potential impacts on their access to education, as well as around age assessments. Mark Winterburn added that local authorities are being very careful in trying not to alarm the children they are supporting, but they are also struggling to answer many questions about the impact of the Act.
- 3.8. Mariam Bafo highlighted that the forthcoming increases in immigration fees will increase the risk of young people falling out of status, and expressed the importance of humanising data and capturing human stories, noting that in her engagement with the Home Office around fee increases she has been sharing anonymised impact stories to capture the real life impacts that this policy has on young people.
- 3.9. Remzije Duli highlighted a number of barriers impacting KAYAV's ability to support its service users, noting that staff have not had any training about the Act and they are struggling to get bank accounts open for some young asylum seekers. Laila Aziz noted that the latter could be linked to a hostile environment policy announced earlier this year to restrict access to banking services for those deemed as 'illegal migrants'.

#### **4. Sudan evacuation**

- 4.1. Eduardo Lopes gave an update on the GLA's Lessons Learned Review into the evacuation of Sudanese nationals in April 2023. Key points included:
  - The goal of the review is to look at the Sudanese evacuation as a case study to help inform future similar responses as a city, particularly by understanding and clarifying the roles of different organisations and improving information sharing.
  - The GLA is consulting with different groups of stakeholders, including Sudanese community groups, local authorities in London, Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs) across the UK, and humanitarian organisations like British Red Cross.
  - An initial consultation has been held with Sudanese community partners this week where a number of issues were raised, including:
    - a strong feeling that there is a clear disparity between the treatment of Sudanese arrivals and that of Ukrainian arrivals,
    - issues around regularising immigration status (particularly for non-British nationals whose initial grant of 6 months leave to enter will be coming to an

- end soon), including a lack of capacity in the immigration advice sector to support this cohort and people being unable to afford visa application fees,
- people struggling to apply for benefits which also impacts on their ability to find accommodation,
  - several barriers to accessing education, including qualifications not being recognised and people being asked to pay international fees that they can't afford,
  - a lack of culturally appropriate and translated resources,
  - and lack of access to mental health and trauma support.

## **5. Housing and homelessness pressures (including asylum support cessations)**

5.1. Maria Iglesias gave an update on the most recent Homeless Migrants Advisory Panel (HMAP) meeting. Key points included:

- The meeting involved representatives from the Home Office and DLUHC, who confirmed that they are working with one another to streamline processes and increase access to benefits.
- A key issue covered in the meeting was the Home Office's recent change in practice around cessations of asylum support, so that the minimum 'notice to quit' period once someone has had a decision on their asylum claim has been reduced to 7 days. Colleagues raised that despite this not being classed as a change in asylum policy itself, it is causing a significant impact on the ground regardless.
- Colleagues highlighted that the government's commitment to end rough sleeping can be used as leverage for advocacy in the migrant rough sleeping space.

5.2. Maria Iglesias and Anna Yassin encouraged colleagues to participate in the London Women's Rough Sleeping Census which is being delivered by Solace Women's Aid from 25 September to 1 October, welcoming that this census includes the experiences of migrant women who are often underrepresented in data on homelessness.

5.3. Mark Winterburn noted that asylum support cessations will be discussed at the next LSMP Board meeting on 28 September, and also invited colleagues to get in touch with any issues on this that they would like to be raised in the Home Office's regular weekly catch ups with SMPs. Maria Iglesias highlighted that if the sector is able to estimate the overall costs of this change in practice, this can be used to counter the Home Office's argument that the change will enable it to save money.

5.4. Renae Mann raised her concern that the Home Office's hotel maximisation policy to increase room sharing doesn't sufficiently take public health into account, noting this will increase the risk of spreading communicable diseases and have a significant impact on service users' mental health, and highlighting that this needs to be considered urgently with numbers set to increase over the coming months. Mark Winterburn noted that issues around this policy are also being raised by colleagues via the London Asylum Health Task and Finish Group, which is chaired by Dr Kevin Fenton.

5.5. Mihai Bica highlighted that Roma Support Group has started a new 5-year project focusing entirely on housing, which will involve policy and advocacy work and provision of advice and support services around improving access to the private rented sector and social housing. Mihai invited colleagues to get in touch if they are interested in collaborating.

- 5.6. Anna Yassin highlighted that CHAIN data has recorded a sharp increase in rough sleeping in the first quarter of 2023/24, particularly amongst Romanians and other Eastern European nationalities, noting that the EU Settlement Scheme continues to have an impact on rough sleeping. Anna welcomed that, to help tackle this, Stop the Traffik is launching a digital campaign targeting Romanians and other high-risk groups.

## 6. Immigration Rules & EUSS

- 6.1. Lydia Martin gave an update on recent changes to EU Settlement Scheme rules and policy. Key points included:

- Since 9 August, it has become much harder to prove to the Home Office that an applicant has 'reasonable grounds' for applying late, with 3<sup>rd</sup> country nationals particularly vulnerable to this change.
- This is because the decision-making process has been split into two stages, starting with considering the reasons for the application having been submitted after the deadline. If the reasons are accepted, the application then proceeds to the second stage of consideration where the substance of the application is decided on. If the reasons are not accepted, the application will be rejected as invalid, and there is no right of administrative review or appeal against a rejection, leaving a judicial review as the only available option.
- The Home Office has also changed its approach to grant funding for organisations supporting people to apply to the EUSS, with Lydia noting that the latest round of funding announced in July covers more of the UK geographically, but fewer organisations have been awarded funding overall than previously. This has led to concerns around capacity and a lack of specialisms being covered by organisations awarded funding, such as mental health specialists and homelessness agencies, making it harder to address certain vulnerabilities.

## 7. Sector resilience

- 7.1. Maysa Ismael and Tamara Smith highlighted two upcoming GLA initiatives that will soon be open to tender to sector colleagues:

- Maysa updated that the GLA is commissioning a partner organisation to deliver its Migration Sector Wellbeing and Resilience Programme, which will start in January 2024. This programme aims to support frontline organisations to embed best practice systems and resources to support the wellbeing of practitioners, protect them from burnout and vicarious trauma, embed healthy working models in their policies and procedures and promote peer learning and collaboration, and will be co-designed with grantees of the GLA's Migrant Advice and Support Fund.
- Tamara updated that the GLA is tendering for a community engagement partner to facilitate its Migrant Londoners' Board, which will act as an advisory panel space for people with lived experience of migration to include their voices in the GLA's work and policymaking, including by providing a tailored space for them to connect into MRAP. The MLB will look to recruit 30 people across all statuses and protected characteristics, and partnership applications to the tender are encouraged.

## 8. MRAP Review

- 8.1. Laila Aziz gave an update on the GLA's MRAP review. Key points included:

- Laila has been summarising feedback from members about what has been working well and what could be improved, and this is being used to inform a revision of the panel's Terms of Reference.
- In terms of session structure, the idea going forward is to retain reactive discussion but also provide a dedicated space within sessions for organisations to share about their work.
- Colleagues are encouraged to share what they think MRAP's priorities up to March 2024 (which is when the pre-election period ahead of the next Mayoral elections will start) should be, with longer-term workstreams able to be planned after this. Topics that have already been suggested by colleagues include safeguarding, physical and mental health and sector resilience.
- Laila is reaching out to organisations that have been suggested for membership, and is looking to set up a digital form on the MRAP webpage for stakeholders interested in joining the panel to be able to express their interest.