

Migrant and Refugee Advisory Panel (MRAP)

23 November 2023

15.00 – 17.00

Microsoft Teams meeting

Chair

Laila Aziz, GLA Migration Team

Attendees

Renaë Mann, Refugee Council

Barbara Drozdowicz, East European Resource Centre (EERC)

Phoebe Heneage, East London Advanced Technology Training (ELATT)

Yvonne Bizayi, ELATT

Howard Chae, Doctors of the World

Stephanie Ratcliffe, St Mungo's

Adis Sehic, Work Rights Centre

Peter Wieltchnig, Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX)

Eleanor Brown, CARAS

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

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

Jacobo Belilty, Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK (CLAUK)

Anna Yassin, Glass Door

Bethan Lant, Praxis

Kahiye Alim, Council of Somali Organisations

Sarah Akbert Robson, Da'aro Youth Project

Phayza Fudlalla, BME Health Forum

Sugi Gobiratnam, Middlesex Tamil Academy

Mary Atkinson, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)

Alex Stevenson, Learning and Work Institute (LWI)

Jack Bradstreet, Learning and Work Institute (LWI)

Greater London Authority (GLA) staff

Tamara Smith, Migration

Eleonora Paesani, Migration

George Hanoun, Migration

Phil Baker, Migration

Eduardo Lopes, Migration

Hannah Boylan, Migration

Louise Yu, Migration

Yin Lam, Migration

Rukshan Rajamanthri, Migration (LSMP)

Marc Simo, Migration (LSMP)

Khadijah Amani, Migration (LSMP)

Mark Winterburn, Migration (LSMP)

Siobhan Gosrani, Migration (LSMP)

Thomas Wilson, Financial Hardship

Elisabeth Pop, Community Engagement

Lisa Wang, Equalities

Lauren Evans, Skills & Employment

Sangeeta Bhui, MOPAC

Minutes:

1. Welcome – Introduction & Minutes

- 1.1. Laila Aziz welcomed attendees and colleagues introduced themselves.
- 1.2. Laila noted that she is looking to expand membership of MRAP per feedback from the group and gave a brief summary of MRAP's function, highlighting that this is a key space for the GLA to hear from frontline civil society organisations supporting migrant communities and to inform discussions held at London Strategic Migration Partnership (LSMP) Board meetings.
- 1.3. Laila acknowledged the significance of recent events, including the war in Gaza and the UK Supreme Court's Rwanda judgement, and their impacts on colleagues who support affected communities or are affected themselves. Laila highlighted that, whilst the GLA is politically neutral, MRAP is designed to be an inclusive and welcoming space for colleagues.
- 1.4. Laila invited colleagues to email her with any amendments or additions to the minutes of the previous meeting.

2. Feedback from LSMP

- 2.1. Mark Winterburn gave a summary of the most recent LSMP Board meeting on 28 September. Key points included:
 - There was discussion around the challenges facing the Sudanese community in London, and an action was taken to convene a further meeting between the GLA, the Home Office, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), and civil society and community partners to specifically follow up on these.
 - Colleagues discussed the closure of Afghan bridging hotels and issues around arrivals from Pakistan, with the Government having committed to relocate eligible Afghans currently in Pakistan to the UK.
 - The Chair of the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) gave an update on issues affecting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), with her key message being that urgent action is needed to address significant issues in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) system.
 - There was discussion around modern slavery, including challenges with the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) system such as a lack of first responder capacity, and the Home Office noted that in principle it supports the idea of setting up a London-level working group on this issue involving the GLA, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and civil society partners.
 - Colleagues raised significant concerns around asylum support cessations and the impact this has on levels of rough sleeping. Mark noted that the Home Office has said it is committed to issuing biometric residence permits (BRPs) at the same time as asylum decisions, and this topic will also be covered at the next LSMP Board meeting on 7 December.

3. Rwanda judgement

- 3.1. Eduardo Lopes gave an update following the UK Supreme Court's judgement that the government's Rwanda policy is unlawful. Key points included:

- The Mayor of London has welcomed the Supreme Court's decision, describing the Rwanda policy as cruel and unworkable and calling on the government to treat people seeking asylum with dignity.
- The government has suggested introducing emergency legislation in response to the Supreme Court's judgement, though it is currently unclear what this may look like in practice. The Home Office has also added Georgia and India to its list of countries deemed safe for removal under the Illegal Migration Act, and the list may be expanded further.
- The GLA continues to convene its Illegal Migration Act Advisory Board quarterly to inform its work in response to the Act, discuss concerns around its potential impact (particularly on the Albanian community) and conduct live policy mapping as various provisions come into force.
- As part of this work, the GLA recently supported the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) to deliver an online webinar covering the Act in detail, and is looking at providing further tailored trainings e.g. for social workers. The GLA is also considering vicarious trauma faced by the sector and has launched the Migration Sector Wellbeing and Resilience Project to help address this.

