

BREM network report

29 June 2015

This report documents discussions during a meeting that was organised by Warwick's Borders, Race, Ethnicity and Migration Network, after consultation with the Coventry University's Centre on Trust, Peace and Social Relations. The aim of this meeting was to develop and build on existing links between migrant organisations, organisations supporting migrants, and academics conducting research about migrants and migration in Coventry. The intention was to share knowledge and expertise about the challenges affecting migrants in our city particularly following the 2015 General Election, and to discuss possible ways that academic research might be developed in ways that are beneficial to life in Coventry.

Participants involved in this network meeting included representatives from: Coventry City Council, Coventry City of Sanctuary, Coventry Ethnic Minority Action Partnership, Coventry University (Centre for Peace, Trust and Social Relations), Open University (Department of Geography), University of Warwick (Centre for Lifelong Learning, PaIS, Sociology, Warwick Business School, Centre for Applied Linguistics), Coventry Law Centre

The group discussed a range of concerns:

- **The predominance of an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty:**
 - Anti-immigration rhetoric creates the conditions for overt racism, and examples were given of this happening in Coventry. Anti-migrant and anti-terrorism discourse provokes differentiation and division between different generations of migrants/refugees
 - This effects a range of groups. For example, EU migrants have been seeking legal advice about applying for residence due to the fear of being removed
- **The implications of funding cuts to basic services:**
 - Concerns were raised about where people will go if not-for-profit organizations such as CRMC face cuts
 - People are more and more sharing experiences of having to make choices between eating or feeding their children under austerity conditions. This is something being reported by both migrants and settled communities.
- **The implications of reduced legal representation:**
 - Debates about the Human Rights Act overlook issues such as torture or the right to a fair hearing, because intensified rhetoric suggests that the Act only benefits criminals
 - Legal aid cuts mean that there is reduced access to legal representation for migrants and asylum seekers; legal groups are

- often having to shift to project work rather than working on legal redress for those who need it
- It appears that the judiciary increasingly buys into a discourse of austerity in decision-making over asylum seeking; deportation cases seem to be increasingly hard to win as in many cases judges reference austerity in decisions rather than a straightforward interpretation of the law
 - There is a continued curbing of redress through the courts – there has been a reduction in the right of appeal in-country, this can only be challenged through judicial review yet it is hard to get legal aid for this
 - The lack of appeal rights also occurs in a context of frequent legislative change – it is increasingly hard for immigration lawyers and support organizations to keep on top of this
 - Planned cuts to the tribunal system are likely to create dramatic delays in hearing appeals due to reduced capacity. As well as the negative impacts on people awaiting decisions, this will likely add to negative press about the asylum decisions system.
- **The barriers to migrant contributions:**
 - Linguistic and social barriers, as well as legal restrictions on paid employment for people seeking asylum, mean that migrants are often not able to use their skills to contribute to local communities
 - Ongoing socio-economic inequality as well as other forms of discrimination have a major impact on the situation
 - **The difficulties of intervening in current debates:**
 - It is difficult to steer the arguments and not to be swamped with the message that all migration is bad
 - Anti-immigration discourse needs to be countered, such as through better engagement with mainstream media, social media, as well as in everyday conversations
 - Public discourse on migration is often missing appreciation of context, such as the reason for particular flows of migration, the reasons why people are fleeing, the reasons why people are coming to Britain/Coventry, and their experiences once they arrive
 - The legal situations of different migrants are complex, and hard to follow even for experts, so informed conversations are difficult. For example, there are different restrictions on the length of stay and the right to family reunification, depending on immigration status and the circumstances of refugees settled in Coventry.

Despite these difficulties, many of which are national issues, it was noted that organizations in Coventry are well placed to tackle many of these

issues, due to an active and engaged voluntary and community sector which has good working relationships with the public sector and a local commitment to being a welcoming city.

The group discussed the importance of interventions that:

- Challenge more widely held stereotypical assumptions on migration
- Continue to emphasise that migration is part of the infrastructure of contemporary society
- Continue to build and support mechanisms that support asylum seekers to engage and use their skills in society
- Continue to build and support local and regional partnerships to share concerns and feedback to policy-makers
- Continue to widen collaborations in order to capitalize on existing funding opportunities across sectors. Coventry voluntary sectors and local public sector already work together effectively: e.g. through basic needs workshops, housing workshops, providing support with learning and skills as a platform to work
- Emphasise information on the role that migrants and refugees do play in service provision
- Continue to build a positive narrative of migration within Coventry that challenges divisions within and between migrant and refugee communities

It was agreed that the following action points will be taken forward from this meeting:

- Communication mechanisms will be mobilized in order to support information sharing (about events, joint funding options, community-university partnerships)
 - BREM network list information will be circulated for participants to join
 - Coventry University Facebook page will be circulated separately
- The meeting report will be circulated for agreement prior to being archived material on the BREM website.
- Additional options will be followed up including joint PhD supervision and options such as Article 26 scholarships