

LONDON PROJECT: ANNUAL REVIEW, 2020/2021



INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of the London Project is to **reduce discrimination experienced by migrants**. We work across London to uphold and strengthen the rights of all migrants, regardless of their immigration status. We do this primarily by:

- 1; Improving skills and abilities amongst migrants to advocate at a local level
2. Strengthening London-wide infrastructure for organising and collective campaigns on migrants' rights advocacy
3. Increasing migrants' understanding of their rights and entitlements

This report shares highlights and outcomes from 2020-2021. Like many organisations, we had to think creatively about how to restructure our projects during the coronavirus pandemic.

Though we would have enjoyed to meet with migrants and migrant communities in-person, we used online platforms to our advantage and found new communities to connect with and also were able to share our resources more widely than might have otherwise been possible.

In a time where everyone has felt disconnected, leaning on our core value of **solidarity** was needed more than ever. It has been an absolute joy building our alliances further and we hope you'll celebrate this year's highlights alongside us.



THE PROJECT PARTS

Know your rights

Challenging immigration raids

Research

Network development

Migrants' leaders programme

Policy and advocacy

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

At MRN, we believe that **nobody's access to safety, rights and security should be determined by their immigration status**. However, that's unfortunately not often the case.

In recent years, the government has been making it harder for all migrants to live their lives without the fear of immigration checks and the threat of deportation or removal from the country. The government hopes that this will force many to leave the UK. They also want to discourage other people from coming into the country.

In order to assert your rights, you have to know what your rights are. We believe sharing knowledge and training on rights to be critical, as this enables migrants to take the lead in advocating for systemic change.

That's why the London Project worked with 9 other organisations and multiple translators to produce a guide on migrants' rights called Know Your Rights. The guide discusses key areas of life in order to address issues that affect migrants everyday, including: health; social services; housing and benefits; education; exploitation; driving; digital rights; hate crime; and, banking.

"It's a really great document, particularly in how applicable it is to a range of migrants."

**Mayor of London's
office**

We also facilitated 6+ workshops on rights, teaching the contents of this guide. We also had a project where we supported people with NRPF during the pandemic alongside our partner organisations OLMEC and RAMFEL. More workshops are scheduled for the future and we can't wait!

"My favourite sessions were the campaigning ones, as it helped me to better conceptualise big ideas into smaller, practical steps. I will definitely use the methods we learned in these sessions in the future."

Workshop participant

The guide has likewise been translated into 8 languages. In the future, we are hopeful that we will be able to work with translators to facilitate multi-lingual workshops on migrants' rights. We are also aiming to produce a version of the guide applicable to Scottish and Welsh law in the future.

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

At MRN, we seek to **build alliances** with individuals and organisations so that migrants are properly represented at all levels of society.

At the London Project, this means meeting with organisations to learn more about their work, so that we can identify opportunities for collaboration. In the past year, we have developed new relationships with 20+ organisations, many of which are grassroots groups or smaller community-based organisations. We also host quarterly London network meetings where we find out ways to support each other's campaigns.

This year, we also built a new partnership with Goldsmiths' University's immigration policy clinic. We have worked closely with 12 volunteer law students that have supported ongoing research at MRN and have also hosted classes for students on MRN campaigns. Other new relationships include the Magpie Project, Roma Support Group, NACCOM, Asylum Matters, Open Rights Group, and more!

As a result of our network development work, we've been able to support dozens of local and national campaigns, such as on VAGW and exploitation, and have been able to promote knowledge-sharing across sectors.

RESEARCH

Throughout the year, we have led research initiatives that we used to inform our advocacy. In particular, we have used Freedom of Information requests (FOIs) to identify information that is otherwise difficult to find. For instance, we have used FOIs to:

1. Better understand the impact of COVID-19 on Tier 4 international students (and the role that universities played)
2. Identify useful information related to our Know Your Rights work, such as Home Office data sharing agreements

3. Identify information on 'illegal working' and workplace raids

4. Identify measures used by the Home Office to assess whether a person will be vulnerable to exploitation in the case of deportations

In addition to FOIs, we produced a study on the effects of COVID-19 on Tier 4 international students, alongside Unis Resist Border Controls. Our survey had 124 respondents across 31 universities and likewise included longer-form case study information.

