

# **NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services**

## **Working Paper 13 Refugee and Migrant Group Action on Xenophobia and Public Policy**

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# NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services

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### Foreword

This paper has been produced as part of the NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services. The Inquiry is specifically concerned with those voluntary and community organisations that deliver *services* in local communities, especially those that accept state money for these activities. These are the groups that have been particularly affected by successive New Labour and Coalition Government policies regarding the relationship between the voluntary and statutory sectors, and attitudes and intentions towards the future of public services. In this and other papers we refer to these as Voluntary Services Groups or VSGs.

It has long been NCIA's contention that the co-optive nature of these relationships has been damaging to the principles and practise of independent voluntary action. The nature and scale of the Coalition Government's political project – ideologically driven - to degrade rights, entitlements and social protections, and to privatise public services that cannot be abolished is now laid bare. This has created new imperatives for VSGs to remind themselves of their commitment to social justice and to position themselves so that they can once again be seen as champions of positive social, economic and environmental development.

Our Inquiry is a wide ranging attempt to document the failure of VSGs, and the so-called 'leadership' organisations that purport to represent them, to resist these shackles on their freedom of thought and action. But it is also an attempt to seek out the green shoots of a renaissance that will allow voluntary agencies to assert their independence and reconnect with the struggle for equality, social justice, enfranchisement and sustainability.

This paper is one of a number that has been produced through the Inquiry and is concerned with the ways in refugee and migrant groups have responded to rising levels of xenophobia, how campaigning is restrained by relationships with state agencies and the extent of links between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' concerned about these issues. This research project was undertaken for NCIA by Lisa Rodan to whom we offer our grateful thanks.

For more information on the NCIA Inquiry please visit our website – [www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net).

NCIA  
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# Refugee and Migrant Group Action on Xenophobia and Public Policy

## 1. The purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to:

- Provide an overview of recent action taken by groups working with migrants in response to xenophobia and related public policy, and the anti-migrant discourse of certain media/political outlets.
- Explore challenges to campaigning and action carried out by professionalised, service-providing voluntary groups (VSGs) as a result of funding or other relationships with state or private sector agencies.
- Examine the links and connections between ‘insiders’ (those whose orientation is to influence change from inside the system) and ‘outsiders’ (those who place themselves outside of the system).

## 2. Background and context

As the final draft of this paper was being written, extreme right and left parties swept to power all over Europe on a platform of anti-immigration rhetoric. UKIP made unprecedented gains around local UK election on little more than xenophobic vitriol, sending Labour and the Coalition into a frenzy of counter-rhetoric within Education<sup>1</sup> to debates on the EU<sup>2</sup> on the back of a fervently anti-migrant right-wing press. In the same period, a British Social Attitudes survey reported a spike in racial prejudice just two years after the warm glow of the 2012 Olympics<sup>3</sup>.

The success of UKIP amongst British voters is particularly salient, the spreading of its anti-immigration rhetoric highlighting a tendency to blame ‘foreigners’, whether refugees and asylum seekers, ‘illegal’ immigrants or migrant workers, for the social effects of government austerity. UKIP’s gains in the recent local and European elections are but the tip of a tide of anti-immigrant rhetoric in the right wing press and from the major political parties appearing alongside rising inequality and cuts in housing and welfare payments. This has culminated in a controversial new Immigration Bill which Home Secretary Theresa May is currently attempting to push through as an Act of Parliament<sup>4</sup>. The Bill aims to improve ease of deportation, new requirements for landlords to check immigration status, higher fines for employers of ‘irregular’ migrants and proposals for increased regulation of access to benefits and free healthcare on NHS.

Migrant organisations have thus been hit by a two-pronged attack - highly politicised xenophobia, accompanied by austerity measures. At the same time there has been an

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/trojan-horse-schools-ofsted-finds-culture-of-fear-and-intimidation-9515306.html>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.ndtv.com/article/world/un-rights-chief-warns-over-rise-of-racist-politics-in-eu-539174>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/may/27/-sp-racism-on-rise-in-britain?view=desktop>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk/blog/2014/06/what-happened-announcement-new-immigration-bill-queen-s-speech>

increasing transfer of funding and power to the corporate sector which started under conditions created by New Labour. This process subjected the voluntary sector to a marketisation process via a shift from grant-based funding to contracts and subsequent commission and procurement structures. The 2008 financial crisis and austerity measures carried out under the Coalition government have since further redefined the role of voluntary agencies as direct vehicles for commissioned state services. This has had significant impact not only on the role of the voluntary sector as a source of independent alternatives to government or private sector initiatives, but also divided and fundamentally changed the nature of how it works and engages with communities.