3.2. Renae Mann and Tamara Smith welcomed the Supreme Court's judgement, noting that it is being celebrated by the sector as a recognition of Britain's commitment and responsibility to protect refugees, whilst also recognising the significant impact that the Illegal Migration Act and wider policies continue to have on the mental health of colleagues working in the sector and the people they are supporting. Stephanie Ratcliffe added that the discourse around the Rwanda policy creates fear for migrants who are rough sleeping, which pushes them away from support and retraumatises them, and underlined the importance of in-depth training on the Illegal Migration Act for colleagues working across the migration sector to raise awareness of its impacts and counteract misinformation.

3.3. Barbara Drozdowicz raised her concerns around the regulations in the Illegal Migration Act on detention and deportation, highlighting the death of an Albanian man in detention last week, and asked if this is an issue the GLA can advocate on. Mark Winterburn acknowledged Barbara's concerns and responded that, whilst the GLA has not historically worked on the issue of detentions, officers recognise that it is an issue which directly impacts migrant Londoners, and so they are actively thinking about how the GLA and its political leadership can respond before engaging with wider partners. Mark added that he is keen to bring this topic to the LSMP Board, and Phil Baker noted that the Illegal Migration Act Advisory Board is also looking to include this in its scope. Tamara Smith also highlighted the importance of amplifying the voices of migrant Londoners with lived experience of detention.

4. Housing and homelessness pressures

4.1. Stephanie Ratcliffe gave an update on what St Mungo's frontline staff supporting migrants sleeping rough are seeing on the ground. Key points included:

- There has been a significant increase in people sleeping rough following departures from asylum support, particularly amongst Eritrean nationals, and there are very few who would meet the threshold for priority need such as having a disability, health condition or other special circumstance.
- The sector is feeling overwhelmed as the latest data shows that there has been a 24% increase in rough sleeping compared to the same period last year. Stephanie highlighted the lack of accommodation in London, noting that local authorities are

under significant pressure and there are barriers to accessing the private rented sector. This often means that, even where people meet the threshold for support under the Housing Act, in practice they are moved to a hotel on the other side of London that is only booked for 30 days.

- There are also concerns around keeping people safe during cold weather and around those that services and organisations like St Mungo's are not seeing, such as women and other vulnerable groups who may sleep rough in a way that is less visible to outreach workers and thus not receive the support that they need.

- 4.2. Sarah Akbert Robson shared her concerns about young people sleeping rough who are less likely to meet thresholds for support, and echoed Stephanie's concerns about those who are less visible to outreach workers, particularly around women who are sofa-surfing.
- 4.3. Carolina Caicedo highlighted homelessness as the top issue for Latin American migrants in London, particularly amongst women, noting that this community is often overrepresented in private rented housing which is unsuitable and overcrowded. Rising costs being passed on to renters by landlords is also exacerbating the impact on Latin American migrants who are often overrepresented in low-paid work, and local authorities are then unable to meet the needs of many of those who present as homeless.
- 4.4. Anna Yassin shared an update on Glass Door's winter night shelter, noting that so far in November the shelter has received 528 referrals, which represents an 81% increase on the same period last year. 52% of these referrals are for non-UK nationals, with Eritreans making up the second largest demographic, and Anna added that this is a particularly young cohort. The majority of referrals are also for people who were sleeping rough. This pressure has led to Glass Door declaring a crisis in its homelessness services, as it is unable to keep up with demand.