We have identified numerous areas of research to pursue in the future and look forward to doing so alongside other organisations within the London network.

MIGRANTS' LEADERS PROGRAMME

At MRN, one of our core values is **leadership**. We strive to be daring and determined by speaking 'truth to power.' Part of creating a just society is actively seeking ways to redistribute power. Supporting migrant leaders is about holding those that do hold power to account, and doing so from a lens that is intersectional and migrant-led.

That's why the London Project developed the migrants' leaders programme, which we call 'Telling Our Own Stories.' Over the course of three weeks, we invited 20 migrant leaders to meet online to share learning, develop our knowledge, build allies, and increase our solidarity by sharing our stories with one another.

We worked with three additional organisations to support the facilitation of these sessions. Migrant leaders were from a range of backgrounds, ages, and a range of campaigning experiences. Our sessions were created by the migrants themselves, so that we could make sure that our core value of being **migrant-led** was upheld.

Based on the interests expressed by the migrant leaders, we chose to focus on the following topics:

1. History of the hostile environment and everyday rights
2. Intro to campaigning
3. Grassroots leadership
4. Storytelling for campaigning
5. How to engage Parliament
6. Mental wellbeing and community care

"This helped me to keep my spirit of advocacy alive. I found new allies and now know that I am not alone in working on these issues."

Migrant leader

"The programme inspired me to keep advocating on issues that affect my community. I appreciated that the programme was free and accessible for everyone."

Migrant leader

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

At MRN, one of our approaches to work is to **tackle strategically important but unpopular issues** which particularly impact on groups most harmed by anti-migrant policies and narratives. This is because migration cannot be seen in isolation from wider current and historical oppressive structures and systems.

At the London Project, we have supported a range of policy and advocacy initiatives over the year. We have particularly focused on the issue of No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and exploitation. A couple of the campaigns we have supported include

the reinstatement of the 2012 domestic worker visa and the Step Up Migrant Women campaign. We join regular meetings on addressing NRPF alongside dozens of other London-based organisations, facilitated by the Mayor of London's office.

We also regularly meet with MPs on issues that affect migrants, respond to government consultations, provide policy briefings to MPs, and are continually seeking ways that we can better engage with Parliament.

Other groups that we support include: the Mayor of London's Migrant, Refugee, and Asylum Panel; the Mayor of London's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Advisory Board; the Home Office's NRPF Stakeholder Forum; and, the APPG on Migration.

CHALLENGING IMMIGRATION RAIDS

Two of our strategic objectives this year were to **reverse the criminalisation of migration** and to **stop the use of service providers as a means of immigration control**. We believe that migration is not a crime and that detention and deportation on immigration grounds must be ended.

That's why we set up the Challenging Raids' Lawyers Network in 2018. The network comprises lawyers and activists collaborating on advice, strategies and legal support for those subjected to immigration raids.

We hold meetings quarterly, and have developed a referral system for individuals subjected to raids to reach lawyers who can provide legal support, as well as know your rights resources for during and after a raid.

The network has allowed lawyers to share ideas and opinions on the legality of different raids, keep up-to-date on new developments in the law and practice, and work to bring strategic litigation on the matter.

CONCLUSION

We really believe that celebrating is important, especially in a year that's been so difficult for so many, including migrants. We hope that reading highlights from the London Project have encouraged you and we hope that you are able to celebrate alongside us!

We want to give a special thanks to our phenomenal supporter, Trust for London. We also want to give thanks to all the organisations and individuals that worked alongside us this year, collaborated on initiatives, and shared resources and learning with us,

We are always looking to grow our London network and are eager to find ways that we can support and collaborate with London-based organisations that are working to promote the rights of all migrants. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with the lead of the London Project at **london@migrantsrights.org.uk** to learn more.

There is also more information available on our website. We have a monthly London newsletter that you can subscribe to here: **www.migrantsrights.org.uk/impact/our-work/the-london-project/**. Thank you!