### 3. Methodology

This research will focus on interviews carried out between July 2013 and January 2014 with nine groups working with immigrants or with a remit to promote their interests or welfare. All names of organisations and interviewees are pseudonyms.

Organisation		National/ Local	Field	Interviewee	Size	Member of umbrella group?
Rights for Asylum Seekers Agency (RASA)	1	National	Campaigning Services- asylum advice	Michael	Large	Yes
People for Change (Pfc)	2	National	Campaigning	Dan	Micro	Yes
Freedom for Movement (FFM)	3	National	Campaigning- antigovernment litigation, advocacy Services- emotional support, legal advice, casework	Jim	Small	Yes
Refugee Women's Rights Service (RWRS)	4	National	Campaigning- events, advocacy	Sarah	Small	Yes
East London Women's Forum (ELWF)	5	Local	Services- employment programme, ESOL, training	Jane	Medium	No
Thames Community Centre (TCC)	6	Local	Services- employment programme/ community garden	Mark	Micro	No
South London Action for Refugees and Migrants (SLARM)	7	Local	Services- advice, training, ESOL, employment, local events/workshops	Tom	Small	Yes
Support Centre for Migrant Women (SCMW)	8	Local	Campaigning Services- advice, counselling, crèche, training	Christina	Small	Yes
Rights of Migrants Agency (RMA)	9	Local	Campaigning- media, advocacy Services- employment, health, legal advice, ESOL	Emma	Medium	Yes

Size in this case refers to numbers of full and part time paid staff:

Micro: Less than 10

Small: 10 to 20

Medium: 20 to 30

Large: 30 to 50

In terms of the 'field' of campaigning and/or service provision, some groups, such as the Rights for Asylum Seekers Agency, who provide services under government contract but also campaign, can be considered as fulfilling both roles. In such cases, the research aims to examine the relationships between the two types of activity and how they feed into each other (or not).

Initial phone/email contact identified the right person to speak to and obtain their agreement to participate in the project. Information was then collected through a short, semi-structured face to face or phone interview based around a number of questions designed to elicit the following information:

- A brief description of the group's activities and/ or services;
- How/ by whom these activities/services are funded;
- Any internal discussion on rising xenophobia and whether action has already been taken to campaign or have plans to do so;
- Any factors that may assist or hinder their capacity to undertake such action;
- Links between 'insider' and 'outsider' groups;
- Any potential collaboration in work to counter xenophobia between these links, if they exist.

Supplementary information was also drawn from the organisations' websites, press releases, policy statements and other published documents.

## **4. The Results**

Four main themes arose from the results of this research, namely:

- **ACTION** - to what extent does working in collaboration with other groups strengthen organisations' capacity and what factors affect their ability/desire to engage with existing networks?
- **INTERNAL CONFLICT**- the social and economic effects of contract culture within organisations that work with migrants.
- **FUNDING**- how have recent cuts changed the course of policy planning, engagement with sector colleagues and ability to carry out current projects?
- **MEDIA, POLITICAL CHANGE AND PUBLIC OPINION**- which external factors have contributed to shaping policy and service provision?

### **Action: Strength in Numbers and Collaboration**

The majority of organisations interviewed strongly advocated working in collaboration with other groups through umbrella networks. Out of the local groups, SCMW, for example, is a member of three different umbrella groups. It was through these networks that they became aware of changes to legal challenges of Local Authority rulings. They also are provided with policy and help with capacity in service provision and campaigning through them.