5. Cost of Living & Winter prep

- 5.1. Thomas Wilson presented an overview of the GLA's work to support Londoners preparing for winter amidst the ongoing cost of living crisis. The presentation covered:
 - The current situation for Londoners, with Tom noting that over half of Londoners describe themselves as 'struggling financially' or 'just about managing'.
 - GLA activity, including tackling fuel poverty and food insecurity and funding programmes in the social welfare advice sector, including in community settings (with some migrant organisations being funded as part of this work).
 - Key findings from a report looking at the support provided in London for low-income households last winter (2022/23). Tom noted that one recommendation was around training, so he will be sharing an Expression of Interest form for organisations to set out their training needs.
 - The [Cost of Living Hub](#), which complements guidance on the [Migrant Londoners' Hub](#) around employment and financial support and now includes a Google Translate function after this was added across the london.gov.uk site at the bottom of each page.
 - Connecting partners with local support, with Tom noting that the GLA can facilitate connections with food partnerships it is funding across London as well as with local authority Cost of Living leads.
 - Tom also highlighted the GLA's Warm Welcome Spaces campaign and encouraged colleagues to contribute to its [location tool](#) and share this with service users.

Action: Laila Aziz to circulate Thomas' slides and EOI form about training needs.

6. Domestic Abuse Commissioner report

6.1. Carolina Caicedo gave an update on '[Safety Before Status](#)', a new report by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, which calls for a firewall in the Victims and Prisoners Bill so that migrant victims of domestic abuse can safely report to the police and other public services. Key points included:

- LAWRS has been working closely with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner on pushing for this amendment, which would allow migrant victims of domestic abuse to report without fear of immigration consequences, and also enable them to access support. The firewall also includes other crimes beyond domestic abuse, such as modern slavery.
- Having a firewall is vitally important as migrant women are often denied access to services and justice based on their immigration status. This exclusion makes them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, but they are often scared of reporting and refrain from accessing health services out of fear that their information will be passed on to the Home Office.
- This report shows that this fear is not unfounded, as it reveals that every police force in England and Wales shared information about victims and survivors of domestic abuse with immigration enforcement at some point in the last three years.
- Carolina highlighted that this data-sharing can enable abusers and perpetrators to exploit victims, and it also has an impact on frontline organisations, as they have to work hard to build up trust.
- The Victims and Prisoners Bill will be progressing through Parliament in December, and Carolina welcomed any support from colleagues of LAWRS' continued advocacy for a firewall to be included in the Bill.

6.2. Tamara Smith highlighted that GLA colleagues in MOPAC have been supporting advocacy work for a firewall since the Mayor committed to calling for one in 2022.

7. Working with the London Assembly

7.1. Elisabeth Pop gave an overview of how the GLA and London Assembly work. Key points included:

- The GLA Act established the GLA, Mayor of London and London Assembly in 1999 to serve as the semi-devolved regional government for London, following a referendum when Londoners voted in favour of a directly elected Mayor to represent their interests, and an Assembly to scrutinise their work.
- This means that GLA officers are impartial civil servants who serve Londoners on a year-by-year basis. The GLA is also tightly regulated about what it can and can't do ahead of local elections, particularly during statutory pre-election periods (PEPs), with the next PEP for the upcoming 2024 London mayoral elections taking place between 19 March and 2 May.
- The London Assembly scrutinises the Mayor's work (including all expenditure of public money) through Mayor's Questions Time and the submission of written questions, which takes place at least 10 times a year.

- Assembly Members are directly elected and can design policy themselves, meaning they are always keen to hear from the Londoners they represent, and the Assembly can also put forward its own motions.

7.2. Mary Atkinson presented a case study of JCWI's recent experience working with the London Assembly on advocacy around giving people seeking asylum the right to work, noting that there is a lot of work taking place across the Assembly on this issue. JCWI supported AMs' preparation for an upcoming session by providing information and context on the topic, and Mary highlighted the importance of sharing case studies/testimonies, citing the experiences of service users, and framing issues within a London perspective in order to make an impact and bolster your argument.

8. Skills research

8.1. Alex Stevenson and Jack Bradstreet presented an overview of [research](#) by the LWI looking into how the Adult Education Budget (AEB) is supporting London's migrant communities. The presentation summarised key findings from the research, including both the positive impact and limitations of key AEB flexibilities on enabling access, socioeconomic barriers to learning, and awareness of AEB funding and eligibility, as well as a set of recommendations for the GLA, the GLA's engagement with the Department for Education and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and the local delivery infrastructure.

Action: Laila Aziz to circulate Alex's slides and the LWI's research into how the AEB is supporting London's migrant communities.

9. AOB

9.1. Adis Sehic highlighted [new report](#) by the Work Rights Centre into the systemic drivers of migrant worker exploitation in the UK, noting that many migrants are now entering the UK through work sponsorship routes and an increasing number are reporting being exploited. The report therefore sets out a number of recommendations to alleviate the pressures migrant workers are facing.