*“Despite competition for everything, including funding”, says Christina, “we understand the important of maintaining a good relationships and sharing to ensure everyone survives.”*

For SLARM, a local community group, “*safety in numbers*” is even more important. Lobbying through borough and London-wide umbrella groups is:

*“...the only way to make our voice heard safely...it’s difficult to speak out as a single organisation...we don’t feel we have much clout outside the borough...we don’t feel we can afford to court much controversy as it draws attention and puts us in the firing line so we keep quiet- we’re not that brave.”*

Similarly, RMA projects are strongly fed by contacts through sector networks. The participants for their current media storytelling project- designed to:

*“...empower migrants via giving them the chance to talk about themselves rather than being talked about”*

- were recruited via existing networks and partner organisations.

Wider national projects also implement collaborative strategies. As a major umbrella network, PFC policy is based on looking for stakeholders and creating nationwide links to organise roundtables and discussions, which eventually feed into parliamentary policy through their position as the secretariat for the all-party parliamentary group for immigration. PFC director Dan additionally describes how

*“...the migrants themselves also work on it through the Migrant Voice network, which is run by Nazak Ramadan, they promote discussion by local groups... we work closely with them”.*

FFM is also a major figure in sector networks. Along with thirty others, they are a member of an umbrella organization of 30 groups working on a mixture of service delivery and campaigning. According to director Jim:

*“what we have in common is a lack of capacity for resources. As the biggest organisation, we have more access to resources and campaigns...we co-convene two out of the four forum working groups. We are constantly looking for ways to enable small, under-resourced campaigns in a strategic way, supporting and bringing together those with a shared agenda”.*

Professionalisation and accountability are central to this, says Jim:

*“You’ve got to be good. Some are hard to reach so we have to be rigorous on monitoring and quality to get grants (which has) enabled us to double in size and get more funding”.*

External partnerships are also a key part of their strategy for success. Referring to the ‘Lib Dems for Seekers of Sanctuary’ group, Jim says: “*we’ve co-opted them, not the other way round.*” Stumbling onto them by chance, they have created a “*collaborative relationship*”. Together they are pushing for a time limit on detention:

*"They have a chance too. They're well connected activists and a good connection to have."*

To this end, Jim goes as far as to criticise overtly outsider groups, saying that traditional tactics:

*"lack imagination...they'd probably say we were 'pragmatic', representative of 'white man's guilt' or 'not radical enough'... [nevertheless] we feel we achieve more through strategic pragmatism."*

Jim points out that that is a need to sustain relationships with detention centres in order to do advice surgeries etc, which is why they work hard to keep SERCO etc on board:

*"It's not that hard to find common ground...and picketing outside is not the way to go about that".*

By marketing themselves as sympathetic there is "scope to negotiate". For FFM, the key is to:

*"..focus on the political route, even though we've been criticised for smiling at policy meetings...'heart of darkness meetings'...but my job is to go in and smile and talk on their terms...I'm a pragmatist...there's no public support so we have to get technocratic support...we can't let idealist posturing get in the way".*

The purist vs pragmatic approach is a massive debate within NGOs, who tend to value 'pure principles' but Jim says:

*"I don't take myself and the organisation so seriously as to jeopardise change. Politics is getting stuck in, negotiating, compromise, social change".*

Partnerships are the key, agrees Sarah from the RWRS:

*"We always attempt to work with other organisations and make partnerships, for example with Britain Think".*

They've also stepped up the work on campaigning, especially in the last year. They've been going to Westminster, creating a relationship with an independent inspector of the UKBA, with whom they have a good relationship, despite the fact he is employed by the government "albeit as an independent" Sarah points out:

*"It's necessary to just keep trying and sometimes you do get some surprises... for example, some Conservative women MPS are surprisingly well informed. They're frustrated by what's going on, they see what's happening as misogynistic as well as racist. To that extent there is some female solidarity."*

A forum arose out of the ESOL classes at RWRS as a group for more politically motivated women. They have recently run a five week course on campaigning, which was undertaken in collaboration with the Refugee Rights Agency, one of the UK's most influential migrant voice bodies.

The latter has itself seen a significant policy shift regarding collaboration. Under his leadership, recently appointed CEO Michael has attempted to counter previous criticism of the RASA of being *“insensitive and imperialist”* and failing to engage local organisations on projects to set up new regional services:

*“We’re trying to change the quality of our communication, in that do we listen as well as talk? I want to redefine the RASA’s role in national policy as well as changing the culture of ‘we know best’ and our failure to check in on people”.*

## **Internal Conflict and Competition**

However not all the groups interviewed cited collaboration and strength in numbers as a tool for survival. For ELWF, its position as a small community organisation providing services for migrant women in East London is shaped by competition for funding. Director Jane points out that:

*“It’s an uphill struggle just to scrape together enough money for our own survival, we can’t afford to look for partnerships with groups who might become potential competitors for funding.”*

For ELWF, the main problem is *“the difficult and challenging environment”* caused by the channeling away of funds, meaning work now revolves around meeting targets, creating a strong element of competition. Jane recalls how:

*“...certain ‘partner’ organisations sign up women with less than two years in the country for themselves, rather than referring them to us first as they’re supposed to. That’s our remit, not theirs and they know that.”*

Rahila Gupta of Southall Black Sisters strongly echoes this, commenting that:

*“...competition for funding destroyed the solidarities we worked so hard at building with other women’s groups”<sup>5</sup>*

A fundamental difference in approach to types of project arises here. For target-driven projects within the world and language of neoliberal bureaucratic processes, success is more asserted. As Jim points out:

*“you’ve got to be good...we’ve had to professionalise and be rigorous on monitoring and quality. That’s the only way to get grants”.*

Tellingly, the type of projects undertaken by this particular organisation lends itself more to this definition of success. Litigation successes and policy changes can be measured and presented in monitoring reports, unlike projects which aim to slowly undermine overlying power structures from a grassroots level.

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<sup>5</sup> Gupta, R. (2012). Has Neoliberalism Knocked Feminism Sideways? *Open Democracy*. Retrieved 13/09/2013 from <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rahila-gupta/has-neoliberalism-knocked-feminism-sideways>

The only alternative that arose within this research to the 'we are successful in a competitive environment' v the 'destroyed by competition' model, is not to align with political movements at all. As a small community group - with a focus solely on services - Thames Community Centre prefers:

*"..discussion in the local community. That way we find migrant voices through day to day engagement keeping in touch with local people through meetings, leading to them becoming in charge of their destiny."*

As a member of a large partnership of small community groups who were procured by SEETEC to provide Work Programme placements, "this is the best option" points out manager Mark:

*"..although we're trying to move more towards a social enterprise model by leasing premises upstairs...we just want to control our own destiny".*

## **Funding, Cuts, Cooption...or a new Direction?**

Control over destiny was a major theme for all the organisations interviewed, and funding cuts are at the centre of that. From the once 300+ staff at RASA to the 4 staff of TCC, cuts have signified a significant restructuring and struggle for survival.

This has affected the organisations in different ways, depending on their previous relationship with funders. As a large national body, the RASA was contracted to provide asylum support on behalf of the government in the early 00s. Former members of staff recall it as a time of being "constantly over a barrel...completely under the thumb of the government". In 2009, however, Home Office funding was slashed by 80%, with another 48% cut in 2013 and 20% projected to go in 2015. This "sent the organisation into a tailspin" according to Michael, via mass redundancies and restructuring. Although he describes organisational policy as having had to "shift to deal with the crisis" so that they "lost a meaningful public profile and sense of direct action", Michael was offered the leadership by the trustees as part of an intentional reconfiguration of the RASA's future direction. With the:

*"...cuts in government funding driving a trend in results-driven behavior within the voluntary sector"*

Michael plans to take advantage of the becoming mainly funded by individual trusts and donations to instigate a:

*"critical infrastructure reshuffle...where a smaller number of people have the license to act with a degree of independence and do innovative, challenging work."*

In this way, he hopes:

*"people will trust us, and they are more likely to as an honest advocate of their interests if (we're) not dependent on the Home Office".*

The relationship between funding and funders' influence and the pressure for change that this embodies has long been an integral part of the process for smaller organisations who were never accused of *"selling their soul to the devil"* to the same extent as RASA. SCMW, SLARM, RMA, PFC and FFM all express the varying extents to which funders want to get involved and describe adapting their projects accordingly. However, Michael's hope for increased independence through trust-based funding is contradicted by those reports of the restrictions caused by bureaucracy to organisations already accustomed to spreading projects around different funders.

SCMW report their engagement with EU funders as *"terrible"*, their bureaucratic requirements being *"burdensome and distracting staff from the more necessary work"*. ELWF agree. Their European funders, *"harass us all the time"* through sending inspectors. Although opposing policies between the European Integration Fund (EIF) and the UKBA, who administer their monies, has meant the EIF's:

*"...lack of policy responsibilities and interest in project work bypasses UKBA/Home Office policy...they make sure we work for every penny by filling in endless forms"*.

Jane does take a more positive approach to the attitudes of their trusts and funds though, saying *"they understand our issues and that we are completely stretched"*.

Jim also praises the smaller trusts for their encouragement, stating that:

*"funders tend to be frustrated by the lack of dynamism of NGOs...they want to fund controversial stuff and for it to be more imaginative and strategic"*.

Nonetheless, time and bureaucracy is a similar constraint:

*"I spend half my time writing monitoring reports" he admits, "after nine months waiting for the funding to be approved in the first place"*.

The balance is delicate - FFM's relationship with one major government-linked funding body ended after they were accused of *"conspiring against government policy"*. They've avoided them ever since.

SCMW, like FFM, have learned to place the:

*"most politically sensitive issues under politically neutral funders...otherwise you can't say anything...the EU are never going to fund policy work"*.

*"You can't be too critical" agree the WFRW, "lots of our funding is from philanthropic organisations to whom we are beholden to telling what's going on"*.

*"Strength of work" is the key says Jim. "We're not particularly good at squeezing larger grants...but this way we stay small and dynamic"*.

Another key issue, especially for the smaller organisations with a higher percentage of council funding such as SLARM and SCMW, is the relationship with local boroughs and recent changes in legal representation. At the moment the LA of LAWRS North London borough: *"seem to be on the same side, meaning no funder requirements."*

However the partnership agreement that takes away the legal right to challenge LAs, which was signed in April 2013, was earmarked as a source of potential problems. *“It hasn’t affected us yet”* said Christina at the time of our interview in August 2013, but she seemed worried.

In South London, SLARM’s Tom also praises their historic good relationship with the LA:

*“..although it has recently changed in terms of staffing levels, most of the former people we dealt with have been made redundant...they’re entering a new phase...it’ll be interesting to see what happens”*

## **Media, Political Change and Public Opinion**

Hysteria against immigration manifested through increasing media-led xenophobia is keenly felt by all the groups. Christina from SCMW commented that:

*“I’ve never seen such an attack on migration in fifteen years of working in the field. I’ve never felt so much discrimination. In the past it was more about asylum seekers, but now it’s everyone. 85% of Latin Americans are in employment and 20% claim benefits, and we’re barely a burden on the NHS. That’s the reality. But the debate is getting to a low point. It’s doing no favours to the UK...it’s just increasing tension and hatred. The political fights, they’re a mixture of racism and economics.”*

A recent report highlights that 70% of Latin Americans have felt discrimination<sup>6</sup>, many through the UKBA practice of going into metro stations in high-immigrant areas and being asked for their documents, on the premise of looking ‘foreign’. Making landlords check immigration status has only increased discrimination, whilst cuts in Legal Aid have increased the needs for services. Christina stresses that:

*“The cuts in Legal Aid have really affected reports of domestic violence. It was already hard enough to get women to denounce it - they’re scared of deportation and don’t know their rights”.*

Combined with a lack of networks and understanding of the language and culture, this has shifted frontline priorities onto *“fundraising and services...meaning policy suffers”*. At a drop-in clinic the day before our interview, Christina described how they had: *“women queuing from six in the morning. Casework support is full on”*.

SLARM echo the negative effect on their capacity for campaigning and policy change which has been wrought by increased need and bureaucracy of services:

*“My big fear is that we’re sleepwalking into a segregated society and that one day people from certain backgrounds will have no access to opportunities. Unemployment will rise and there’ll be no strong ties to civil societies. Here at SLARM there are limited numbers of migrants we can see because of time and funding - at the moment we can see 60-90 per week, between four workers. The women’s group gets 12-18 per week and the five ESOL classes bring in 6-12 per week per class.”*

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<sup>6</sup><http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/docs/research/latinamerican/48641.pdf>

What Christina calls the *"intentionally quagmire-like nature of the bureaucracy"* has led to an intensification of the situation. With all their time taken up on fundraising and report-writing, there is no time or resources to try and push for more flexibility in existing structures:

*"The UKBA have been a big hindrance for us, it never changes and has made very little leeway, things are entrenched and very complicated"*.

Media pressure is cited by all the groups as the major contributing factor to this. Jim recounts that:

*"Officials have acknowledged that what they are being asked re: policy change [on detention] is reasonable, but they won't risk being in the tabloids, the Minister is terrified of media coverage, as are Harper, May and Green. Foreign criminals can end Home Secretary's careers, they're all traumatised by the Charles Clarke scandal...UKIP and the Mail are the reasons why policy change doesn't happen."*

PfC also states that:

*"...any action we undertake... is always hindered by the timidity and cowardice of the political establishment, especially the left of centre side. They always 'agree' but this has no mileage any more, anyone who sticks their head above the parapet regarding migrant rights is shot down. Labour have offered [us] their congratulations for the work we've done, but also emphasized we can't expect to be helped by them- they don't want to be branded. Their MPs all talk about 'looking at issues' but they are simply not going to call on the present government in case of a media scrum"*.

*"No, we can't be too political"* says Sarah from the RWRS, *"as we have to strike a fine balance and be open to everyone"*. Politicians themselves are also described as avoiding overtly 'political' statements by attempting to appease everybody and do nothing. Boris Johnson accepted a collective statement on the 'Go Home' vans from the PfC as part of its local consortium. He *"was charming, but ultimately fobbing off"* says Tom:

*"...he recognizes that London is diverse and he can't afford to upset many people, as it hurts his chance of re-election"*.

The consortium nonetheless has had some success. The vans were backtracked because of the legal challenge. *"That's the beauty of front line organisations"* says Christina. For groups like SLARM, these type of initiatives are even more important - they are the only way to make their voices heard:

*"On the issues that are really important to us we join the umbrella organizations - safety in numbers. If it's within the borough, on a specific issue, we can, because of the good relationships with the borough Council - we can trust they'll listen. But everything else, we're mindful of the consequences - won't tolerate it. They think migrants should be grateful for what they've got and shut up. They think we don't deserve rights. It's their intention that the country doesn't get too complacent about immigration, they want to keep the fear up. This issue with migration happened organically so it's unchartered territory"*.

Other groups such as SCMW, as well as campaigning through umbrella groups, additionally attempt to influence change through stealth:

*“Migration campaigning is a political hot potato, they attempt to target parliamentarians, although it’s very hard to do it via the migration issue. It’s better to enter at another angle e.g. women’s rights or labour exploitation, then bring in migration strategically. We’ve done some work on the Family Reunion policy changes for example. It’s very hard to find sympathetic views in parliament though, even if many of them apologise for that”.*

Attempts for action on a local level are further hindered by political maneuvering. There is state recognition that local groups like ELWF have a key role to play. After a meeting with Eric Pickles, it was agreed that the council should pay for more ESOL funding:

*“It felt strange to be on the same wavelength, however it was all generally hot air as it boils down to conflict between local versus central government in terms of funding allocation. Pickles advocates the former, pointing out that localism is the key to addressing local needs. However very little money actually comes from the borough, looking at the climate demographic it’s obvious - these women don’t have the vote. Therefore the council isn’t interested in funding them, preferring to invest the money in employment - investment is therefore decided by political status. The mayor is an independent and does what he wants. So yes, there’s a massive conflict between national and local politics. It’s all a game and they are fobbing off on these women who don’t exist politically on each other.”*

## 5. Conclusions

### Collaboration

There are several elements which affect the way service provision and campaigning interact within voluntary sector groups working with immigrants. Firstly, partnerships and collaborations (or lack of) are mentioned by all as shaping the work they do. Those groups that actively seek collaboration within the sector through umbrella organisations cite either SURVIVAL (through sharing resources, capacity, media and campaign support) and/or SAFETY (through speaking out in greater numbers).

Those that actively avoid seeking partnerships, such as ELWF, posit COMPETITION over funding as the main reason. In the latter case, a heavier dependence on niche funders for their services than similarly sized community organisations such as SLARM (who have a better relationships and more support from their LA) seems to be the main reason for this.

All organisations state increased professionalisation as a major side effect of the contract culture. For more service-oriented groups like ELWF, this has resulted in a complete disengagement from the political process and higher focus on services- a side effect being its relative isolation, as stated above. For FFM, a more campaign based group and member of a large consortium, professionalisation has worked by making them more attractive to some of the more radical funders. The downside is increased time spent on bureaucracy, which has also affected SCMW, to the extent that policy work is suffering. The ‘strategic

pragmatism' of organisations such as the RWRS, RASA, PFC and FFM, with their contacts with key government figures and position on the Human Rights, legal side of the field, place it in a distinct position from some of the women's community groups. The latter find themselves within the field of longer-lasting, grassroots change of which Jane described as based on:

*"...bigger issues we have no control over...these issues aren't poverty, it's Mum not being able to speak English and choosing to stay at home, it's like Victorian times. It's all based on class internationally, not nationality or ethnicity. The families here, they're low working class, they come from the fields or stripping the docks. Class defines their choices."*

'Success' within contract culture is thus based on tangible aims such as legal change. As Rahila Gupta of Southall Black Sisters points out:

*"How do you quantify success in supporting a woman facing domestic violence if she does not choose to leave her violent partner? These outcomes take a long time and the short-termist, box-ticking culture of neoliberalism destroys the integrity of such work"*<sup>7</sup>

## Funding Shifts

The cuts have pushed formerly huge organisations like the RASA into a shift towards the more diversified and streamlined funding and style model of smaller, dynamic bodies such as FFM and SCMW. Nevertheless these latter groups have still not managed to find the balance for the necessary hybridity of insider service work which informs outsider campaigning. The endless bureaucracy needed to maintain the former takes away time from the latter. Groups like SCMW and FFM believe there is the money available for dynamic policy work, but all the interviewees underline the difficulties in struggling to get enough funding to maintain the necessary service provision which underpins it.

Political conflict/ cowardice and increasing discrimination and xenophobia shape the way contemporary migrant organisations exist. All cite media and politics as the main impediment to true, lasting change. As a political hot potato in the face of right-wing media hysteria and continuing neoliberal economic restructuring, it is very difficult to balance the needs of service users with public image and juggle what different funders are willing to ally themselves to. A shift towards 'services' over 'policy' within hybrid groups has been wrought as a direct consequence of austerity.

## 6. Recommendations

In their present form, the voluntary groups featured in this small study are impeded by the political landscape and specifically by neoliberal emasculating of the voluntary sector role as an agent of radical social change. Instead these groups have been pushed into a service-providing role as public services are increasingly privatised and tendered out (mainly) to profit making companies. The bonus for such companies and the political establishment is a defocusing of the engaged, passionate elements within these voluntary groups, away from campaigning and work aimed at achieving long term, permanent change and towards service provision, administrative tasks and form filling; as well as these changes also creating

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/rahila-gupta/has-neoliberalism-knocked-feminism-sideways>

division within the sector itself.

Co-option and bureaucratisation is decreasing solidarity amongst potentially radical factions within the voluntary sector, alongside widespread disaffection with politicians and political processes. Faced with this situation, it is even more necessary for those advocating dissent and opposition to prevailing policies and attitudes to embed themselves within communities and create a dialogue of shared solidarity, resources and practical support. This can be done through:

- Opposing privatisation of public services;
- Supporting local campaigners;
- Working for change on an individual as well as community basis through open and engaged local dialogue;
- A shift from organisational to community management of resources;
- Providing a space for alternative discussions for change.

At the moment there is a wealth of campaigning experience and resources within existing organisations. However externally imposed structural changes means they are mired in complex political and bureaucratic processes, which, along with the right-wing press, impede true justice for migrant populations in the UK

It is imperative that a way of redistributing and sharing this knowledge is made widely accessible to any and all who can use it into a form of what Esteva and Prakash refer to as 'grassroots post-modernity' where:

*"people refused to be seduced and controlled by economic laws...[by] rediscovering and reinventing their traditional commons and re-embedding the economy...into society and culture"<sup>8</sup>*

Any organised initiatives that aim to truly empower should be able to provide an anti-utilitarian space to expand rather than stifle this creativity.

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<sup>8</sup>Esteva, G. and Prakash, M. (1998). *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*. Palgrave Macmillan

## The Author



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